



## **International Association for College Admission Counselling Submission to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Students**

### **Summary**

- The International Association for College Admission Counselling (International ACAC), a non-profit organisation that facilitates global interaction among counsellors and universities in support of secondary students transitioning to higher education. The organisation has members in the UK and international members with a strong interest in UK education and access to it.
- UK education is perceived to be as good or better than many competitor countries but overall competitiveness of the UK's educational offering to international students is compromised by a perception that the UK is unwelcoming and has highly restrictive immigration policies.
- The desire to reduce net immigration, including international students has led to an increased perception that the UK does not want international students.
- The most deficient area for the UK is the lack of a meaningful post-study work route for international students to gain international experience in the workplace.
- Brexit represents a significant risk to the UK HE's ability to recruit international students should current arrangements change significantly.
- Counsellors agree that the presence of international students in the classroom brings benefits to all students that offsets any impact of extra support for those international students.

### **About the International Association for College Admission Counselling**

1. International ACAC was founded in 1991 (as Overseas ACAC) when a group of primarily European counsellors (responsible for advising students on their applications to higher education) met and approached US-based National Association for College Admission Counselling (NACAC) about the creation of an affiliate regional organisation that would represent overseas counsellors. The group became a chartered regional association and over the years has continued to grow. In 2016, the organisation changed its name to International ACAC.
2. Membership is a privilege made available to eligible institutions, organisations, agencies and individuals as defined in the association's Bylaws. International ACAC is a US-based not-for-profit organization.
3. The association's membership is made up of over 3,000 professionals from more than 90 countries worldwide dedicated to serving students as they make choices about pursuing post-secondary education. International ACAC is committed to maintaining high standards that foster ethical and social responsibility among those involved in the transition process,

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as outlined in the Statement of Principles of Good Practice: NACAC's Code of Ethics and Professional Practices. Membership of International ACAC includes schools based in the UK, international schools based overseas who support students who choose to study their tertiary education in the UK and a number of UK universities.

4. International ACAC effectively brings together primary and secondary school counsellors (operating within a range of international, national and independent schools), independent counsellors, university admissions, recruitment and financial aid officers, enrolment managers, and organisations engaged in guiding students through the secondary to higher education transition process.

### **Gathering the views of members**

5. International ACAC notes the submission from UUK setting out the views of UK universities. As such, International ACAC's submission focuses on the views of counsellors advising students progressing to higher education at universities around the globe, including the UK. These counsellors are either working in secondary schools (both in the UK and abroad) or acting independent of schools with students who opt to engage their services.
6. To accurately capture the opinions of International ACAC's diverse range of counsellors a questionnaire of the membership was undertaken to gather the views of the membership on those areas identified by the APPG. Whilst the timing is difficult for school-based counsellors, 52 responses were received with responses received reflecting the distribution of International ACAC membership and patterns of international applications to the UK (e.g. 52% were based in East and South East Asia and the Pacific region).

### **International students in the classroom**

7. International ACAC members working in international schools have considerable experience with having mixed international classrooms. There is a strong consensus amongst responding members that the presence of students from other countries and cultures enhances students understanding of global issues (94%) and global opportunities (89%), intercultural communication skills (91%) and adds fresh perspectives to classroom discussion (91%). Respondents also commented that this international experience improves empathy and tolerance of others.
8. A majority of respondents (57%) reported an increased range of subject diversity offered at their school as a result of their students being from a range of countries and cultures, just 6% felt that the 'international' nature of their schools led to a more restrictive curriculum.
9. 53% of members who completed the survey agreed that having international students in the classroom does require additional resources, with additional language support identified by 73% of those as the area which requires those resources.



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10. None of those with UK students in their schools agreed that it was difficult to integrate UK students with international students in their classrooms.

### **Perceptions of UK higher education and soft power**

11. The counsellors who responded to the survey were overwhelmingly positive in their perceptions of UK HE. 44% of respondents compared the standard of UK higher education favourably against that of other countries where their students choose to study, whilst only 3% felt the standard of universities was worse than competitor countries.
12. Many respondents also felt that UK graduates were better able to secure high-quality graduate jobs (41%) and almost all (85%) felt that UK entry requirements and admissions processes were more transparent than other receiving countries. However, respondents were more evenly split on the standard of customer service offered by UK universities with 36% believing it is better and 23% think it worse. Those who considered it worse pointed to a disconnect between admissions and recruitment functions in the UK in contrast to countries such as the United States.
13. 92% of respondents reported that their students returned with more positive opinions of the UK after studying there and 82% felt that this also improved the opinions of the UK amongst other students and parents in the wider school community.

### **Impact of UK-wide immigration policy**

14. UK-wide immigration policy is seen as being restrictive and making international students feel unwelcome. 31% felt the UK is more restrictive than other countries, 63% felt it was as restrictive and only 5% felt it was less restrictive. Only 10% felt that visa processes were simpler than other countries. One counsellor noted that 'the supporting documents are extensive when compared to the US F1 Visa application process. However, it is simpler than the Canadian student visa process.'
15. Post-graduation ability to gain work experience in the UK is seen as particularly important, with 81% of counsellors stating this is very important for students when choosing where to study. However, the UK is perceived to have highly restrictive rules in this area according to 50% of counsellors and only 4% consider the UK less-restrictive.
16. A counsellor working in India commented that 'most Indian students now apply to Canada as they get up to 3 years visa after graduation'. Another counsellor from Singapore commented that 'comparing the UK with a very wide range of countries where our students go, the UK is less immigrant-friendly than Canada, Japan or Australia, but more friendly than the US.'
17. These perceptions reinforce the view that UK-wide immigration policy has been a key factor in the UK losing market share to other countries for international students. Since the closure of the post-study work route in 2012, UK market share has fallen from 10.5% to 9.2%<sup>i</sup> and the UK is set to lose its place as the second most popular destination to Australia if it has not already done so.<sup>ii</sup>

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### **Potential impact of Brexit**

18. 30% of international students currently come from the EU<sup>iii</sup>. Currently these students have access to tuition fee loans, pay the same fees as UK students and do not require a visa in order to study.
19. 79% of respondents to our survey who work with EU students observed that ability to pay UK fees was 'extremely' or 'very' important. Similarly, 55% of those counsellors felt access to tuitions fee loans and 67% felt the ability to study without a visa were of similar importance.
20. Clearly changes to any of these areas represents a huge risk to the UK's ability to continue growing the number of EU students in UK higher education.
21. There has also been a wider reputational impact of Brexit, with negative headlines in a number of countries. Regardless of the reality, this has had an impact. For example, one counsellor says 'recent events have led to lots of conversations in families about whether the UK is a welcoming place - these are very different to the past where the UK was seen as a great place for an international student.'

### **Conclusions**

22. The reputation of UK HE remains incredibly strong amongst those advising students on tertiary education options around the world, despite the UK's loss of market share in international students. International students studying in the UK also has considerable trade and soft-power benefits to the UK as a whole.
23. Whilst there are some challenges to integrating international students into the classroom, the benefits to all students in the class outweigh these and lead to a richer learning experience, broader curriculum and increased empathy and cultural awareness.
24. The perceptions around the UK's immigration policy are overwhelmingly negative. Many international students wish to supplement their studies with work experience in the country they study in. The fact the UK is seen as limited in this regard means that many students are increasingly looking elsewhere. Some offer to international students who will be highly skilled graduates for working in the UK after graduation is essential to the UK regaining market share and competitiveness.
25. The desire to reduce net migration of which international students are a significant proportion has meant an increasingly difficult experience for those students entering the UK since 2012. Removing students (who are here temporarily to study and hopefully acquire some work experience) from net migration numbers would allow a more evidence based approach to international students.
26. Brexit represents significant risk to the number of EU students studying in the UK. Retaining current arrangements for fees, loans and visa-free study are essential if there is not to be a significant decline in the number EU students studying in the UK.



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<sup>i</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics [Online] Available from: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> [Accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> August 2018]

<sup>ii</sup> Centre for Global Higher Education (2018) The UK in the global student market: second place for how much longer? [Online] Available from: <http://www.researchcghe.org/publications/the-uk-in-the-global-student-market-second-place-for-how-much-longer/> [Accessed:24<sup>th</sup> August 2018]

<sup>iii</sup> Higher Education Statistics Agency (2018) Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2016/17 - Where students come from and go to study? [Online] Available from: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/11-01-2018/sfr247-higher-education-student-statistics/location> [Accessed:24<sup>th</sup> August 2018]