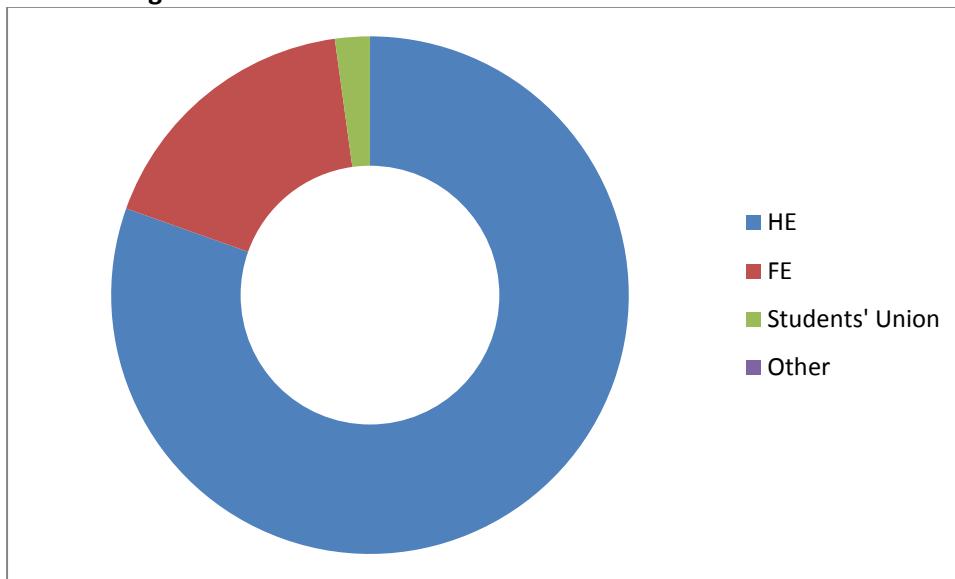


UKCISA Regional Conference: Bristol 4 December 2014

This was the second in a series of Regional Conferences. This report is a summary of the event and will contribute to the final report after our fourth conference in London in March.

We were delighted to welcome colleagues working in a variety of roles and we were particularly pleased to see so many Further Education (FE) members (see chart below) and this was reflected in the very fruitful discussions during the day of the crossover between FE and Higher Education (HE).

Where delegates came from:**Keynote presentation: Shaun Curtis Director, Exeter International.**

- The UK has a high international profile, very strong 'brand' and recognition (from Shakespeare to the Beatles)
- Education is one important part of the GREAT campaign run by the British government and British Council
- UK Higher Education institutions have outstanding facilities compared with many other countries
- Exeter University invested in internationalisation and recently produced an annual report on the internationalisation strategy:
http://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/internationalexeter/pdfs/Int_Report_and_Accounts_2014_spreads_AW.pdf
- Pathway programmes are essential as institutions must be 'farmers' as well as 'hunter-gatherers'!
- Need for institutions to define their geographical space. Need to get beyond the question 'How far are you from London?' and actually define where you are.
- Drop in Indian student recruitment is not just about visas, the currency fluctuations have also impacted negatively for the UK
- Challenges for internationalisation: The Four 'C's: Competition, Costs (the price is the same but in different markets), Compliance, Complacency

- Agents are key element in Exeter's recruitment strategy. Exeter mitigates risks by 'performance management' of agents including bringing them to the university on regular visits. USA has traditionally not used agents but this is changing – could have big impact on the UK

Panel 1: The UK International Student Experience

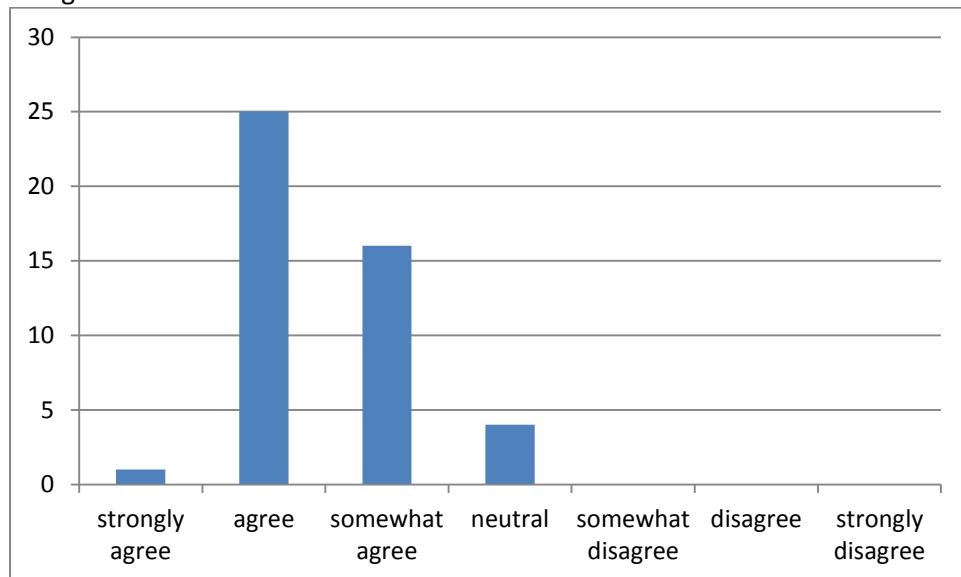
- UK Government strategy has an International Education Growth Strategy
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340600/bis-13-1081-international-education-global-growth-and-prosperity-revised.pdf
- 260,000 students go on Erasmus exchanges each year but many more come to the UK than travel from it
- Bologna target is for 20% of all undergraduate students to have a mobility experience of at least two months
- Most UK student mobility is at postgraduate level
- Transnational Education (TNE): 78% of Higher Education institutions deliver programmes overseas
- International student satisfaction in Wales is very good, as media and various awards have recognised over the years: <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/students-say-theyre-happiest-wales-2199183>. On a general point for the UK as a whole, the QAA has however noted lower levels of satisfaction for international compared to other students in a number of areas (including integration on campus, work opportunities, career advice, cost and financial support)
- All HEIs in Wales have student charters
- There are 8 universities, 13 colleges in Wales, 10 with Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS) status.
- International Roles in FE are often very broad and could include recruitment, advice, welfare
- International engagement in FE is not just about income generation – seen as a way to enhance culture diversity and learning
- FE colleges in Wales have varying numbers of international students, from 2 – 200 students. Small numbers help students to be more integrated into colleges
- FE could learn from HE about how to use alumni and testimonials from previous students
- Need to make more of how 'people-friendly' Wales is and the safe environment
- British Council Indonesia research showed contrasting perceptions of the UK and Australia. Key words linked to the different countries:

Australia	UK
Friendly	Exclusive
Easy	Difficult (related to travel? Admissions? Visas?)
Familiar	Unfamiliar
Flexible	High Quality
Affordable	Expensive

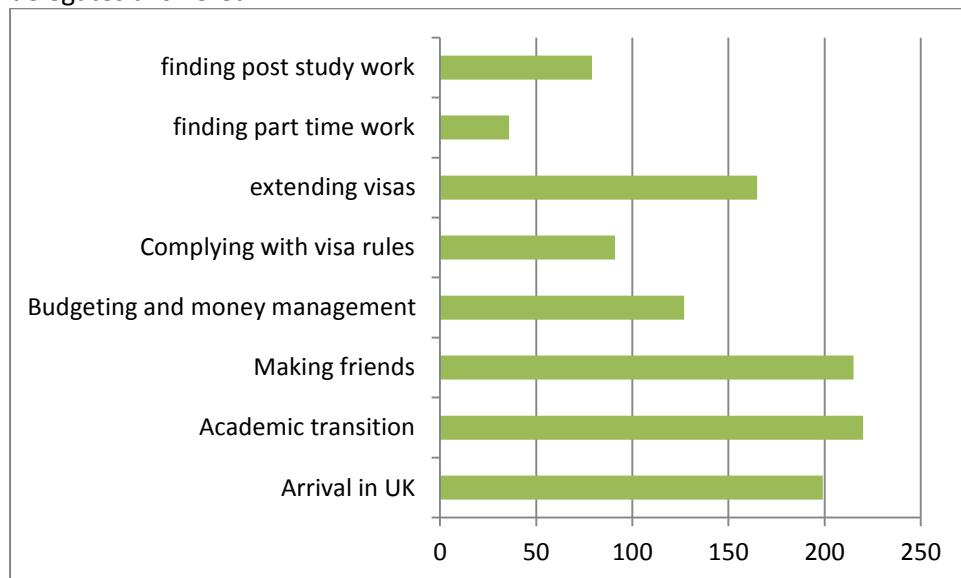
- International Student Barometer (ISB) receives 150,000 responses in 178 institutions. 1/3 of these in the UK. The UK is very slightly above the global average for overall satisfaction and also for the number of students who would recommend their choice of study in the UK. Four key areas of: arrival, learning, living and support indicate that the UK exceeds the global average in satisfaction.

Open Forum

In response to the question '*Overall, international students in the UK have a positive experience*' delegates answered:



In response to the question '*Which is of most current concern to your international students?*' delegates answered:



What do we not do so well in the UK for international students?

- Integration. International students want to make friends with host country nationals
- Collaboration – FE and HE could work better together
- Plateau in recruitment – need to take action to avoid this from becoming ‘the beginning of the end’

- Challenge for FE – finding ways to do alternative international work - not just focussing on recruitment
- Managing expectations – students need to understand ‘self learning’. HE students can access *Prepare for Success* online learning tool – not so useful for FE?
- Outward Mobility – still too few UK students going overseas
- Joined-up service provision – need to make it easier for students to access support in our own institutions

What do we do well?

- Institutions with small numbers offer good support. FE colleges get to know their individual students
- Technical expertise of large institutions – high level of professionalism
- Visa advice – excellent and free of charge
- Accommodation offer – many institutions can guarantee for first year entry
- We recognise the enrichment international students bring to institutions
- Excellent careers service
- Welcome and arrival

Panel 2 International Students and the Immigration System

- We need to remember students are not comparing current regime with previous regulations
- Agents sometimes complete visa application process for students – this means when applying to extend in the UK, the experience is totally new to them
- Students appreciate the support from institutions on visa advice
- Students feel under great pressure during visa application process because they live in fear of having to return home
- The UK system is seen as very systematic – a good thing – but also very rigid
- Police registration is perceived by students as discriminatory
- Students don’t view themselves as ‘migrants’ and are not interested in claiming benefits and do not like the implication that they are
- Compliance officers are not the only staff in institutions who hold the responsibility for maintaining the institutional licence – this is the responsibility of all staff
- We have to make the system work so that it is not seen as a ‘tool of oppression’
- It is important to maintain a balance between compliance and support
- The impact on students who arrive late is significant – it is difficult academically but also socially as students arrive when friendships have already been formed. Some may never catch up
- It is useful for advisers to know that the visa application process has a significant impact on the lives of students while they go through the process – they have no passport, no ID, no travel and limited social life –some feel isolated and mistrusted. Students don’t feel part of the institution while they remain unregistered
- Advisers are increasingly keen to support students in different ways – after 5 years of PBS, time for something different
- On a positive note, the online form for in-country applications is a great improvement to the previous paper one.
- Some colleges experienced long delays this year obtaining additional CASs – this had major impact on recruitment and perception could be that institutions had done something wrong (and CASs had been taken away)

- In 2012 Association of Colleges Survey, colleges said dealing with visas was one of the greatest challenges for the sector
- Lack of parity between FE and HE providers and these conspire to make FE look 'less trusted':
 - Colleges with smaller numbers of international students might be disproportionately affected by 10% refusal rate
 - Limited funds in FE so cannot access Premium Account Managers
 - FE must assess English language
 - FE work entitlements – 10 hours per week, HE work entitlements – 20 hours per week
 - Three year maximum study rule
 - Different pre-sessional rules

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- Wise Wales Partnership to increase student engagement in Higher Education in Wales
<http://www.wisewales.org.uk/>
- Future Directions Programme for Higher Education in Wales
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/FD_impact_assessment_report_0.pdf
- Gradlink – advice for students to find work overseas
<http://www.gradlinkuk.com/>
- Prepare for Success – interactive online learning tool for international student preparing to come to the UK
<http://www.prepareforsuccess.org.uk/>
- AoC report Skills Sector International Activity (2012)
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With many thanks to our speakers and panellists:

Jin Chen, PhD candidate, University of Bristol
Shaun Curtis, Director International, Exeter

Sioned Evans, Head of International Student Recruitment, Gloucestershire University and British Universities International Liaison Association (BUILA)

Neil Gaskin, Manager, International Students Advisory Service, Swansea University

Sian Holleran, International co-ordinator, Colleges Wales

Dr Tove Oliver. Senior European and International Manager, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)

Jim Price, Immigration Compliance Officer, University of Exeter and Immigration Compliance Network (ICN)

Jessica Randall, International Manager, Plymouth and City College

Liz Rees, Student Services Manager, Bath Spa Global and Association of International Student Advisers (AISA)

Chris Reilly, European HE Policy Adviser, International Knowledge and Innovation Unit, Department for Business, Innovation & Skills



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