




UKCISA Members' Seminar 23rd November 2017

Lexy Docwra

**International Partnerships Manager
University of Strathclyde**

The background of the slide features a soft-focus photograph of two young women sitting at a desk. They are looking at a computer monitor which displays some data or a website. The lighting is bright and natural, suggesting a classroom or library setting. The overall color palette is light and airy, with greens and blues from the background image blending into the white text boxes.

Addressing the needs of international summer school students: implications for universities of the 'quiet revolution' in short-term international experiences.

There is growing interest in short term study opportunities such as international summer schools (ISSs). At UofG alone there has been a significant increase YoY in applications and students participating the ISS.

Numbers grew by 100% between 2016 and 2017.

Motivations for research

Methodology

Key survey findings

Why attend an ISS?

ISS Student Support by Nationality

Common Issues hosting an ISS

Conclusions, ideas for further research and lessons learned

Motivations for Research

Whilst managing the ISS at UofG, I noticed that the reasons for participating varied by nationality. Expectations and needs also varied by nationality.



At UofG, the main cohort were from North America. Students travelled to Glasgow to gain essential credits during their summer break. A recent but growing trend from this region was the request from institutions (namely those that focused on the life sciences) to teach their own classes on Glasgow's campus.

We had a growing number of students from South East Asia, the majority applied to UofG to improve their English and study skills.

On the whole our students from East Asia applied because they wanted to experience a new and different culture, and to get a taster of what it would be like to study in the UK.

In early August this year, a WeChat post that described the cities of London, Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh as being popular with Chinese students on summer school programmes attracted more than 100,000 views (British Council, Sept 2017).

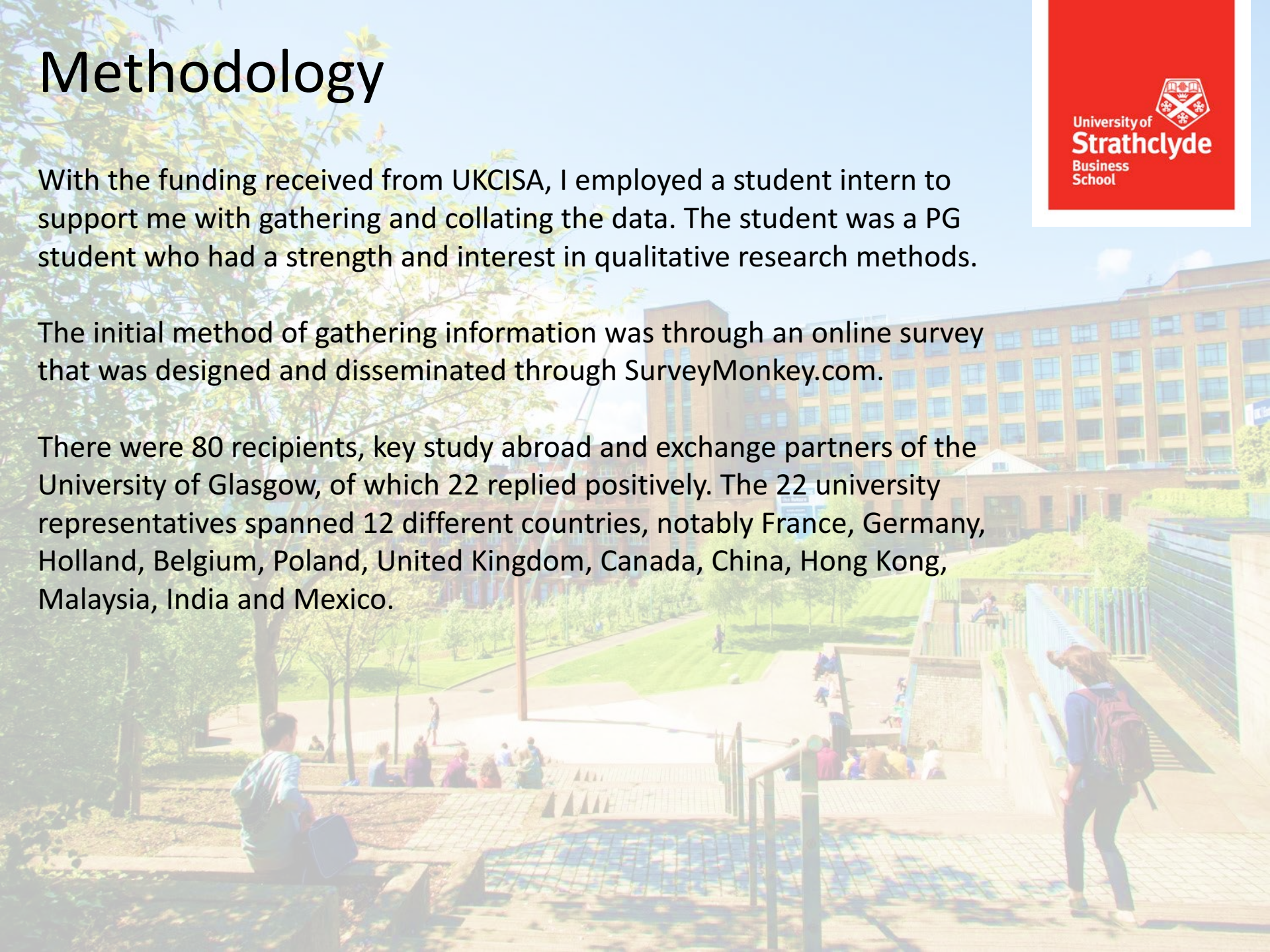
Around the same time, the China Daily reported twice within three weeks about the growth in groups of Chinese summer school students going to the UK.

Methodology

With the funding received from UKCISA, I employed a student intern to support me with gathering and collating the data. The student was a PG student who had a strength and interest in qualitative research methods.

The initial method of gathering information was through an online survey that was designed and disseminated through SurveyMonkey.com.

There were 80 recipients, key study abroad and exchange partners of the University of Glasgow, of which 22 replied positively. The 22 university representatives spanned 12 different countries, notably France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Poland, United Kingdom, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, India and Mexico.



Nationality

From the results, it became clear that the combination of nationalities within a summer school varied according to the host country.

On the whole British universities receive ISS students from Asian countries (notably Japan and China), USA, Europe and Saudi Arabia.

In Scotland more specifically however, there was a significant population of students from North American institutions participating in ISSs

In contrast, European universities hosted predominantly local students.

In order of importance, the main reason why students applied to attend a summer school were:

- 1. To gain academic credit and/or work experience**
- 2. To experience a new country and culture**
- 3. Make new friends**
- 4. To gain a taster of the host university/pursue PGT/PGR study**
- 5. Combine studies with recreational activities and travelling**
- 6. Learn another language**

Needs by Nationality

From the findings it was clear that nationality also played an important role in the expectations for on campus student support:

Prospective students from Asia and North America expected guidance and student support through the whole end to end process and applicant journey. Parents of North American students want to know what their child is doing or want to make sure that the child is performing well.

Students of Islamic faith indicated that the option to skip Friday classes for prayers would be welcome.

Chinese students were interested in a package deal arrangement, with all costs (including travel and meal plan) included in the overall price.

Mixed student accommodation is not always popular.

Food preferences and restrictions. As ISSs fall outside term time, providing a meal plan/catering was an issue (no pork and Halal food for Muslim students, for example).

Common Issues Part I...

Engaging with business and society

Across the institutions participating in this survey, a pattern of common problems emerged:

Resource: ISSs require many hands on deck, from both academic department and university services, and this is typically during a quieter time in the academic year.

Most universities are not fully prepared to offer pastoral care during the quieter summer period. A common occurrence was that the institution's disability and support services were not fully equipped to provide accommodations and support out with term-time.

Sport facilities and access to the campus gym - some universities do not provide access to the gym over the summer period.

Accommodation - lack of space for incoming summer students, especially on city campuses. As a result, some universities engage with host families to accommodate students during the summer (this is very popular with Japanese students).

Common Issues Part II...

Almost all universities faced problems in processing **visas**. The common solution is in the provision of ongoing support, guidance and providing sufficient information throughout the applicant journey, and not just at the point of registration.

Diversity: one of the participating UK institutions noticed that if there were too many students of one nationality, there is a tendency to interact only with each other in the home language. This can have a detrimental impact on student integration and student experience.

Differences in methods of **learning and teaching** - academic approaches can vary and expectations vary across nationality and age. Some students (North American and East Asia for example), are not as familiar with the flipped classroom approach as, say, students from Europe and the UK.

Medical insurance - students require detailed information regarding healthcare and health insurance, as provision varies tremendously between countries. Failure to do so has at times proven to be extremely disruptive and costly.

Conclusions

Ideas for further research and lessons learned

Whilst conducting this research, a number of lessons were learned:

More time is required to research this subject in further depth.

Face to face interviews and focus groups with the participating institutions would have proven valuable, however time and budget did not allow.

It became apparent that my counterparts, as was the case with myself, managing their institution's summer school was not their only responsibility, and participants simply did not have enough time to complete or fully contribute to the online survey.

It was hoped that individual case studies would be obtained to provide more specific information for this report, however for the reasons detailed it is recommended that for future research, face to face interviews are conducted.

Conducting the research for this project was both re-assuring and rewarding. As a summer school manager myself, I felt re-assured that I was not alone in facing a multitude of issues and problems on an almost daily basis. I found comfort in knowing that I was not the only one having to find solutions and think on my feet, and that every day was, essentially, a school day when managing short term study for international students.

Going forward, as the demand for short term study options is predicted to continue to grow globally, it would be beneficial that there was continued support to conduct further research on this growing trend within Higher Education.

Thank you to both UKCISA for
the funding, and to
yourselves for listening.

Lexy Docwra, International Partnerships Manager
University of Strathclyde

alexandra.docwra@strath.ac.uk