

Institution of the Year: University of Warwick

Q1. What inspired Warwick to mark its 60th anniversary with a bold, student-focused international strategy?

Internationalisation has long been central to Warwick's identity, grounded in a strong commitment to student success and to fostering a diverse, inclusive global community of students, staff and alumni.

International students now represent 35% of our student body and bring profound cultural and social benefits that enrich the Warwick experience for everyone.

In recent years, Warwick has taken a strategic, institution-wide approach to strengthening all aspects of its

international activity. This has included building on our globally recognised research strengths and partnerships to develop a truly global network of multilayered meaningful partnerships with world-leading universities, while also placing renewed emphasis on international student recruitment, experience, intercultural engagement, and expanding international opportunities for all students.

A key enabler of this approach has been the establishment of a broadened International Committee with executive-level representation within Warwick's governance structure. With a remit spanning all international activity, this governance model reflects a deliberate move to embed international priorities across the University and to sustain a cohesive, joined-up focus.

At the same time, we have also committed to celebrating Warwick as a truly global campus

and as an inclusive, enriching environment for all students. Our new flagship One World Warwick programme serves to celebrate both our global community on campus and the multiple ways in which we connect with partners across the world through our Warwick Global Network.

Warwick's 60th anniversary provided a natural and symbolic moment to articulate this ambition through a bold, student-focused International Strategy, placing our global community firmly at its centre:

“We will champion, in conjunction with the articulation of an outstanding academic success offer, the evolution of an exceptional International Student Welcome, Experience and Transition programme at all levels to maximise

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students' experience whilst at Warwick, as well as their future prospects.”

This strategy reflects Warwick's confidence, maturity and forward-looking vision at 60 years, reaffirming our belief that an outstanding international student experience is fundamental to our future success.

2. Who came up with the idea of the International Student Experience Advisory Board, what benefits and impact has it had?

The idea for the International Student Experience Advisory Board (ISEAB) emerged from work led by Warwick's

Student Experience team, which has strategic responsibility for International Student Support and Experience. When Warwick's International Office was restructured in 2018, its functions were redistributed across several central teams with the intention of creating more inclusive services and opportunities for all students. While well intentioned, this model risked producing services that were overly generic and less responsive to the distinct needs of a globally diverse student population.

The global Covid-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of a strong, vibrant and inclusive student community. In response, Warwick established a dedicated Student Experience function in 2022, with a Deputy Director role providing a clear focal point for international students. This created the foundation for embedding the UKCISA #WeAreInternational Student Charter within Warwick's wider student experience framework.

In March 2023, the Student Experience team convened the first International Student Roundtable to capture international students' expectations and lived experiences. Insights from these discussions, alongside institutional data such as surveys, informed a series of targeted initiatives across key areas including pre-arrival support, onboarding, communication, cultural integration, visa guidance and careers support. Two major projects delivered in 2023 and 2024 brought together a wide range of stakeholders to make services and opportunities more tailored and inclusive for international students.

Following the success of this work, the team recommended the creation of an International Student Experience Advisory Board in early 2025, co-chaired with an international student, reporting into the

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University's International Committee. This proposal was warmly supported by senior leaders and formally approved.

Since its establishment, the ISEAB has delivered significant benefits. It has formalised collaboration by bringing together colleagues who were previously working on international student experience initiatives and projects, alongside other key stakeholders. This has enabled members to champion inclusivity within their own areas of work and beyond. Importantly, the Board is embedded within Warwick's governance structures through its reporting to the International Committee, ensuring accountability in

delivering the commitments set out in the International Strategy.

The ISEAB places student voice at the heart of its work. With representation from International Student Ambassadors and the Students' Union, the Board provides a space for both university-led and student-led initiatives to be shared at the design stage, fostering meaningful collaboration and co-creation. This approach ensures that decisions and actions are consistently informed by lived experience. Since its creation, Board members have worked collaboratively on a range of initiatives and projects, including:

1. International Student Wellbeing Project

A collaborative project that centred international student voices in discussions about wellbeing support. The findings are now informing the ongoing development and implementation of Warwick's Wellbeing Strategy.

2. Addressing sustained and emerging risks

Members worked together to identify and respond to risks affecting international students, such as scams targeting students and their parents. This resulted in relevant information being incorporated into the central Student Information Hub, as well as the inclusion of tailored content within the newly developed in-house training module, CyberSafe.

3. Staff training

A team of colleagues collaboratively developed a two-hour WISE (Warwick International Student Experience) session aimed at promoting international student inclusion in teaching, learning and support. A successful pilot ran with two academic departments in autumn 2025, and plans are now in place to develop a staff MasterClass and a Staff Toolkit to

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further support colleagues working with international students.

3. How does the International Student Experience Advisory Board strengthen cross-campus collaboration and influence decision-making?

The International Student Experience Advisory Board (ISEAB) brings together a wide range of stakeholders from across the university, including colleagues who shape policy and those who work directly with students at key stages of their journey, from pre-arrival through to post-graduation. It creates a powerful platform for genuine cross-campus collaboration. By ensuring that decision-makers and

practitioners are in regular conversation with one another, the Board enables new initiatives to meet students where they are, and where they expect the university to be.

A defining feature of the ISEAB's influence is its shared commitment to moving away from a 'deficit model' of support. Instead, the Board promotes a user-centred approach that focuses on removing structural and procedural barriers, enabling students to succeed through equity. This shift in mindset has become central to how Warwick designs services and support for international students.

One clear example of the ISEAB's impact is the development of three new Warwick Award pathways aimed at enhancing employability skills for students pursuing careers in China, India and other global destinations. As the Head of Skills is an active member of the Board, regular engagement with international student

insights has directly informed the creation of these pathways, ensuring they reflect the diverse career aspirations of Warwick's global student body.

Another significant example of the Board's influence is the meaningful change achieved for postgraduate taught (PGT) students, 70% of whom are international. Through the International PGT Experience Project, the University formally changed the PGT 'course start date' to align with the beginning of Welcome Week from autumn 2025 onwards. This change provided international PGT students with valuable time to settle, build connections and prepare for their studies.

The impact was clear: 94% of international PGT students arrived before Welcome Week in autumn 2025, compared with 77% in the previous year.

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This demonstrated students' strong motivation to arrive early when institutional structures support them to do so. However, as departmental welcome activities remained optional, experiences continued to vary across the University. This shift in arrival patterns is an important focus in the Welcome team's comprehensive review of Welcome Week, involving both staff and students, including a review of the Academic Induction Framework as experienced by PGT students.

4. What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?

One of our most valuable learning areas has been how to maximise

impact within the realities of limited time and resources. Across the University, colleagues are strongly committed to collaboration and to enhancing the international student experience, and this environment encourages creative, solution-focused approaches that cut across traditional boundaries.

A helpful illustration of this has been Warwick's evolving approach to in-session English language support. Following organisational change and making the best use of resources for the most students, the university's existing in-session English course was discontinued in autumn 2025. Although bespoke English language support continued in partnership with academic departments, it was recognised that additional, complementary solutions would further enhance students' experience.

This period of change also created space for complementary, student-centred initiatives to

emerge. In response to a shared commitment to supporting language development and confidence, the Global Lounge programme was launched at the start of autumn 2025. Designed as a relaxed, flexible and low-pressure environment, the Global Lounge provides opportunities for international and home students to connect, practise English naturally and build confidence through informal interaction.

Building on the success of the Global Lounge, in Term 2 a dedicated English Mixer workshop was developed, drawing on the expertise within the group and on proven departmental practice. The workshop focused on language practice alongside peer connection, reinforcing the social dimensions of language learning. At the same time, the Students' Union representative introduced the "Bridging the Language Barrier" campaign, which

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emphasises positive reinforcement, expanding access to targeted communication workshops and improving visibility of existing support offers across campus. A new enhanced in-session English provision is now in development, with a more comprehensive programme due to launch from autumn 2026.

Looking ahead, we recognise that the external environment will continue to present both challenges and opportunities, particularly in the context of ongoing financial pressures across the UK higher education sector. Changes to immigration policy, visa uncertainty and increasing global competition from alternative study destinations are reshaping

international student recruitment. These dynamics underline the importance of continued collective effort to strengthen Warwick's welcoming, inclusive and supportive environment for international students, and to ensure equitable opportunities for success.

Remaining attentive to sector-wide developments, global trends and evolving student expectations will be essential. Making thoughtful decisions about how to allocate resources effectively and achieve maximum impact will remain complex, but it is also an opportunity to innovate, collaborate and focus investment where it delivers the greatest benefit for students.

5. Will you continue with all the global initiatives when your 60th year is over?

Absolutely. Whilst the 60th anniversary created a powerful springboard for global engagement,

the initiatives launched this year are designed to endure far beyond the 60th celebration.

One of the most significant developments has been the introduction of the Global Celebrations Programme, which now reports directly to the International Committee. This elevates cultural celebration events to a strategic level and publicly signals how the University values the many global regions represented by our students and staff.

Although Warwick has always marked cultural celebrations, the approach in previous years was less consistent. Often, a single team was responsible for delivering large flagship events and deciding which celebrations could go ahead, with outcomes heavily shaped by staff capacity and availability. The result was, at times, unpredictable and uneven.

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This changed with the formalisation of One World Warwick, which now provides the foundational framework underpinning the Global Celebrations programme. Rooted firmly in Warwick's International Strategy, One World Warwick goes far beyond cultural celebration; it is a call to action for a commitment to inclusive, globally connected education and research, and an invitation for every member of our community to celebrate our diverse international community, engage with the world, build meaningful partnerships, and shape a truly international future.

Now a fixed feature of our annual calendar, One World Warwick takes place twice a year.

The autumn event can last up to a month, transforming the campus into a vibrant hub that encourages all students, whether international or home, to gain global experience and exposure without leaving the campus. The Spring event shifts the focus outward, promoting short-term mobility opportunities, international internships and global careers pathways, while encouraging students to develop the skills they need to thrive internationally. It also highlights joint seed-funding opportunities with international partners, supporting collaborative projects and enabling students and staff to engage meaningfully in global initiatives. This includes free intercultural trainings, our virtual [TeamWork internship programme](#), and a growing portfolio of opportunities designed to develop a global mindset and global competence.

These initiatives are not temporary: they

represent a long-term commitment to embedding internationalisation into the fabric of the university life. As we look beyond the 60th anniversary, programmes like One World Warwick will continue to shape how our community connects, collaborates, learns and celebrates together, ensuring we remain a leading global institution for years to come.

6. What advice would you give to institutions wanting to embed international student inclusion?

A meaningful commitment to international student inclusion must start with listening to international students themselves. Large-scale surveys such as the National Student Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey provide valuable sector-level insights, but they cannot capture the full depth of the international

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student experience. Tailored, institution-specific surveys, designed around the entire student lifecycle, can help you understand how you are performing in key areas and identify trends year on year.

Alongside this, focus groups such as International Student Roundtables offer richer, more nuanced data. Through open conversation, you can better understand students' motivations, barriers, challenges and successes, and can quickly identify where small but targeted improvements could have a big impact. But also, going beyond just listening to their voice, do invite them to work with you, to co-create their experience, create the infrastructure

to enable peer support, if possible. Many international students are passionate to share and help. Invite service providers to co-create with students so that guidance and service offering are inclusive by design. This approach proved highly effective at Warwick when international students helped develop the 'Personal Tutor toolkit: Working with International Students', providing real-world examples that gave personal tutors insight into the challenges international students face and how they can be supported more effectively.

Start an advisory board, a community of practice, or a network if it is feasible. There are plenty of staff members interested in supporting international students, and having such a staff group can work as a catalyst to share good practice, encourage creative thinking and problem solving.

Use the UKCISA student charter to benchmark

your current practice. It is a powerful tool to highlight where international students may require specific support and help us evaluate whether current services genuinely meet their needs. Working closely with colleagues across support services is essential. Encourage them to reflect on the inclusivity of their offer and identify opportunities for enhancement. By consistently asking, 'what barriers might an international student face', you can identify gaps, remove barriers and create a more equitable environment across all stages of their journey.

7. Do you use the [#WeAreInternational Student Charter](#) in your institution?

Yes! The #WeAreInternational Student Charter sits at the heart of Warwick's approach to international student experience and acts as an important

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compass for how we design, benchmark, and enhance our support and services. It works hand in hand with our own International Strategy and is embedded through the structures and culture we have built in recent years.

The establishment of the International Student Experience Advisory Board has been central to this. The Board provides a formal mechanism to embed horizontal collaboration across the University and elevates the international student voice directly into decision-making. Its creation was shaped by our recognition that inclusivity could not be assumed. It needs to be intentionally designed. The ISEAB ensures that colleagues

from across departments, support services, governance committees, and the Students' Union can come together at both decision-making and practitioners' levels to champion international student inclusion in a coordinated and strategic way.

The Charter plays a crucial role in guiding that work. It gives us a clear, shared framework through which we can evaluate how well we are meeting the changing needs of international students and where tailored support may be required.

For example, the Charter's emphasis on student voice informed our decision to launch the International Student Roundtables, which provided rich insights into the motivations, challenges, and expectations that later fed directly into initiatives such as the redesigned international student welcome programme and the creation of the ISEAB.

The Charter is also influencing our wider strategic direction.

Working with our Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, we are currently conducting a benchmarking exercise to assess Warwick's progress against each element of the Student Charter: what we are already achieving, where gaps exist, and what the next phase of development should be.

The findings will be presented to the Student Success Subcommittee in Spring 2026, ensuring senior colleagues remain engaged and interested.

Find out more

>> [#WeAreInternational Student Charter](#)