

Integration of international students

A UK perspective

September 2014

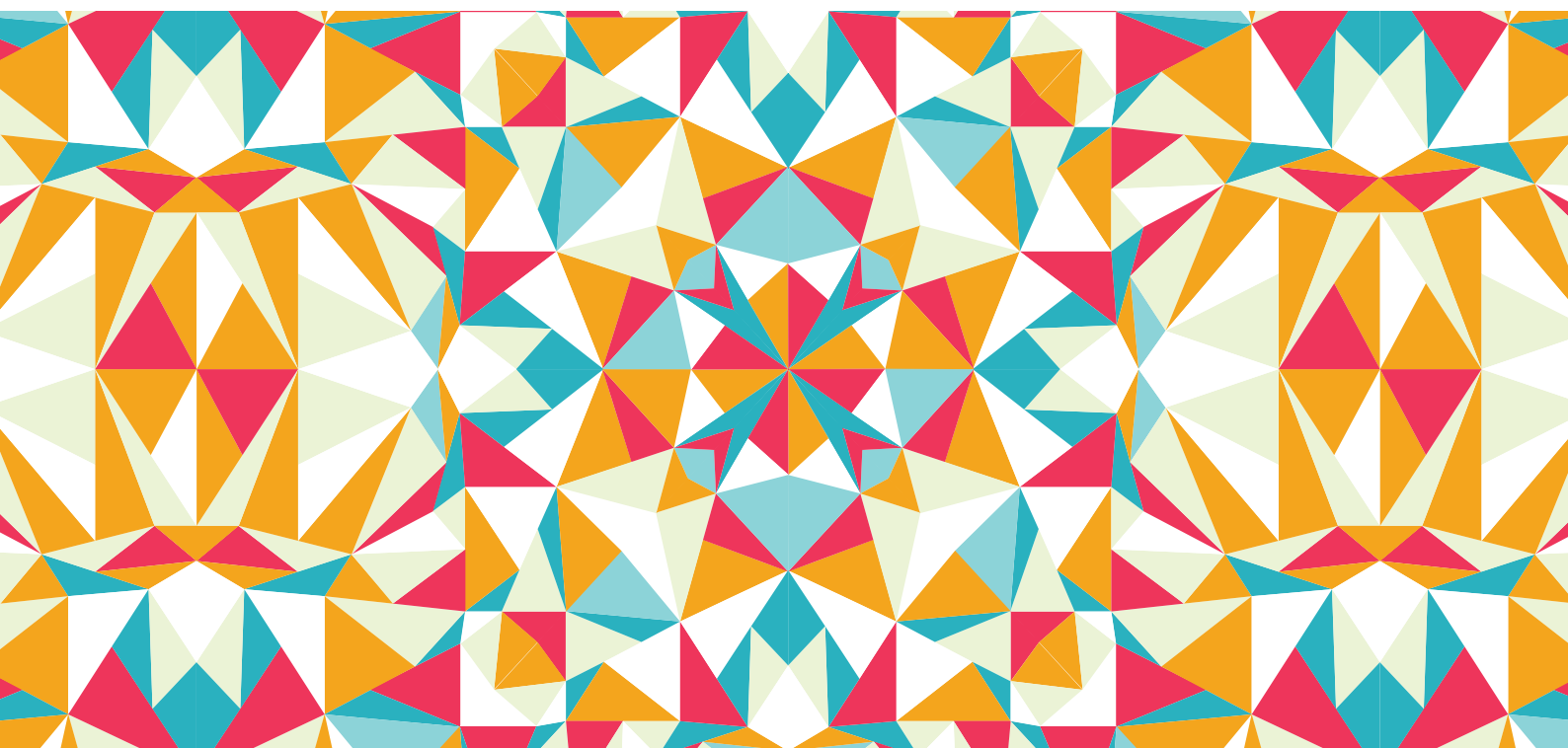


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Foreword

Diversity of students, and therefore viewpoints, is a cornerstone of a global education and as such, acceptance and integration of international students must be an essential part of a university's internationalisation process.

Whilst much research has been conducted on institutional responsibility with regards to the integration of international students, little has been done in the way of understanding the sentiment of home students. This report looks at the state of international students in the UK and examines UK student perceptions on the integration of students.

The primary data in the research shows that UK students are not only aware of the importance of integration of international students, but also largely positive about their role and the presence of students from all over the world at their university. Seventy-four per cent of survey respondents stated that they believe international students are welcomed by students in the UK and 76 per cent of students indicated it is everyone's responsibility to make international students feel welcomed.

The research additionally implies that the experiences of UK-domiciled students who have befriended international students positively influenced home student views on international student motivations; when asked about their general sentiments, 82 per cent of respondents with friends who are international students emphasised that they value the opportunity to engage with international students.

The engagement of UK-domiciled students with international students is valuable and helps lift overall sentiment towards a diverse, international student body, as well as the internationalisation efforts of a university and the UK as a whole.

The importance of integration in internationalisation

While the benefits of a global campus are plentiful and well-publicised, they do not naturally arise due to the presence of international students; the distinction must be made that simply having a diverse student body does not mean the education or even the campus is global in nature. What comes as an essential part of a global education is the inclusion of international students in communities and classes.

Integration of all students is an elemental factor in the expanding concept of internationalisation not only due to immediate student outcomes of comprehensive learning and cultural awareness but also due to long term benefits for the individual, the institution and the UK. Risks of separation to international students include at best, feelings of isolation that manifest in poor social and academic performance and at the very worst, risks to their personal safety. The positive effects and outputs of productive integration of international students not only affect the students and faculty, but the calibre of education itself and the long term promotion and marketing prospects of a university and a nation.

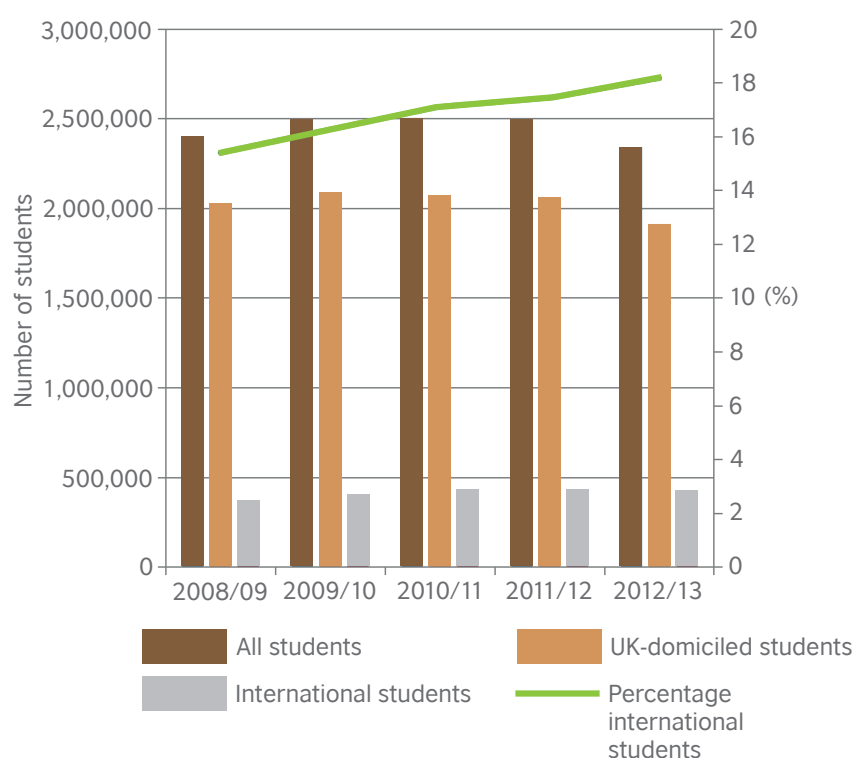
This report outlines the importance of the international student in the UK higher education sector as well as international student decision-making before examining topics of integration from the UK student perspective.

The UK: International student ratio

Almost one in five students in the UK is international

In the academic year 2012/13 there were 2.3 million students in UK higher education institutions.¹ This figure represents a slight decrease from the 2011/12 total of 2.4 million, which in turn was a slight decrease from 2010/11, when UK student numbers had reached a high of 2.5 million as reported by the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

UK and international student totals 2008/09 - 2012/13



Of the 2012/13 total UK student body, 1.9 million (82%) were UK domiciled and just over 425,260 (18%) were international students, representing both “other European Union” and “non-European Union” students for the purposes of this report. Whilst in real terms the number of international students in the UK has decreased since the 2011/12 high of 435,230, the proportion of international students with the total UK student body has increased (from 17.4 per cent in 2011/12 to 18.1 per cent in 2012/13), in large part due to the 7% decline in UK domiciled students from the same period; it is worth mentioning that this decline was principally driven by a decrease in the number of part-time students.

Source: The Higher Education Statistics Agency 2014

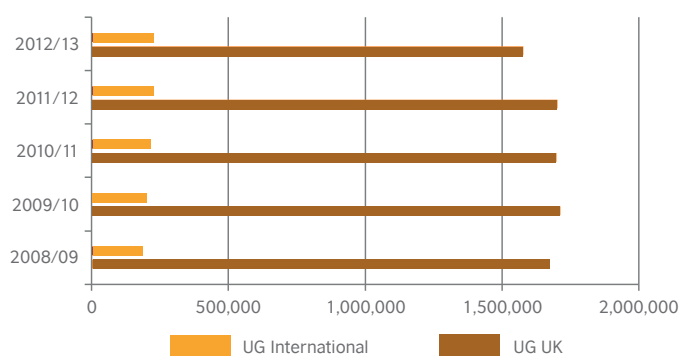
¹ The data used in this section are from the Higher Education Statistics Agency and include student enrolments, part-time and full-time, at publicly-funded higher education institutions in the UK as well as one independent institution. Statistics do not include students with incoming, visiting and exchange or 'writing-up' status.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students

Just over one in 10 UK undergraduate students are international

In 2012/13 the total number of UK undergraduates was 1.8 million. Of these students, 226,400 (13%) were international, representing a one per cent increase from the previous year's undergraduate total of 225,530 students.

Undergraduate: UK and international student totals 2008/09 - 2012/13



Source: The Higher Education Statistics Agency 2014

UK institutions with the highest proportion of international undergraduate students

The institutions listed below represent the top 10 largest undergraduate student hosts in the UK, with total international undergraduate student numbers ranging from 3,400 to over 6,000. Of the top 10, two institutions in London have over 30 per cent international students.

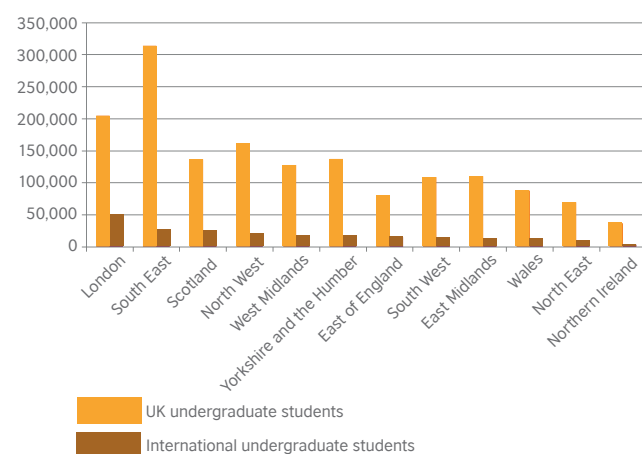
UK institutions	% UK students	% International students
University of the Arts, London	61%	39%
University College London	62%	38%
The University of Edinburgh	75%	25%
The University of Warwick	76%	24%
The University of Manchester	77%	23%
King's College London	77%	23%
The University of Westminster	78%	22%
Middlesex University	80%	20%
Coventry University	82%	18%
The University of Nottingham	83%	17%

Source: The Higher Education Statistics Agency 2014

UK regions with the highest international undergraduate student numbers

In real terms, London hosts the largest number of international undergraduates students, with 50,520 students or 22% of the total. Within London, twenty per cent of undergraduates are international students. Other regions with higher proportions of international undergraduates include Scotland (16%) and East of England (16%).

Undergraduate students in UK regions 2012/13

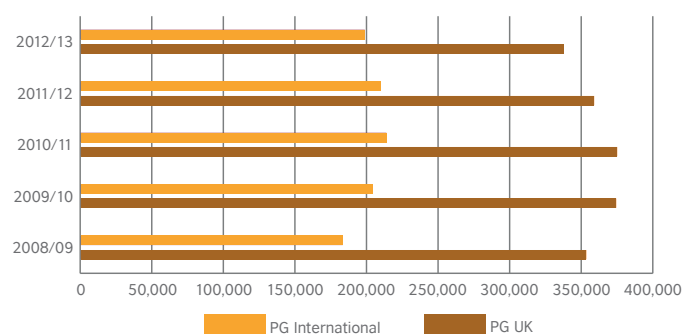


Source: The Higher Education Statistics Agency 2014

More than one in three UK postgraduate students are international

In 2012/13, 37 per cent of the UK postgraduate student body were comprised of international students. This significant proportion has grown steadily year-on-year from 34 per cent in 2008/09.

Postgraduate: UK and international student totals 2008/09 - 2012/13



Source: The Higher Education Statistics Agency 2014

UK institutions with the highest proportion of international postgraduate students

The institutions listed below represent the top 10 largest postgraduate student hosts in the UK, with total international postgraduate student numbers ranging from 3,700 to over 5,000. Of the top 10, five institutions have over 50% international students.

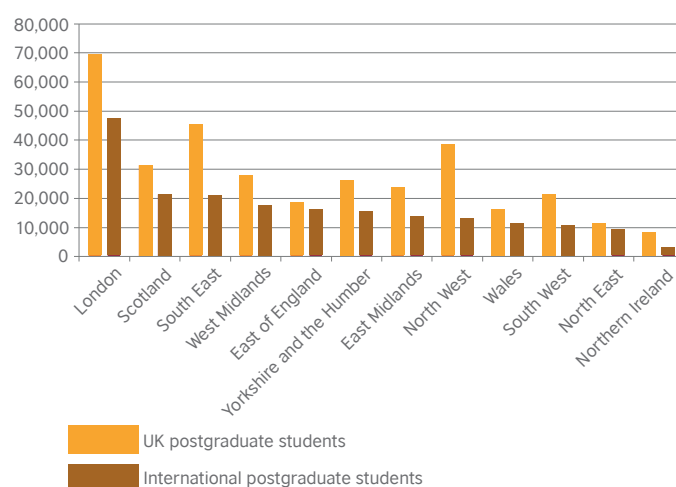
Top 10 UK institutions hosting international postgraduates	% UK students	% International students
London School of Economics and Political Science	18%	82%
The University of Oxford	44%	56%
The University of Cambridge	45%	55%
The University of Sheffield	49%	51%
The University of Edinburgh	49%	51%
The University of Warwick	53%	47%
The University of Nottingham	54%	46%
University College London	56%	44%
The University of Manchester	57%	43%
The University of Birmingham	59%	41%

Source: The Higher Education Statistics Agency 2014

UK regions with the highest international postgraduate student numbers

In real terms London hosts the largest number of international postgraduate students, comprised of 47,490 students or 41% of the postgraduate population. However other UK regions have higher proportions of international postgraduates: Scotland also houses 41%, East of England hosts 46%, Wales has 41% and the North East hosts 44% international postgraduates.

Postgraduate students in UK regions 2012/13

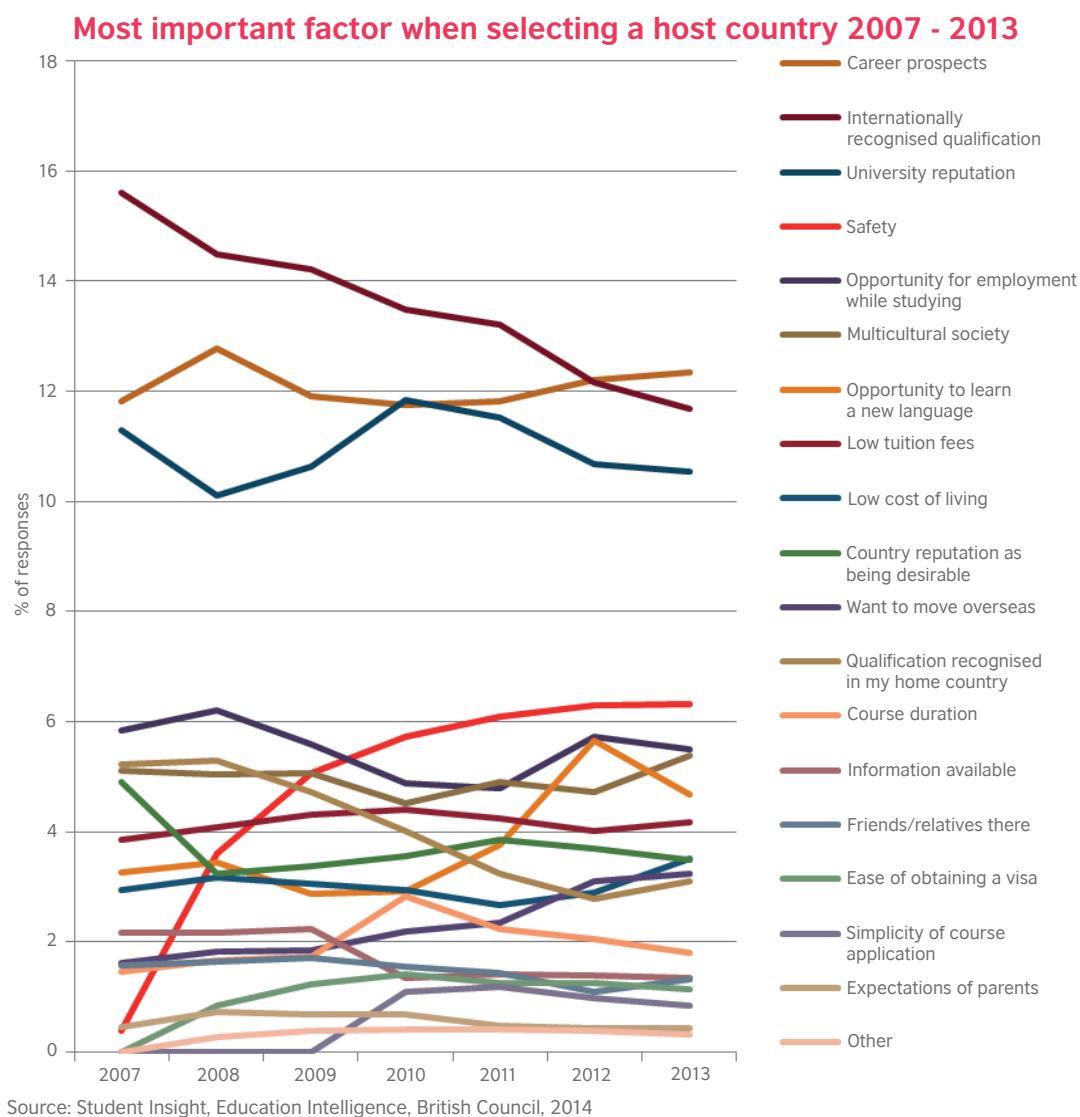


Source: The Higher Education Statistics Agency 2014

Identifying trends in international student decision making

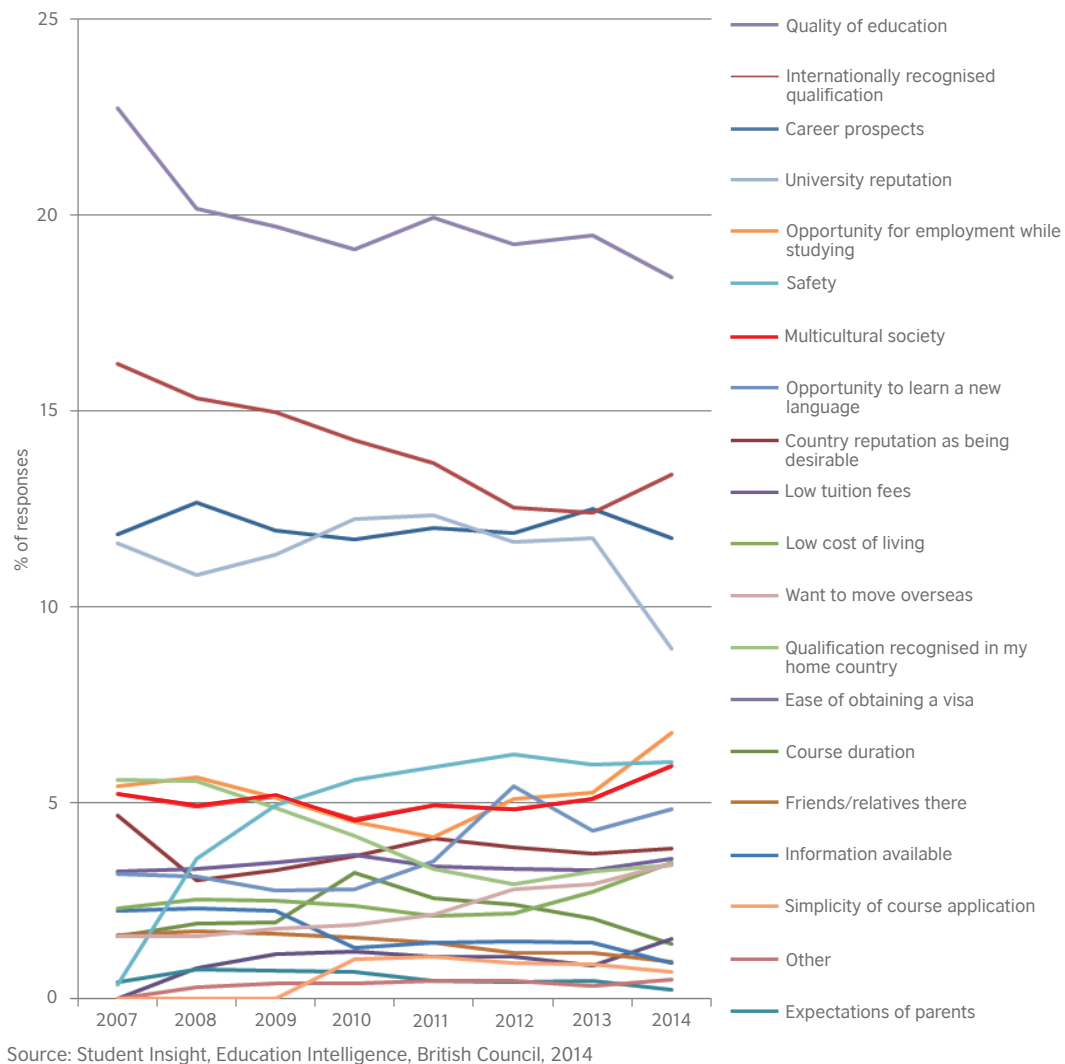
Since 2007, the British Council has been collecting data from prospective international students with the aim of understanding influence on their decision making process. This Student Insight study provides a comprehensive view of the entire decision making process from first consideration of overseas study to institution selection and visa application. Since 2007, we have collected responses from over 180,000 prospective students from around the world.

One question within the study asks respondents to identify the most important factor when choosing a destination country for study. The graph below shows the 19 different factors from which respondents can select their top three answers. The top three factors influencing choice of host destination have since 2007 remained the same: career prospects, internationally recognised qualification and university reputation.



In 2011 we identified a trend in the data that showed that a destination country being a safe place to study becoming increasingly important. It had moved from 17th most important factor with less than one per cent of responses, to become the fourth most important factor in 2010. With additional research, we discovered that while personal safety held a variety of meanings, it was always considered an intrinsic component of on-campus integration.

Most important factors to students who want to study in the UK 2007-2014



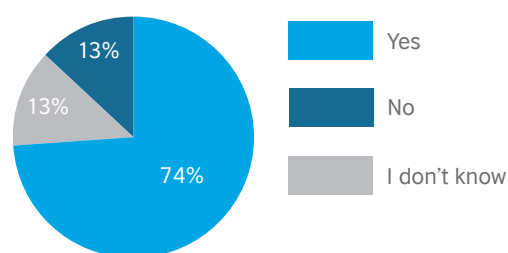
In 2013, for students who wanted to study in the UK, selecting a host country with a multicultural society was the seventh most selected consideration, on par with safety. Up to 25 August, 2014, a multicultural society made up six per cent of responses to what the most important factor was in choosing a destination.

Integration of international students – UK student views

Our Student Insight research helped us identify the growing trend of the increased importance of international student personal safety and inclusion. Often the academic success of international students can be dependent upon their integration into domestic students and local communities. However, little research has focused on domestic student perceptions of incoming international student views and study motivations. This research aims to understand the level of awareness UK students have of incoming international students, their level of interaction with them and understanding of their motivations for studying in the UK.

The British Council surveyed 2,632 UK-domiciled students in February and March of 2014. The survey consisted of multiple-choice, single-answer questions.

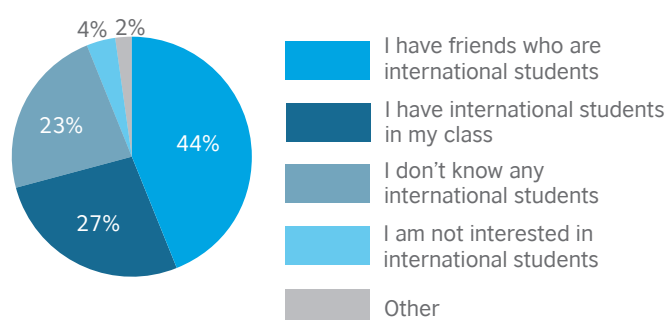
Do you believe international students are welcomed by students in the UK?



Source: British Council Education Intelligence 2014

The majority of students (74%) in the UK stated that they believed international students are welcomed by their peers in the UK. The remaining twenty-six per cent were less sure with 13 per cent saying international students are not welcomed by their other students and 13 per cent stating they did not know.

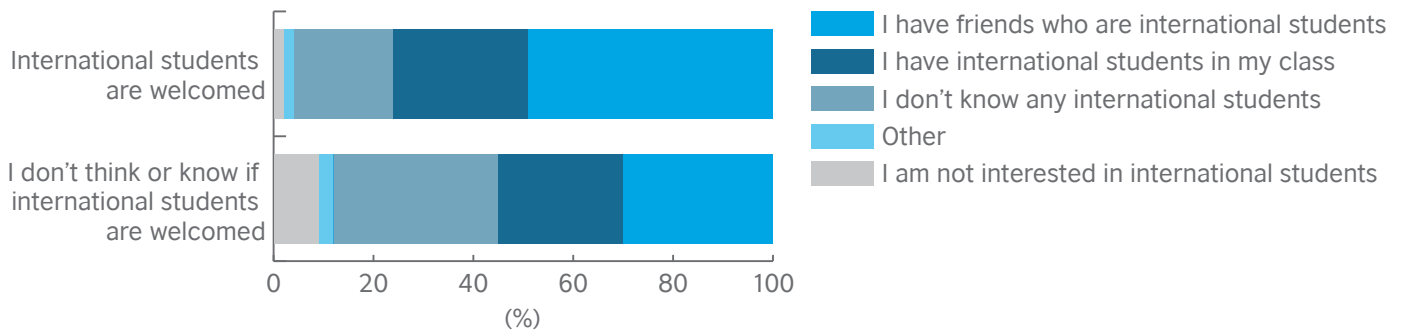
How much interaction have you had with international students?



Source: British Council Education Intelligence 2014

Respondents were asked about the level of interaction they felt they had with international students. The highest percentage of students stated they have friends who are international students (44%), 27 per cent said they have international students in their classes, 23 per cent indicated they didn't know any international students. Just four per cent said they were not interested in international students and two per cent selected other reasons.

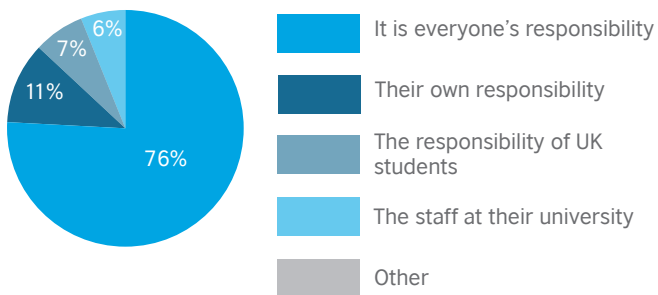
How much interaction have you had with international students?



Source: British Council Education Intelligence 2014

Closer examination of the data revealed dissimilar experiences of those students who showed they felt international students were welcomed by their peers and other respondents. Of the 1,951 respondents that answered positively to international students being welcomed, 49 per cent had friends who were international students, 27 per cent had international students in their classes and 20 per cent stated they did not know any international students. Alternately, of those that stated they did not know if or think international students were welcomed by their peers, 30 per cent stated they had friends who were international students, 25 per cent said they had international students in their classes and the highest percentage, 33 per cent, said they didn't know any international students.

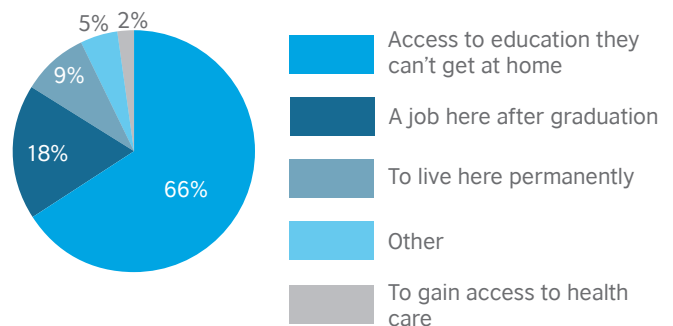
Whose responsibility is it to make international students feel welcomed?



Source: British Council Education Intelligence 2014

UK students mostly believe that it is everyone's responsibility to make international students feel welcome (76%), but small minorities expressed their beliefs that it is an international student's own responsibility (11%), the responsibility of the UK students (7%) and the responsibility of the staff (6%).

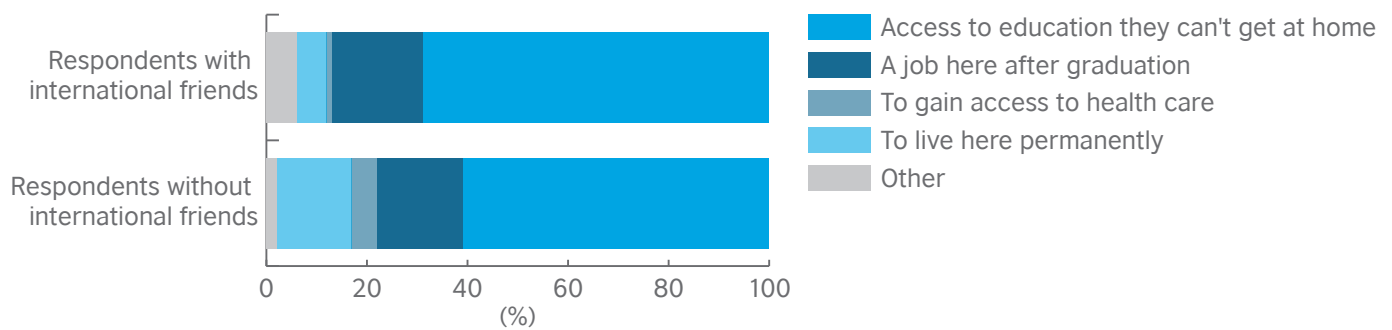
What do you believe are international students' motivations to study in the UK?



Source: British Council Education Intelligence 2014

Two thirds of UK students expressed their belief that international students study abroad in the UK to get access to education they can't get at home. Eighteen per cent of the UK respondents stated international students chose to study in the UK to obtain a job in the UK after graduation, while other respondents stated that international students may want to live in the UK permanently (9%) or gain access to health care (2%). Five per cent of respondents selected other reasons.

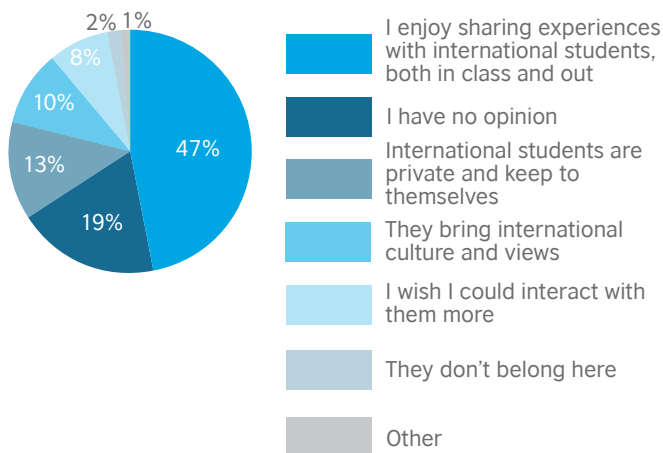
What do you believe are international students' motivations to study in the UK?



Source: British Council Education Intelligence 2014

The 1,165 respondents who indicated they did have friends who are international students and the 710 respondents that didn't had slightly differing viewpoints on the motivations of international students; those that did not have friends who are international students stated that the motivation to study in the UK was more likely to be for migration purposes (15 per cent as compared to just six per cent for those with international friends) or to gain access to health care (five per cent as compared to one per cent of those with international friends).

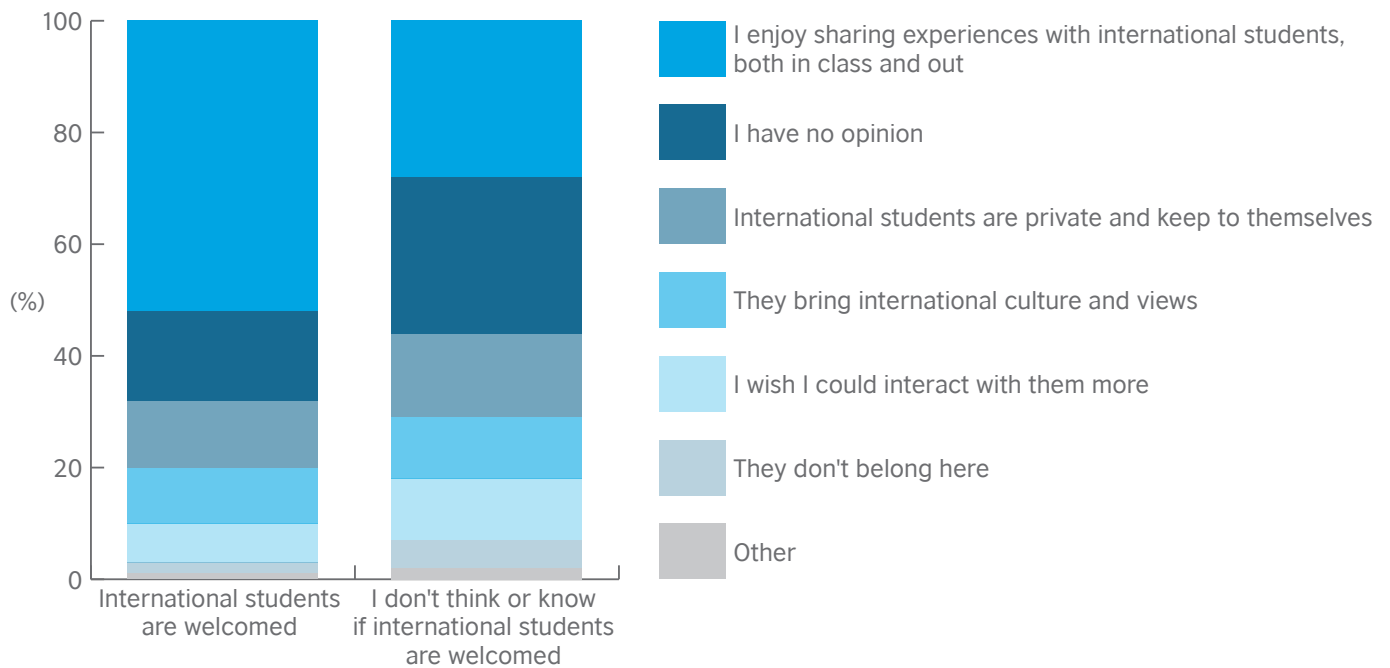
How do you feel about international students on campus?



Source: British Council Education Intelligence 2014

We asked respondents to share their sentiments regarding international students with us; almost half of students stated they enjoyed sharing experiences with international students, both in class and out (47%). Other stated they had no opinion (19%), international students were private and kept to themselves (13%), international students bring culture and views (10%), UK students wished they could interact more with them (8%) and international students do not belong here (2%).

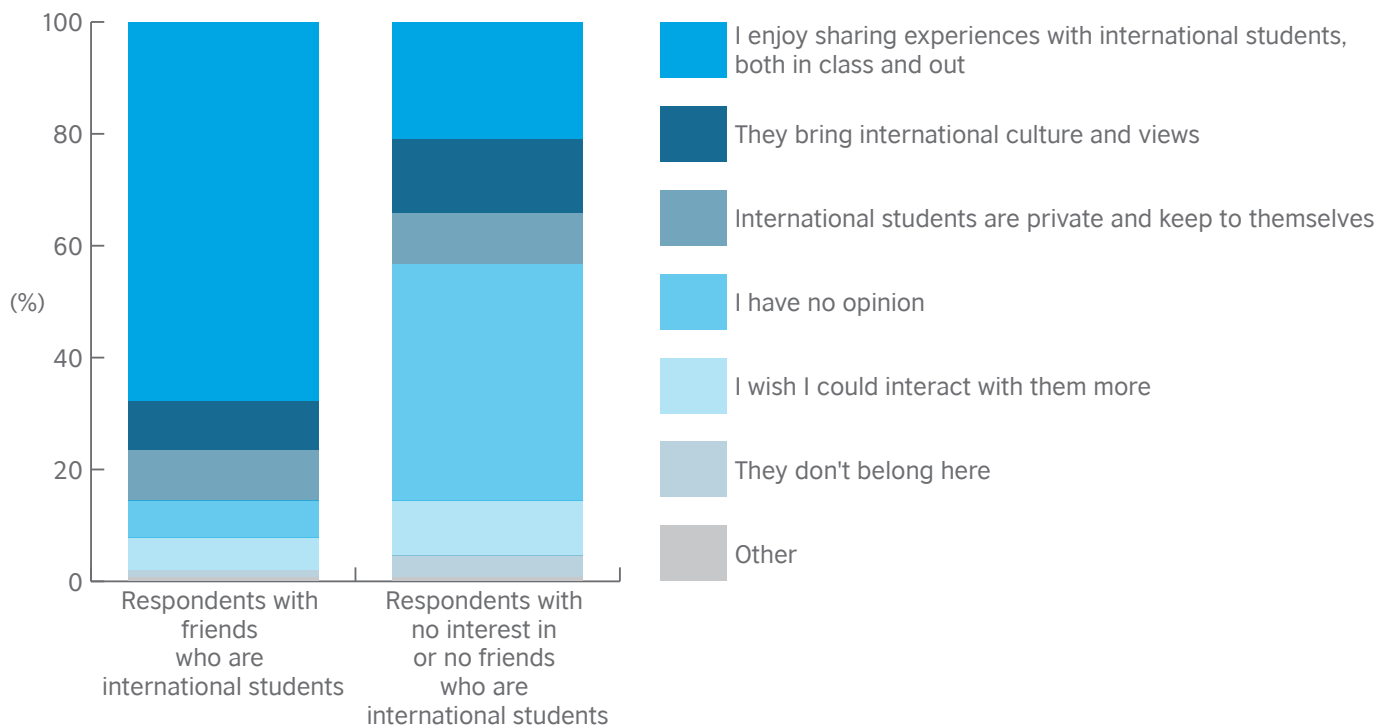
How do you feel about international students on campus?



Source: British Council Education Intelligence 2014

A higher percentage of the students who earlier in the survey indicated they believe international students are welcomed by UK students stated they enjoy sharing experiences with international students (53%), as compared to those that said they didn't think or know if international students were welcomed by their peers (28%). Further, while 16 per cent of those who said international students are welcomed stated they have no opinion, 28 per cent of those with negative or neutral opinions regarding international students being welcomed stated they have no opinion on international students.

How do you feel about international students on campus?



Source: British Council Education Intelligence 2014

Respondents with friends who are international students largely enjoyed sharing experiences with international students (68%), though some stated that international students are private and keep to themselves (9%) and bring international culture and views (8%). UK students with international friends were mixed but generally positive in their opinions, with only one per cent saying international students did not belong in the UK. Conversely, the majority of students who did not indicate interest in or having international friends said they had no opinion on international students (42%), while some said they enjoy experiences they have with international students (21%) and that international students bring culture and diverse views (13%). Four per cent of students with little to no interaction with international students stated international students do not belong in the UK.

Findings

Based on a survey of 2,632 students we were able to understand UK student perceptions on the integration of international students.

The percentage of international university students in the UK has been increasing

As the proportion of both undergraduate and postgraduate international students has grown, the role of the home student in welcoming and integrating with the international student has become more critical. Currently, the 13 per cent of undergraduates and 37 per cent of postgraduates in the UK come from abroad, with the highest percentage of international students living in London.

International students are increasingly valuing safety and multiculturalism, and see the two as intertwined

Personal safety has, in the last seven years, become the sixth most important factor in choosing a study destination; its multicultural society has become the seventh most important factor to those interested in higher education in the UK. Both of these factors link closely to integration, with safety seen by international students as a product of integration while multiculturalism is representative of integration at the institutional level.

UK students who believe that international students are welcomed are more likely to have international friends

Of the 74 per cent of students who said they believe international students are welcomed, 49 per cent have international friends, twenty per cent do not have international friends and two per cent are not interested in international students, indicating that even students who are not personally invested in integrating with international students see the importance of it and know it is the 'right' thing to do. Conversely, of the 26 per cent who did not believe or were unsure if international students are welcomed, one third do not know international students and 30 per cent have international friends.

UK students are generally in agreement that it is everyone's responsibility to welcome international students

There was not much difference in the sentiments of those with international friends and those without regarding whose responsibility it was to welcome students from abroad. Seventy-nine per cent of students with international friends and 71 per cent of those without them stated it is everyone's duty to welcome students. However, it is beyond the scope of this study but worth highlighting that the prospect of welcoming students may be wholly dissimilar from the idea of integration.

UK students who have minimal interactions with international students are neutral about the presence of international students on campus

The highest percentage of students who do not interact with international students stated that they have no opinion about international students on campus, indicating that there is room for the university and UK students themselves to increase awareness about the importance of international students to a university's internationalisation agenda.

A slightly higher percentage of UK students with little to no interaction with international students have negative perceptions of international student motivations as compared to those with international friends.

UK students who said they have no interest in international students or no international friends were more likely to indicate that they believed international student motivations for studying abroad include migration and access to better health care; further, a higher percentage of this group (four per cent) stated that international students do not belong in the UK as compared to the one per cent of those with international friends. These modest differences hint towards the possibility of increased negative perceptions of international students by those who have had little to no interaction with them.

In conclusion

To obtain the diverse and open discourse necessary for a global curriculum, international students need the support of UK students and faculty to help address the sociocultural and academic challenges they face; the relationships are symbiotic and in fact, the responsibilities of the involved parties are not mutually exclusive.

International students who connect with home students and faculty at an early stage are more likely to feel a sense of security and belonging, which can translate to academic advancement and personal growth. That feeling of contributing and belonging is what continues to draw international students to the UK.

UK students are aware of issues surrounding integration and largely positive about taking responsibility for their part in providing a welcoming environment. Our data indicate that those that have little interaction with international students are less knowledgeable about their experiences and motivations and in some cases creating a neutral sentiment towards international students as a whole. There is leeway, then, for the UK higher education sector to improve relevant communication channels.

International students who leave the UK having had a positive student experience convey feelings of trust towards not only their host institution and student peers, but the UK as a whole. In this way comes an exchange with international students of the education being exported and the long-terms sociocultural, academic and economic contributions they provide to the UK.