



## Study signals “explosion of choice” in global HE market

Significant shifts in the multi-billion pound student recruitment market are highlighted in the findings of a new study published today.

The StudentPulse study conducted by the International Graduate Insight Group (i-graduate) provides the most up-to-date picture of how prospective international students perceive their growing range of options, and shows which considerations currently have the biggest influence on their decisions.

Responses from over 11,000 prospective students from 143 countries indicate that the UK may be beginning to challenge the US as the most popular study destination, despite being seen as the most expensive place in the world to study.

95 per cent of those taking part in the study rated the UK as an attractive or very attractive place to study, compared with 93 per cent who felt the US was attractive or very attractive.

The study also reveals:

- What motivates students to study abroad
- Which factors most influence choice of where to study
- Which subjects are the most popular
- What the cleverest students are looking for
- What prospective international students are most concerned about

Will Archer, i-graduate director, said the findings illustrate the unpredictable nature of the market due to an “explosion of choice”, and the need for reliable and regularly updated information on changing the perceptions and priorities of prospective students.

He said: “A lot of assumptions about the market are based on old data, and many forecasts are based on trends that people assume will continue. But the changing perceptions of students and those who influence them add up to the new reality of what we have to deal with.”

A report on the findings argues that the responses on how attractive different countries are may be a sign of the US losing its market share more quickly than the UK to new host countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and China, which are building their own higher education capacity to offer a cheaper and increasingly well respected alternative. Although it is not suggested that America’s market lead has suddenly evaporated, the findings may be seen as an early warning that its position is under threat.

The UK and its institutions are seen as very attractive because they score well on many of the factors that international students value most – safety and personal security, reputation of qualifications, and high quality teaching and research.

Australia, Canada, France and Germany are also seen as highly attractive study destinations by a high proportion of prospective students taking part in the study.

While the US is perceived as offering qualifications with the best reputation, views on how attractive it is as a study destination are more polarised because it suffers from a relatively

weak safety rating and is also considered to be by far the hardest country from which to obtain a student visa.

Mr Archer said: “The US is waking following a slide in its fortunes and is beginning to fight its corner”.

He added: “As in the UK, the very best institutions have been quickest to recognise that they need to respond to changes in the market and student expectations.”

The rise of so-called transnational higher education, where students study for an overseas qualification either in their home country or in another country that does not award that qualification, may be contributing to the changes. The study reveals that students from some countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria and Pakistan are more likely to be considering studying for a foreign qualification in their home country than abroad.

Mr Archer predicted that transnational HE in some areas will become stronger than traditional host country provision, increasing the need for accurate tracking of trends in student perceptions.

He said: “The natural instinct of institutions and policymakers has been to make a lot of effort to attract international students. But they may be wasting time and money if they don’t first understand the perceptions and motivations of those students. That is especially true as students’ expectations are changing and study options are multiplying year on year.”

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### Notes to editors

The [International Graduate Insight Group \(i-graduate\)](#) is an independent research service specialising in the development and delivery of world-class insight tools and studies for stakeholders in education. i-graduate has worked with over 140 institutions worldwide. i-graduate works with universities in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, North America and South Africa.

i-graduate’s StudentPulse is a global study of the perceptions and motivations of prospective international students. The study has evolved over three years from initially being focussed solely on China to a much broader and more comprehensive exercise in October 2007 when a total 11,425 students from 143 countries were surveyed. Responses were gathered both online and at international education exhibitions and fairs.

The sample has been weighted to correct for a bias towards some study destinations including the UK, and to reflect the global market share for international students.

The sample was collected by contacting students through StudyLink, How2UK and the British Council China.

[StudyLink](#) has been bringing the best students and the best education providers together since 1991. Helping over 500 providers worldwide from offices in Australia, UK, US, India and Japan and students from those locations plus China, SE Asia, Latin America and Europe through a virtual network of world class websites and study experts.

[How2UK.com](#) is an impartial, UK-Universities website for International Students. The site is based in Shanghai and available in both English and Chinese. It is widely read in many countries, particularly the Chinese Mainland, by overseas students considering a British education.

The [British Council](#) is the UK's agency responsible for cultural relations. In China the British Council operates as the Cultural and Education Section of the British Embassy and aims to connect young Chinese people with learning opportunities and the latest creative ideas from the UK.