

Best Practice Exchange Regent's University London, 3rd April 2014

i-graduate's Student Barometer™, the global benchmark for the student experience, has obtained feedback from almost two million students. We have worked with over 1,400 institutions worldwide, including over 100 universities in the UK. On 3rd April 2014, delegates gathered at the beautiful RSA House in London for i-graduate's 8th Best Practice Exchange, to assist the UK Higher Education sector in using Barometer feedback to implement positive change.



The event focussed on a series of roundtable discussions, giving delegates the opportunity to share their thoughts on how to improve the student experience. There were also enlightening presentations from professionals of leading universities Oxford, Edinburgh and Warwick. The Exchange comprised 60 delegates from 36 universities, colleges and organisations.

Session 1: The Big Picture

William Lawton, Director, The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education

The conference was opened by Dr William Lawton, who provided an overview of current trends in the sector and projections for the future, drawing on the Observatory's *Horizon Scan on Higher Education in 2020*. Lawton shared his view that the impacts of online learning and technology on higher education will be far reaching, but as an evolutionary shift, rather than an avalanche of change as stated in the 2013 Pearson report. One of the reasons he gave is that technology does not have a free hand in driving change, it can also be driven by people and institutions.

Jamie Taylor, Managing Director, i-graduate

Jamie Taylor then presented the results from the latest wave of the International Student Barometer™ (ISB), drawing examples from the national data set. In comparison with 9 other countries the UK holds the second highest score for recommendation (86%).

% Recommend	Global	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	UK	I
RECOMMENDATION	83%	78%	82%	85%	61%	84%	79%	88%	86%	84%
% Satisfied										
OVERALL SATISFACTION	89%	86%	89%	87%	79%	89%	88%	90%	90%	90%
ARRIVAL OVERALL	89%	89%	90%	85%	78%	88%	88%	87%	89%	90%
LEARNING OVERALL	87%	85%	88%	87%	81%	86%	86%	87%	88%	89%
LIVING OVERALL	88%	87%	87%	85%	77%	85%	87%	88%	89%	89%
SUPPORT OVERALL	90%	89%	89%	87%	75%	87%	89%	91%	91%	91%

A number of other comparatively strong indicators were highlighted across the four areas measured in the ISB: living, learning, support services and the arrival experience. Examples include living cost (66% satisfaction), good teachers (90%), catering (82%) and registration (90%) – all areas where the UK is performing well on the global stage. The UK are not, however, at the top across all measures of the student experience and there is still some level of competition from other countries. In areas including financial support and class size the UK is slightly below the global average.

Changes over time were then outlined, showing international student satisfaction levels since 2007. Some key areas which had moved forward include bank accounts (18% increase in satisfaction), home friends (21%) and the welcome (13%). Almost all areas have improved; however, a key element the UK must focus on is the potential to earn money (-9%). Overall there has been significant progression in the UK since 2007 and many of these areas are similar for home students.

Session 2: Reporting to Engage

Jonathan Gordon, Student Information Manager, University of Oxford

Jonathan Gordon has been leading the way in the development of sharing Barometer results and bringing the data alive at the University of Oxford. When it comes to student feedback, data is reported to various different stakeholders, including a number of committees, colleges, departments and, of course, students. At Oxford there are 38 colleges and over 150 departments, faculties and sub-faculties. All these stakeholders have an interest in student data and all have different data needs.

Gordon explained “We are entirely reliant on the Barometer. When you have a hyper-complex organisation like Oxford, you need one survey tool that can do it for you. The Barometer does it and does it brilliantly. It means we can find meaningful data at almost every level of the university.”

Oxford are able to respond directly to student feedback within the Barometer and have done so in a number of ways which have consequently led to increased student satisfaction. For further details, please refer to a separate publication ‘Student Surveys: fighting fatigue and reporting to engage’. (Please contact info@i-graduate.org to request a copy).

Session 3: Roundtable Discussions

Delegates divided into six self-selected Best Practice Exchange groups and held open discussions around the current issues before sharing best practice insights. A selection of these are shown below.

Providing a warm welcome

Facilitated by Caitlin Mills Lyle (Senior Account Manager, i-graduate) with delegates from various universities including Aberdeen, Surrey, Glasgow Caledonian, East London and East Anglia.

- A good orientation is critical; if you get it right you will have fewer problems throughout the year.
- Provide a checklist of essential orientation activities (eg. campus tour, library, services, banking) when students are enrolling to encourage attendance.
- Include the orientation programme in the mandatory timetable, so it is no longer optional and all students attend. Service staff can join lectures to give brief talks on matters such as banking, visa issues, cultural awareness and accommodation.

- To avoid overloading students, provide two student portals; one for current students and another for those in the application process. Information such as pick-up, orientation, what to bring and expect, plus advice for parents can be included.
- Provide students with key information on USB sticks.
- Keep talks short and then play refresher quizzes.
- Provide one point of contact for your late arriving students, ideally other new students who have recently gone through the orientation. Students are more likely to ask other new students rather than staff members.
- Hold a separate orientation and enrolment for international students before UK students arrive.
- If there is limited budget for taxis and buses, signposts can make students feel more welcome.
- Offer flexible timings for the airport pick-up.
- Invite the local mayor to welcome students to make them feel part of the community.

Student accommodation – improving the living experience

Facilitated by Jess Howlett (Senior Account Manager, i-graduate) with delegates from various universities including Warwick, Aberdeen and Royal Holloway, plus representatives from Royal Veterinary College and Navitas.

- Students view accommodation as more than a room, it's about the whole living experience, such as making friends.
- Provide more guidance to students on signing private accommodation contracts.
- Lettings agents on the university campus can be useful.
- Offer an enhanced accommodation package which includes airport pick-up service, a kitchen pack and bedding. Encourage international students to opt for this package.

Support services

Facilitated by Jamie Taylor (MD, i-graduate) with delegates from universities including Limerick, Loughborough, Creative Arts, Oxford and Kingston.

- Provide students with an overview of the banking system, including a checklist of required identification, a list of potential problems and a list of local banks and maps.
- Banks on campus work well. A current student or International Student Adviser can take small groups of students into the bank and provide assistance.
- Ensure hall reps and porters know how to refer students to counselling.
- Ensuring academics likewise know support referrals.
- Ensure pre-arrival communications and marketing initiatives do not lead to unrealistic expectations of support services.

Improving careers support to meet the expectations of international students

Facilitated by Rory Govan (Technical Director, i-graduate) with delegates from universities including East London, Glasgow, Oxford Brookes, Bristol and Kingston.

- Manage student expectations. Offer employability not employment.
- Send the careers team out to international locations and provide information pamphlets on what the careers centre can and can not offer.

- Encourage international students to speak English at all times instead of their mother tongue to increase employability chances within the UK.
- Recruit an International Careers Advisor to support international students.

Emerging trends in student recruitment today

Facilitated by Tim Rogers (Consultant, i-graduate) with delegates from universities including Strathclyde, Glasgow, Sheffield Hallam, Royal Holloway and Leeds.

- Do we manage student recruitment or is it unmanaged? There is an increasing need to provide the best student experience because word of mouth and student recommendation are key to the recruitment of future students.
- Students should be made aware of becoming alumni from the start. Alumni promotion should be used at the orientation, not just graduation.
- Send postcards from campus to your alumni to connect with them.
- Social media sites such as LinkedIn can be used for recruitment, particularly at Masters Level. Twitter is another useful tool.
- MOOCs can be used to showcase your university and raise the profile.
- Use student ambassadors at events, as well as academics.
- Continue to use printed marketing materials (particularly, the prospectus) as parents are one of the key influencers and often prefer printed collateral.
- Create separate marketing materials targeting parents with more focus on aspects such as the library rather than the nightlife.
- Pathway programmes are a major route to market.

Making the most of education agents

Facilitated by Saskia Jensen (Senior Researcher, i-graduate) with delegates from universities including Coventry, Salford, Oxford Brookes and Birmingham, plus The College of Estate Management.

- Agents still have a substantial impact on student recruitment, so there is a need to ensure they manage student expectations accurately.
- Keep agents up-to-date with regular newsletters.
- Set up an agent workshop to train agents and keep them informed.
- Set up a portal for agents on the intranet where they can access useful information.
- Provide incentives.
- Send a representative from your institution overseas to increase control.

Session 4: Student Integration

Johanna Holtan, International Coordinator, University of Edinburgh

Johanna Holtan introduced EUSA Global, a student-led project run by Edinburgh University Students Association, which aims to enhance the global experience on campus. Holtan explained that the international student experience does not only belong to international students but to all students, which is where the concept of global citizenship has emerged. Since launching in 2010, EUSA Global have partnered with 40 different organisations across the university.

Edinburgh have used the International Student Barometer™ to recognise issues amongst different nationalities, and in different schools, and have used this data to develop ways of enhancing global citizenship and the student experience.



A vast range of initiatives have launched including:

- Peer support schemes.
- 'Edinburgh Buddies': for new visiting students in dark, cold Scotland in January.
- Proof reading schemes: a support network for those who may be too embarrassed to ask for help.
- Language cafes and online sites, with a similar set up to dating sites, where students can create a profile and be matched to students who speak their desired language, including Hungarian, Icelandic and Scottish Gaelic. They also hold monthly speed dating events. A room buzzing with different languages creates a different power dynamic as students want to learn languages other than English.
- Student communities: there are 280 student societies demonstrating that students are clearly already engaged. EUSA global provide marketing and financial support to these societies.
- Edinburgh Award: acknowledgement for activities outside the classroom. Global citizens are not just impacting students but impacting the world.
- Gather Festival: a celebration of culture (when they drink a lot of tea!) about *everybody* in the university. Nearly 3000 people attended over 50 events.



This festival includes a wide range of fun activities for (and run by) students, including food evenings, a charity fashion show, a festival of social change, tai chi / chai tea classes, a university dance show, a student run, a climbing competition, tug of war and the global star awards.



In conclusion, Holtan explained that as well as providing and supporting this range of activities for students, it is important to continue to empower students to take up the opportunities, to grow their confidence, as summarised by one student here. These activities aim to bring students together naturally and provide them with a platform to grow and develop.

Claire O’Leary, Assistant Director (Student Experience), University of Warwick

Claire O’Leary followed with a perspective from the University of Warwick. In 2011, International Student Barometer™ data showed that 31% of international students at 44 UK institutions agreed with the statement “I feel isolated from the university community”. Warwick delved deeper into this data with a greater set of internationalisation questions and have since been working towards their strategic objective ‘Every student an international student’.

Institutional Policy Level

“It is our belief that at Warwick every student is an international student. By this we mean that all students, from whatever country or discipline, emerge from Warwick as global citizens, international rather than insular in knowledge, skills and outlook”

“every student an international student”



O’Leary explained that Warwick’s institutional strategy is top down and so they focus on communicating the challenges of being an international student across the whole university. Messages are seamed through publications and reiterated in the VC’s address, university induction events, welcome events, orientation and via the Go Global fair.

Warwick promote an awareness amongst students and staff that intercultural contact alone is not enough and activities do not necessarily create a shift in attitude or behaviour. Internationalisation activities must link to internationalisation policy that genuinely values cultural diversity and meaningful engagement across cultures. Warwick work on activities which link to their overall goal of helping students to integrate and to gain skills and competencies befitting of a global graduate who will be working in a globally connected world.

Warwick have developed a variety of activities which promote and celebrate the value of international students. Initiatives have included a culturally mixed accommodation policy, recruiting an Internationalisation Officer to ensure close links and continuity with Students’ Union and various Student Societies, World at Warwick Language Cafes, a new Buddy Scheme and One World Week, which has now been running for 20 years.



Conclusion

We hope all delegates found the event informative and useful. Thank you for the kind words we have received. Some of these are below.

‘Thank you for organising this event. It was very useful and I had quite a few ‘take aways’ from the sessions.’

Michelle Stewart, University of Strathclyde

‘We found the day and information really useful’

Sarah Tattam, Student Life & Support Manager, Royal Holloway University of London

'Thank you for organising what was a fantastic day. I very much enjoyed it and managed to glean lots of better practices.'

Jonathan Gordan, Student Information Manager, University of Oxford

Further reading

Oxford University's Student Barometer data:

http://public.tableausoftware.com/views/OxfordUniversityStudentBarometer/ReadMe?:embed=y&:display_count=no

'Horizon Scan on Higher Education in 2020', The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education

www.obhe.ac.uk

For information on the Student Barometer™ and i-graduate's other range of products, please visit

www.i-graduate.org or contact info@i-graduate.org.

Forthcoming events

3rd - 4th December 2014, Regent's University London. The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education will host an event on the future of public / private partnerships.

Contact info@obhe.ac.uk if you wish to receive further information.

Dates for future Best Practice Exchanges are to be confirmed.

Contact rachel.worley@i-graduate.org if you would like to receive details when they are available.