

## **Does the UK lead the world in international education?**

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### ***Introduction***

The Council for Industry and Higher Education commissioned The International Graduate Insight Group (i-graduate) to report on the extent of internationalization in higher education institutions. This is possible through additional analysis of data collected through i-graduate's International Student Barometer™. The central point of interest for this report is identification of just how satisfied international students are with the experience of UK higher education compared to that of institutions in other countries.

The International Student Barometer (ISB) measures the opinions of international students who are currently studying in higher education institutions around the world. By measuring student satisfaction quantitatively, conclusions may be drawn as to whether UK institutions provide a more satisfactory experience to international students compared to their counterparts across the globe.

The ISB measures 48 generic satisfaction elements covering most areas of student life. This report will examine areas that differ significantly between UK and overseas institutions in terms of satisfaction. Particular focus will be given to the international experience of studying in another country.

### ***Survey method***

Online surveys were distributed to international students at three South African institutions, three Australian institutions, three in the Netherlands and one in the USA. Additionally, the ISB Autumn Wave Survey included 38 UK based institutions. Thus a total of 38 UK and 10 international institutions were surveyed. The surveys included 31,932 international students at UK universities and 8,419 international students at overseas universities, giving a total response base of 40,351 across 48 institutions.

The online surveys included questions on demographics of the respondents, how important they rated specific university services and how satisfied they were with those university services. The survey included three satisfaction sections: the 'learning experience', the 'living experience' and 'support services'. In this report an additional section, "careers", has been created by grouping responses to careers related questions.

Ratings of satisfaction were scored using a Likert scale where respondents selected a rating of 1 - 4, corresponding to 'very dissatisfied' to 'very satisfied' respectively. These rating scales were applied to 48 different elements of the university experience.

At the end of each survey, respondents were asked whether they would recommend the institution to others thinking of applying. This element was scored on a 5-point scale (5 being the most positive answer).

### ***Analysis method***

Mean satisfaction scores are calculated within each data set for each of the 48 generic satisfaction elements from the survey.

Two-tailed heteroscedastic two sample t-tests are carried out comparing UK institution data with overseas institution data. These are done for each of the 48 satisfaction elements, and for the recommendation element. An additional t-test is carried out on the mean scores for all the 48 elements together, comparing UK data to international data. Levels of significance are indicated as p values, where  $p=0.01$  or less is taken as a significant difference (1% chance the difference is due to chance).

## Results

Full results for the UK vs. overseas comparison are presented in Appendix A. Overall satisfaction (an average of all 48 satisfaction elements) is not significantly different between the UK institutions and the overseas institutions.

The element with the greatest difference between the UK and overseas is ‘living cost’ (i.e. satisfaction with the cost of food, drink, social activities etc.), which is rated higher for the overseas institutions. This could indicate either lower cost of living overseas, or expectations being met. The ‘library facilities’ are rated significantly higher at overseas institutions. Making ‘host friends’ is also rated significantly higher overseas compared to in the UK, suggesting less integration between foreign and British students in UK higher education.

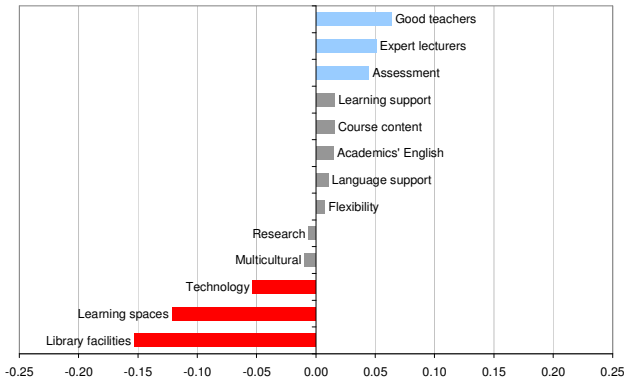
‘Transport links’ is the element where UK institutions outperformed overseas institutions to the greatest degree (see Table 1 for details). The ‘careers advice’ – an area where international students are usually demanding – can give the UK institutions some comfort in that they are significantly ahead of overseas rivals in terms of student satisfaction. ‘Students’ Union’ receives higher ratings at UK institutions, indicating that some social services perform well at home.

**Table 1: Mean satisfaction scores for International compared with UK institutions, with the top 3 performing elements for each group**

<b>UK institutions ahead</b>	UK	International	Difference (UK - International)	t-test p value
1 Transport links	2.99	2.86	0.14	0.00
2 Careers advice	2.75	2.63	0.12	0.00
3 Students' Union	2.95	2.83	0.12	0.00
<b>International institutions ahead</b>	UK	International	Difference (UK - International)	t-test p value
1 Living cost	2.50	2.68	-0.18	0.00
2 Library facilities	3.14	3.30	-0.15	0.00
3 Host friends	2.74	2.88	-0.14	0.00

The graphs below show individual elements from the learning, living, support and careers sections of the ISB. Elements where there are significant differences in satisfaction between the UK and overseas are highlighted.

International ahead of UK | UK ahead of international

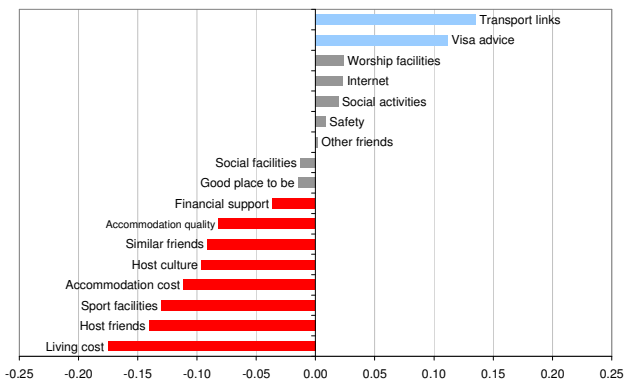


**Figure 1: Mean score difference for Learning elements (positive values indicate UK score is ahead of overseas score), coloured bars indicate significant differences**

## LEARNING

Figure 1 indicates the satisfaction with the learning experience is balanced between overseas and UK institutions. UK institutions score higher in academic areas (such as fair assessment, expert lecturers and good teachers), international institutions score higher for university facilities (including the library, learning spaces and technology).

International ahead of UK | UK ahead of international

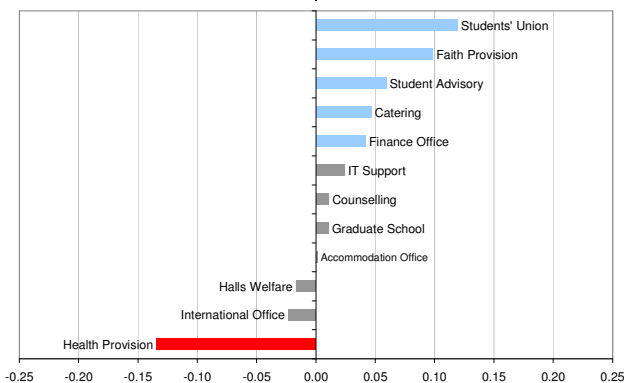


**Figure 2: Mean score difference for Living elements (positive values indicate UK score is ahead of overseas score), coloured bars indicate significant differences**

## LIVING

Within the living experience (figure 2) UK institutions are ahead on some elements, including the transport links and visa advice. The overseas institutions score significantly better on integration: meeting host friends and experiencing the host culture. Overseas rivals also achieve significantly higher satisfaction ratings in the important area of accommodation – the UK trails on both cost and quality. Satisfaction with sports facilities also falls behind compared to overseas rivals.

International ahead of UK | UK ahead of international

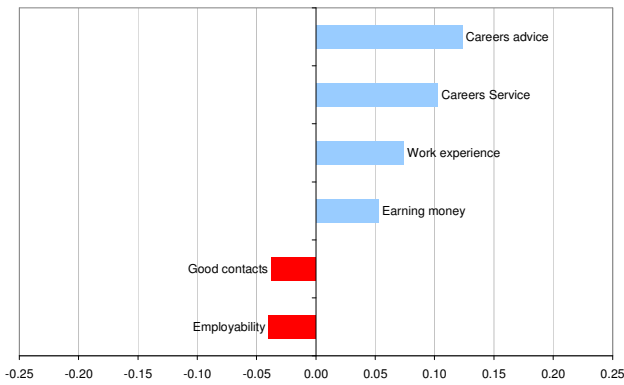


**Figure 3: Mean score difference for Support elements (positive values indicate UK score is ahead of overseas score), coloured bars indicate significant differences**

## SUPPORT

The majority of the support service results (figure 3) show the UK outperforming international universities in terms of satisfaction. Just one element is rated significantly higher for international institutions: health provision.

International ahead of UK | UK ahead of international



**Figure 4: Mean score difference for Careers elements (positive values indicate UK score is ahead of overseas score), coloured bars indicate significant differences**

## CAREERS

Elements related to careers generally score higher for UK institutions. The careers advice, careers service and work experience are rated more highly at UK institutions compared to those overseas. Students are also more satisfied with the ability to earn money whilst studying at UK institutions. Students are more satisfied with their employability having studied overseas compared to in the UK. Students at overseas institutions also feel more satisfied with the contacts for the future they make whilst studying there.

Elements particularly relevant to internationalization are displayed in table 2. It can be seen that respondents in the UK institutions are more satisfied with the visa advice than those at international institutions elsewhere in the world. The overseas institutions receive significantly higher satisfaction scores for ‘host friends’ (meeting friends from the host country). Limited differences are noted for ‘multicultural’ (the multicultural study environment), ‘other friends’ (meeting friends from other countries), the International Office and the worship facilities.

**Table 2: Mean scores for ISB elements particularly relevant to internationalisation at university, differences between scores for the UK ISB institutions and International ISB institutions**

<i>UK institutions ahead</i>	UK	International	Difference (UK - International)	t-test p value
Visa advice	2.88	2.77	0.11	0.00
<i>International institutions ahead</i>	UK	International	Difference (UK - International)	t-test p value
Host friends	2.74	2.88	-0.14	0.00
<i>Limited difference</i>	UK	International	Difference (UK - International)	t-test p value
Multicultural	3.07	3.08	-0.01	0.30
Other friends	3.06	3.05	0.00	0.81
Worship facilities	2.88	2.85	0.02	0.05
International Office	3.01	3.04	-0.02	0.03

## ***Discussion***

Overall, satisfaction levels with the international student experience are similar between the UK and overseas institutions. Whilst the UK is ahead on some individual elements and services within institutions, generally this is balanced out by other elements where the overseas institutions are ahead.

Interestingly, the individual element where UK institutions are furthest ahead of the international institutions is 'transport links'. The element where overseas institutions are furthest ahead of the UK group is 'living cost' (i.e. satisfaction with the cost of food, drink etc.). It will be worth continuing to review how the UK international student experience compares to a growing benchmark of overseas universities.

Areas of further research of interest would be a comparative investigation of student expectations. It may be that expectations are higher for elements of the UK and hence international students are more critical. This paper reviews the student experience at the most generic level. It masks what will be significant differences between nationalities, across different levels and areas of study.

In summary, whilst overall satisfaction levels are similar, the UK outperforms overseas institutions on careers services, academic teaching elements and support services. It trails overseas rivals on facilities, costs and social integration.

## ***About i-graduate***

i-graduate is a professional research service specialising in online opinion research and analysis for the education sector.

The company aims to assist international educators to plan, understand, adapt and to measure more accurately the opinions, expectations and experience of the international students who will determine their future success

## ***About the International Student Barometer™***

The International Student Barometer is a global benchmarking tool enabling education institutions to track and compare the expectations and experiences of international and home students.

The Barometer tracks up to 60 elements of the student experience and establishes the relative importance of each – as seen through the eyes of the students. The Barometer has taken feedback from over 120,000 international students from 187 countries in its first 2 years of operation.

## Appendix A

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>A - B</b>	<b>A vs. B (means)</b>
	<b>UK</b>	<b>Overseas</b>		<b>p</b>
<b><u>LEARNING SATISFACTION</u></b>				
<b>Good teachers</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>3.01</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Expert lecturers</b>	<b>3.26</b>	<b>3.21</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Assessment</b>	<b>3.04</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Technology</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>3.21</b>	<b>-0.05</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Learning spaces</b>	<b>2.99</b>	<b>3.11</b>	<b>-0.12</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Library facilities</b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>3.30</b>	<b>-0.15</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Course content	3.13	3.12	0.02	0.061
Learning support	3.04	3.02	0.02	0.096
Academics' English	3.16	3.15	0.01	0.120
Multicultural	3.07	3.08	-0.01	0.297
Language support	2.95	2.94	0.01	0.356
Flexibility	3.04	3.03	0.01	0.426
Research	3.05	3.06	-0.01	0.508
<b><u>LIVING SATISFACTION</u></b>				
<b>Transport links</b>	<b>2.99</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Visa advice</b>	<b>2.88</b>	<b>2.77</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Financial support</b>	<b>2.49</b>	<b>2.52</b>	<b>-0.04</b>	<b>0.008</b>
<b>Accommodation quality</b>	<b>2.96</b>	<b>3.05</b>	<b>-0.08</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Similar friends</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>3.09</b>	<b>-0.09</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Host culture</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>2.96</b>	<b>-0.10</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Accommodation cost</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.61</b>	<b>-0.11</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Sport facilities</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>2.96</b>	<b>-0.13</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Host friends</b>	<b>2.74</b>	<b>2.88</b>	<b>-0.14</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Living cost</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.68</b>	<b>-0.18</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Internet	3.15	3.12	0.02	0.035
Social activities	2.83	2.81	0.02	0.050
Worship facilities	2.88	2.85	0.02	0.054
Good place to be	3.04	3.05	-0.01	0.107
Social facilities	2.88	2.89	-0.01	0.167
Safety	3.07	3.07	0.01	0.355
Other friends	3.06	3.05	0.00	0.815

**Key:**

**UK ahead of international**

**UK behind international**

## Appendix A cont.

<b><u>SUPPORT SERVICES</u></b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>Overseas</b>		
Students' Union	2.95	2.83	0.12	0.000
Faith Provision	2.93	2.84	0.10	0.000
Student Advisory	3.00	2.94	0.06	0.000
Catering	2.58	2.54	0.05	0.001
Finance Office	2.87	2.82	0.04	0.000
Health Provision	2.91	3.05	-0.13	0.000
IT Support	3.03	3.01	0.02	0.014
International Office	3.01	3.04	-0.02	0.030
Halls Welfare	2.83	2.84	-0.02	0.245
Counselling	2.95	2.94	0.01	0.398
Graduate School	3.01	3.00	0.01	0.428
Accommodation Office	2.75	2.75	0.00	0.918
<b><u>CAREERS</u></b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>Overseas</b>		
Careers advice	2.75	2.63	0.12	0.000
Careers Service	2.92	2.82	0.10	0.000
Work experience	2.68	2.60	0.07	0.000
Earning money	2.58	2.53	0.05	0.000
Good contacts	2.82	2.86	-0.04	0.000
Employability	2.89	2.93	-0.04	0.000
Recommendation	4.18	4.18	0.00	0.661
SATISFACTION OVERALL	2.92	2.92	0.00	0.925

**Key:**

**UK ahead of international**

**UK behind international**