

UK universities

UK universities have been experiencing mixed results in recent years, with the emergence of strong new international student markets coupled with the falling away of traditional ones.

Statistics published by the Higher Education Statistics Authority (Hesa) in the UK for the 2000/2001 academic year reveal student trends that are remarkably similar to those experienced by the UK's secondary school market (see *Education Travel Magazine*, April issue, 2002, page 5). Falling student numbers from a number of key markets, such as Germany, France, the USA and Singapore, are being masked by large increases from China, which have ensured an overall international student increase of 5.5 per cent on the previous year.

"The largest recent difference has been the decline in the numbers coming to us from Singapore and Malaysia and the large growth in numbers from China and India," says John Alexander, from the University of Glasgow, who puts this change down to a number of factors, including "the changing international patterns of economic growth".

Tim Rogers at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), which has experi-

enced healthy international applications from their major markets in recent years, says, "I imagine [the decreases other institutions are experiencing] are as a result of increased global competition, the improvement of local provision and changes in local economic factors."

Economic factors are certainly having an effect on student enrolments from certain parts of the world, particularly Singapore, as Edwin Cox from the School of Pharmacy at the University of London, points out. "Singapore is of course in economic difficulty and experiencing unemployment for the first time since independence," he says. However, Kuah Ann Soon, from ATS Information Technology Institute in Singapore, adds that while economic factors are one reason for the falling student numbers from Singapore, another possible factor is "universities not appointing local agents".

The high value of the British pound makes the UK an expensive destination for many students from key markets, and marketing overseas

Selection of higher education institutions in the UK

Name of school	Location	Use agents?	No. of students	% overseas students
Doncaster College	Doncaster	✓	8,000	3
Dudley College	Dudley	✓	6,000	10
London School of Economics & Political Science	London		7,544	62
School of Pharmacy, University of London	London		700	22
Tresham Institute	Kettering	✓	2,000	10
University College Northampton	Northampton	✓	7,500	5
University of Bath	Bath	✓	8,000	20
University of Bradford	Bradford	✓	1,000	14
University of Glasgow	Glasgow	✓	17,000	11
University of Salford	Manchester	✓	17,704	6
University of York	York	✓	3,500	3
Weymouth College	Weymouth	✓	2,000	10

Overseas higher education students in the UK by country of origin

	1998/99	1999/00	% change 98/99 v 99/00	2000/01	% change 99/00 v 00/01
Greece	27,968	28,880	3.2	31,150	7.9
China	3,850	6,090	58	12,095	98.6
Germany	13,069	13,340	2	11,370	-14.8
Malaysia	12,032	10,280	-28.3	10,005	-2.7
France	12,771	12,390	2.6	9,950	-19.7
USA	10,490	11,140	8.2	9,425	-15.4
Hong Kong	7,510	8,140	4.2	8,335	2.4
Japan	5,558	6,090	4.4	6,470	6.2
Singapore	5,617	5,270	-5.9	4,410	-16.3
Total	213,119	218,820	2.6	230,870	5.5

is becoming increasingly vital for UK universities. Pascal Rouillard, from Accents D'Ailleurs in France, puts the 19.7 per cent decrease in the number of French students in the UK down to the increased attraction of destinations such as Australia. "I think that [this trend] will last [for] the next few years," he says.

Cox also points out that recent publicity surrounding the issues of funding within UK universities has had a detrimental effect on the country's image overseas. "Every time a vice-chancellor says we can no longer afford high quality scientific research, it may make only page four of *The Times*, but it is front page in the *Straits Times*, *South China Morning Post* and *The Nation*," he says.

However, Rogers believes that factors such as "better information provision, greater proactive marketing, the general changes in working regulations [for international students] and a relatively good global economy" have helped international student enrolments to the UK remain strong. "The future looks good," he says.

Quality versus quantity

"I cannot remember when I last heard the word 'quality' from a British Council Education Promotion person," says Edwin Cox from the University of London School of Pharmacy. "Everything has become numbers driven and it does us no favours."

The Prime Minister's Initiative that was launched in 1999 set UK universities the target of attracting an extra 50,000 international students by

2005 (see *Education Travel Magazine*, October issue 1999, page 35). The resulting increased promotion overseas and changes to work regulations (see *Education Travel Magazine*, April issue 2001, page 10) have been welcomed by universities, but high targets for international students have raised questions regarding the adequate provision of courses for increased numbers, as well as the quality of the applicants themselves.

And for some higher education institutions in the UK, this question of quality is having a serious effect on their international recruitment strategy, as Tim Rogers from the London School of Economics and Political Science, explains. "We are not seeking to increase [international student] numbers at the moment, rather maintain and indeed raise academic standards," he says.