

Aiming high in the UK

International students and their parents often choose high school year programmes as the first step in an academic path leading towards university education in the UK, and independent schools in the country are increasingly looking at ways to accommodate this new student market.

Language schools or international study centres attached to mainstream schools now enable international students to be welcomed at an even younger age and with lower levels of English competence. Bob Orton, Director of Millfield's English Language School (MELS) in Somerset, UK, explains, "The creation of MELS in September 1997 meant that no language requirements were necessary [for international students]."

International pupils attending MELS are given intensive language tuition combined with other academic subjects such as maths, science, computing and geography. "The aim is to expose pupils to sufficient English to enable them to function in Millfield's mainstream classes as rapidly as possible," explains Orton.

At St Mary's Hall in Brighton, places are offered to international students from as young as eight, and they undertake mainstream education classes within their year group while also receiving focused language tuition at the school's International Study Centre. "Before entry, all students take a written test," says Maryam Kisray at the school. "The result of this test will help determine the student's level of

English. The [English language] team will [then] plan a study programme to suit each individual student's needs."

Schools in the UK report that long-term courses, usually leading to qualifications such as GCSEs and A-levels, are the most popular, however the possibility to study other qualifications also attracts interest. Staff at King William's College on the Isle of Man have noticed an increase in enrolments from Europe since they started offering the International Baccalaureate (IB).

"Most, if not all international students at King William's College, attend to achieve the IB diploma," says Alastair Montgomery at the school. "Courses are adjusted to meet the particular needs of overseas students and native language is offered as an elective subject."

However, not all international students attending UK schools are solely interested in exam courses, as Dr Bodkin, Head of Tettenhall College in Wolverhampton, points out. "Some [international students] – such as those from Germany – may only attend for one academic year for the experience of an English boarding school and to improve their English," he says.

Student markets for courses in UK schools span all continents. "The greatest influx is from Asia – Hong Kong, China, South Korea and Vietnam – followed by Africa, mostly Nigeria and Ghana, then Spain and Russia in Europe," relates Kisray, while other schools also note growing enrolments from Eastern Europe.