

UK high schools

An overall increase in international students studying at independent schools in the UK this year masks falling student numbers from a number of key markets. Bethan Norris looks at the wider picture.

Thanks to a 40.8 per cent increase in the number of Chinese students studying in independent schools in the UK, the total number of international students in this sector increased by 2.3 per cent this year, according to statistics from the Independent Schools Council (ISC). However, closer inspection of the figures reveals worrying decreases from main markets, with numbers from Germany, North America, Africa and Japan dropping by between 3.9 and 19.5 per cent.

According to Lauren Stone, Vice President of Alliance Abroad in the USA, the reason for the 19.5 per cent drop in North American student numbers is not hard to find. 'There is little question that September 11 affected the youth market more than other markets,' she says. 'Parents were quite unsettled and wanted to keep kids close to home. Barring another terrorist incident, I suspect that more young people will be studying overseas again.'

At Roedean School in Brighton, Julia Johnson has noticed decreasing

numbers of US students since 1999, yet reports that the Japanese and Chinese markets have been increasing. 'We feel the international market is very buoyant and have no plans to market overseas this year, except indirectly via the British Council's Education Counselling Service,' she says.

The German student market has traditionally always been very important for independent schools in the UK, providing the second highest number of students after Hong Kong. However, this year saw German numbers decrease by 3.9 per cent. Gina Hart at Euro-Internatsberatung in Germany believes that this is directly linked to the decline in the German economy. 'Middle class families are no longer able to pay the substantial term fees [required] for their children to go to school in the UK,' she says.

However, Mike Hamlett, from Rossall School in Fleetwood, points out that Germany is now the school's main market with 'student numbers [from Germany] equal to those from Asia,' and he also reports increasing

Selection of high schools in the UK

Name of school	Location	Use agents?	No. of students	% int. students
Glenalmond College	Perth	✓	400	6
King's College	Guildford		600	1
Oakham School	Stanford		1,050	7
Polam Hall School	Darlington	✓	460	10
Prior Park College	Bath	✓	530	7
Roedean School	Brighton	✓	426	48
Rossall School	Fleetwood	✓	850	-
St Michael's College	Tenbury Wells	✓	120	100

numbers from a number of Asian markets in recent years. 'Indonesia, Korea and Thailand were all badly affected by the economic crisis but they are slowly beginning to recover,' he says.

As the main international student markets for the UK independent schools sector undergo change, so many schools are looking at adapting their courses in order to diversify their student intake.

A distinct trend among many UK schools is to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma (see below), as well as traditional A-levels, which Hamlett believes is a major selling point for overseas markets. 'In the main school [we have] around 12 per cent [international students] up to the end of year

11, but this climbs to 30 per cent in years 12 and 13 where students are attracted by the IB programme.'

At Saint Michael's College in Tenbury Wells, Spain is one of their main student markets due to the fact that students are offered a full Spanish as well as a British curriculum. 'Spanish parents like the idea of sending their children to our school as they are able to continue with their Spanish education [and] have intensive English classes,' says Janine Faulkner at the college.

The college is also introducing a university foundation course in a bid to vary their marketing focus. 'We hope to attract nationalities such as Malaysians, Turkish, Thai, Middle Eastern, Indonesian, Singaporean [and] Vietnamese,' says Faulkner. ○

Overseas students in UK independent schools

	2001	2002	% change
Hong Kong	2,028	2,197	8.3
Germany	1,026	985	-3.9
China	548	772	40.8
North America	609	490	-19.5
Africa	483	455	-5.7
Japan	400	354	-11.5
Russia	313	335	7
Spain	285	313	9.8
South Korea	279	320	14.6
Total	7,872	8,094	2.8

Source: Independent Schools Council

The International Baccalaureate

The International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma is a two year, pre-university qualification which is accepted for university entrance in many countries around the world. It is available in English, Spanish and French and is made up of six academic subjects - one of which must be a foreign language - as well as a further three modules, consisting of an extended essay, a course in the theory of knowledge and

a creativity, action and service programme.

Offered in 110 countries throughout the world, the IB diploma has recently become more widely available in the UK due to the wide breadth of its curriculum and its well-regarded reputation in universities worldwide.

Oakham School in Stanford has been offering the IB diploma to domestic and international students for the last two years as an alternative to A-levels. 'The IB

is] a passport to universities worldwide,' says Jill Rutherford at the school.

'North American universities really like good IB students as do UK universities. They recognise that the students have taken a challenging programme and anecdotal evidence suggests that IB students have very good study skills by the time they get to university.'