



**Bournemouth
University**

A sustainable future for international students

in the UK

Bournemouth University Response

Submitted: Friday 31st August 2018

Inquiry Questions

In the classroom

- 1. What are the educational opportunities and challenges of welcoming international students into our schools, colleges and universities?**

International students in our university provide great potential for home students to learn useful intercultural skills by working with international students while also learning about different ways of learning, and different points of view on global challenges and other subjects relevant to their studies. For example, students can work on a Chinese critique of Western media alongside a Western critique of Chinese media. This experience is critical to providing UK students with the kinds of skills they need to be employable, especially for those who are unable to go abroad during their degree.

The presence of international students provides a great opportunity for UK students to learn about other cultures and approaches. It enables us to offer a stimulating multi-cultural learning environment for all our students and is an excellent means for developing links for our ongoing education, research and practice.

Our whole community benefits from a more diverse living experience learning from one another. We also believe the rich diverse student experience can facilitate tolerance and open mindedness.

Students returning to their home countries also act as soft power ambassadors for BU and the UK HE sector as a whole as they reflect on and share their experience. Ultimately their links may allow the UK to enhance overseas recruitment and potentially increase trading opportunities through their future employment and personal or familial connections.

In our experience of working with international students, our international students also grow personally beyond their learning experience from their time in the UK. When they arrive they can be limited by confidence in their language skills and reticent to contribute their views and join discussions, but this improves greatly during their time with us. They can also be reluctant to integrate fully and tend to socialize with others from their country of origin. These challenges – be they a result of a different academic culture, language, or other aspect – mean that ‘participation’ in general is a challenge for international students. This can also be a challenge for lecturers. Even with IELTS 7 students can sometimes struggle with Level 6 assessments. We do have to provide additional language support in some cases.

International students may join us from institutions with different academic calendars, creating logistical challenges. Supporting the health and wellbeing of international students, particularly those who don’t have local connections in the UK, also requires additional consideration and resource as students adjust to living in a different country and culture. It is particularly difficult if an international student struggles academically and their culture does not condone failure.

In many cases, students are supported financially by their families. This significant investment for students to study abroad, can create additional pressure for students

In our communities

2. What are the challenges and opportunities of integrating international students and their dependants into local communities? Do international students differ from other migrant or visitor communities in this regard?

In the community, students often stick in co-national groups for emotional comfort, at the cost of intercultural learning and language development. There are also unfortunately (although they are rare) incidents of racism or discrimination by members of the local community. We work with local groups and the police to ensure reporting and action in such cases and provide support for students.

There are a number of opportunities for universities to assist international students with integration into their adopted communities. Prior to their arrival in the UK, universities can work across their faculties and services to ensure that international students feel suitably prepared. A range of communication channels such as phone, Skype and email can be used effectively to speak with students before they travel to the UK to support them through the incoming process. At Bournemouth, we arrange for students to meet each other virtually via online social mobility platforms enabling them to bond and form relationships and offer peer support prior to arrival. This is something that we do for our incoming exchange students as well. We also offer pre-arrival cultural and practical advice via various channels including webinars and social media platforms.

At BU, we put a significant effort into the integration of all students, including international students, whatever their status. From the moment that students arrive in the UK, we have the chance to make them feel welcomed, settled and happy. We offer provisions such as airport transfer and meet and greet services, these are perceived as welcoming and very popular amongst our incoming students. Another great example of our welcome that promotes integration is our International Commencement Ceremony – a unique event that welcomes our international students into our wider university community. The event, hosted by the Vice-Chancellor, is attended by the Chancellery, Board Members, a host of local dignitaries, special guests, parliamentarians and members of staff all gather to welcome our students to the UK, Dorset, and to Bournemouth University. Around 2/3rds of our new international students now attend this special event at start of every year.

Assisting international students to feel settled in their accommodation is a vital component in helping them adjust and integrate into life in the UK. Support in the form of residence services, 'buddy' schemes and a varied and comprehensive range of events and activities are number of ways that can help students feel more at ease and part of their community. It can also help them to forge new friendships outside of their co-national groups which they may have a natural draw towards.

To help overcome barriers around language, universities can provide access to English language lessons. At Bournemouth University, all international students including our incoming exchange students are offered English Language support for academic purposes through our Languages@BU programme. The programme is free and available to students during induction via a mixture of online and one-to-one support.

At Bournemouth, we offer peer support through a 'Global BUddies' scheme, which matches groups of incoming students together with current BU students to form a support network of friends with similar interests. Incoming exchange students are also directed to the appropriate cultural Society relating to their home country.

Working closely with students' unions can provide additional support for incoming international students. We ensure that the BU Students' Union is made aware of all incoming exchange students, include them in communications and events, and inform them of the 'Global BUddies' scheme (as mentioned above). We

continue working with our colleagues in Student Services to enhance the support we provide to incoming exchange students. We are also planning to award incoming exchange students a form of alumni status to integrate them further into the BU community and keep in touch with them once they return to their home institutions and countries.

At BU we coordinate a host of volunteering opportunities which support international students to purposefully explore and support the local community. This includes sport based outreach schemes within local schools meaning the children within our community also experience wider perspectives through interaction with the international students. In return the international student experiences a far wider community cultural integration, feels a contributing member of the community, receives appreciation and valuing from the children because of the student's help and coaching, and supports the international student to further develop their confidence and navigation of cultural norms outside of the academic sphere.

For our regions and nations

According to a recent report by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) there are over three times as many higher education international students in London and the South East than any other region of the UK.

3. Is this regional tilt similar for international students in other levels of education and if so, what would be the challenges and opportunities of achieving a greater balance of international students in regions across the UK?

Outside of London, Bournemouth (and the wider conurbation) has one of the largest international student communities in the UK. Contributing more than £300m to the local economy each year, more than 50,000 no-UK students come to the local area per year – not only to our universities but to the area's language schools, colleges and boarding schools. The demographic for the English language schools range from junior to adult and helps create an international vibrancy within the town. In 2015, an Executive Business Network called the International Education Forum (IEF) was formed. The institutions involved in the IEF, are major employers in their own right. The students who attend local universities, language schools and colleges support the employment of many other people in the local tourism and other sectors through their secondary spending while studying in the area.

As a University we strive to deliver positive impact for our students, our staff, and our societies regionally, nationally and internationally. We strongly believe that undertaking a range of activities overseas provides our BU students with the right set of attributes which is highly needed in today's globalised world. Experiencing the learning and/or working environment of another country and culture enriches their learning experience and journey at BU, and enhances their employability by providing them with a skillset and perspective that are highly essential to today's job market. All overseas opportunities developed by the University are available for all BU students regardless of whether they UK or overseas domiciled.

A benefit of achieving a greater balance of international students across the UK means all regions can experience the cultural diversity and economic benefits international students bring. Furthermore, it supports the Industrial Strategy with its focus on "place" which envision no region being left behind.

International students become ambassadors for the UK generally when they return to their home countries, or indeed move elsewhere in the world. More specifically they are likely to continue collaborating with institutions/businesses in the region in which they studied stimulating further economic and social opportunities and boosting diversity.

4. What are the costs and benefits of international students participating in the regional and national labour market and how could we ensure they have a sustainable role in supporting and building local or skilled industry post-study?

As a region, by 2030, only half of Dorset's population is forecast to be of working age. This could have significant impacts on the numbers of learners, trainees and recruits available, presenting challenges for skills providers and reinforcing the importance of up-skilling the wider workforce. Ethnic diversity is expected to increase, with a larger proportion of the population accounted for by people from non-British backgrounds. Exactly how that will affect skills and employers is unclear, not least because it will be influenced by the countries from which people relocate and the language skills they possess.

Government policies on migration connected to this may also have an impact, including on businesses and skills providers, especially universities which benefit from international students.

- Measures such as a change in policy relating to post study work visas could help mitigate predicted shortfall in the labour market regionally and prevent any negative impacts on the growth of businesses in the area.
- When the UK leaves the EU next year we will have over 1, 500 EU students that will need some form of migrant monitoring to ensure the university complies with immigration processes. The lead in and timeliness in understanding new monitoring processes will be crucial.
- The existing T4 visa requirements can be a barrier as they are resource heavy for universities and time consuming for applicants. These processes may, we believe, put off good applicants.

As already mentioned, as a region, international students already contribute more than £300m per annum to the local economy in Bournemouth. Providing opportunities for them to extend their stay, whilst working, not only provides additional income to the region but also enables them to enhance their employability skills – in turn supporting businesses – and deepen their ties to the region and the UK more generally.

Bournemouth is flourishing as a major creative and digital employment sector, not least due to the pipeline of talent developed through our world-class degree programmes within this sphere. However, starting salaries within creative and digital industries can be lower than in other sectors. We recommend that the Government recognise both regional and sector pay differentials when setting limits for working visas secured through the skilled talent route. A blanket minimum pay level requirement drives talent to London and the major cities for higher starting salaries, and away from other geographical pockets of excellence and innovation. It also increases housing, transport and other infrastructure pressures on the major cities and runs counter to the Industrial Strategy's vision of prosperous communities across the UK. A differentiated approach to visas would facilitate regional economic growth and allow other areas to build on local strengths and contribute fully in UK transformation through the Industrial Strategy's central foundation in place.

For research, trade and soft power

5. What role do international students play in increasing global research capabilities, trade links and soft power for the UK and what strategies could be implemented to support this further?

All students, particularly postgraduate students, may go on to further study or research positions in their home countries which gives UK universities and other organisations instant links for developing research projects and working together on global challenges and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as examples. The skills and learning approach the international students gain in the UK creates networks of people overseas who will be able to work with the UK more easily as they will understand the business culture, ways of communicating, and common professional practices.

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