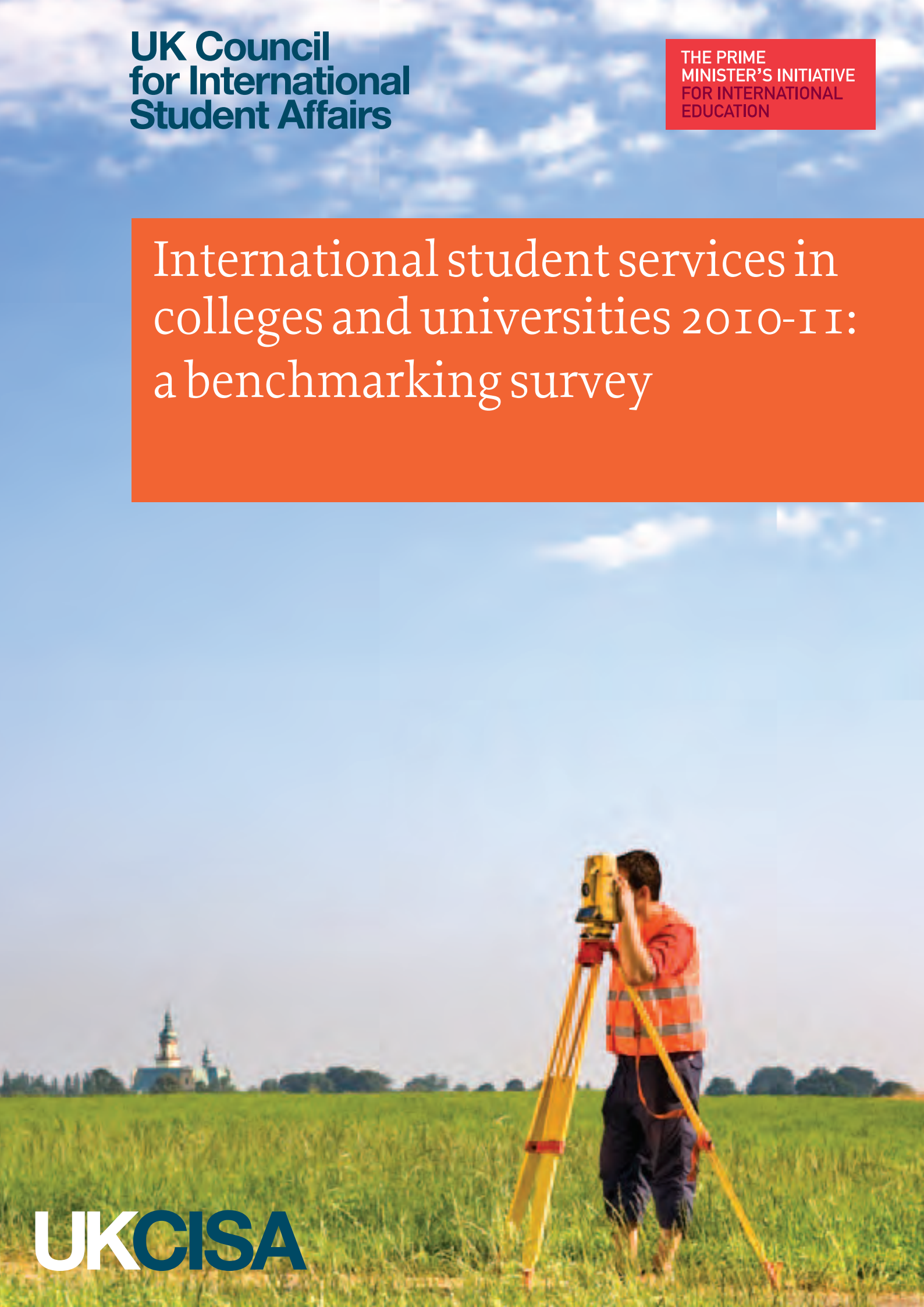


International student services in colleges and universities 2010-11: a benchmarking survey



UKCISA is the UK's national advisory body serving the interests of international students and those who work with them.

It does so through research, print and web-based publications, a national training programme, dedicated advice lines for students and advisors, and liaison and advocacy with institutions, agencies and government.

Its members include all UK universities, those further and higher education colleges which are active internationally, and a range of specialist and representative bodies.

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Foreword



This seemed to us at UKCISA a timely moment to survey the state of international student services in UK colleges and universities.

For one thing, five years of activity to improve international student services was drawing to close with the end of the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education in March 2011.

For another, international student advisers have, for the last two years, faced major upheaval to their workloads and practices with the introduction of the Points Based System for immigration, to the extent where it has often seemed as though they can have time for nothing else.

Finally, sufficient time had passed since our last surveys of higher education (in 2007) and further education (in 2008) to warrant an expectation that there would be discernable trends and patterns in the changes taking place over the intervening period.

The survey received an excellent response rate (82 higher education institutions and 37 further education colleges), giving a comprehensive insight across the sector. The trends that have emerged reflect a number of themes:

- The **PMI** has provided a stimulus for review and reflection, has made new resources available and has contributed to staff development.

- The **Points Based System** has increased workloads and demanded additional resources and new ways of working. It has not always been possible for institutions to protect other areas of international student services from the encroachment on staff time and resources. However, in some cases it has led to review and improvements of business processes.
- **New technologies** are increasingly used to disseminate information faster, more flexibly and accessibly, as a means for institutions to connect with students, and also to help them connect students to their peers.
- **The range and availability of services continues to improve across the sector** despite the pressures of falling budgets and increased student numbers and the demands of PBS.

The enthusiasm of advisers and the commitment of institutions to improving international students' experiences are undoubtedly at the core of these improvements. Factors which have assisted appear to include the work of the PMI and the availability of new technologies. The availability of clear benchmarking data from our previous reports, as well as extensive research in the sector into international student satisfaction, have given institutions the tools to identify areas for enhancement. We hope the current report will continue that process still further.

Professor Christine Hallett

former Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Stirling and Chair of UKCISA's Board of Trustees

Geoff Pine

Principal, Greenwich Community College and Vice-Chair of the UKCISA Board of Trustees

Key findings

The survey illustrates that it is now the norm across both FE and HE to offer a comprehensive range of services tailored to the needs of international students, from before their arrival until the end of their programme and beyond.

Predeparture information

Delivery of information has shifted **from hard copy to electronic**: 90% of institutions now deliver information through their website, 75% by email, and only 70% now send it as hard copy. In person delivery is also widespread via agents (70%) and in-country briefings (47%). 46% of HEIs also use social networking sites, but only 5% of FECs do so.

Contact between new and current students/alumni is much more widespread, also thanks to use of online media. 77% of HEIs and 50% of FECs facilitate this.

Arrival and orientation

Meet and greet services are offered by 87% of institutions and 96% offer international student **orientation programmes**. One in five institutions now make use of **web and multi-media** resources to increase flexibility over the timing of orientation sessions. Provision of **follow-up sessions** has doubled, with 86% of institutions offering an on-going programme of workshops and briefings, especially on immigration, work, academic issues and safety.

Language and study skills support

44% of respondents provide pre-arrival help with language or study skills, usually in the form of a link to **Prepare for Success**. Most institutions also offer some form of **language support** post-arrival, most commonly in the form of free in-session classes.

Accommodation

61% of FECs offer **accommodation for all international students** for the full duration of their course; in HE, 62% offer all international students accommodation for at least the first year.

More institutions now offer **accommodation for dependants**: 52% of HEIs and 22% of FE offer at least some.

Institutions offer a wide range of **support with finding private sector accommodation** including advice on housing rights (62%), contract checking services (44%) and house-hunting events (32%).

International Student Support

Specialist international student support is **available in multiple locations** at most institutions: it is most commonly offered in international offices (72% of respondents), student services departments (59%), international student advisory services (53%) and students' unions (42%).

Increasing numbers of institutions provide a **24 hour emergency contact** number for students throughout the year (51%).

Under 18s

Awareness of provision for under-18s appears to be patchy in HE, with highest levels of awareness around **guardianship issues**. In FECs, more extensive **measures are in place to safeguard under 18s** especially around parental consent forms for activities (80%), guidance to homestay hosts (79%), emergency contacts for guardians (72%) and requiring a nominated guardian in the UK (50%).

Immigration advice and police registration

Immigration advice is almost universal, although the menu of services varies. For instance, although most deal with **entry clearance and extension applications** for students, HEIs are more likely additionally to offer these services for dependants, and also to offer help with Post Study Work and other non-student categories. 73% of HEIs and 43% of FECs offer the **Batch scheme** to some or all students – the proportion has increased significantly in the FE sector over the last three years.

40% of respondents arranged for **police registration** to take place on campus and a further 25% assisted students with this in other ways.

Facilitating social interaction

A range of **buddying and mentoring schemes** are run by institutions centrally, in departments and in students' unions, either exclusively for international students or additionally involving UK students. Schemes involving all students and based in academic departments are the most common model.

Institutions offer a wide range of **social activities**, most of which are also open to home students, including sporting, cultural and social events, trips, volunteering opportunities and host visits.

Finance

Deposits are required from all students by 94% of FECs. Use of deposits has increased in HEIs, but still only 53% require them from all students.

Most institutions (52%) fix **fees** for one year ahead only, although 26% set them for the full duration of the course. Nearly 70% of institutions allow all students to pay in **instalments**. Fees commonly include the cost of orientation programmes and language/study skills support, but not infrequently institutions charge extra for social events, graduation and meet and greet programmes.

While 90% of institutions include a recommended amount for the cost of living in their pre-arrival information, they are increasingly likely to provide additional **budgeting assistance** via referral to external sources such as the International Student Calculator (linked to by 64%). Some also provide budgeting advice or workshops after arrival.

There remains a stark sectoral divide on **hardship funding** with 95% of HEIs but only 33% of FECs providing any for international students.

Employment

Institutions now offer much **more specialist support for international students** in finding part-time work during study, with 50% of FECs and 65% of HEIs

offering services such as workshops, drop-in sessions and webpages or leaflets. 60% of HEIs also offer specialist help with careers advice for work after study, although most FECs offer the same support for both home and international students.

Take up of services

FECs told us that take up of services was greatest for **orientation programmes** (72% said these were attended by more than three-quarters of their students) and **advice services** (53% said these were used by more than three-quarters of students). Most services, except careers, were used by at least half of new students. By contrast, it was rare in HE for services to be used by such a large proportion of students, although again advice services and orientation programmes were the most widely used.

Student representation and feedback

Over 50% of respondents said they had a full-time or part-time elected **international student officer post** in their union, and 34% had an **International Students Committee**, either in the union or the institution.

Over 90% of institutions use **feedback**, mainly in the form of one or more of the following: internal surveys of international students; the International Student Barometer; focus groups; and analysis of international student responses to general student surveys.

The impact of national policies

Many institutions commented on the huge resource implications of the **Points Based System** and the negative impact this had had on services to international students, both increasing pressure on immigration services and reducing resources for other forms of support. Some positive impacts were highlighted in terms of institutions having to tighten up their business processes.

Respondents commented positively on the impact of the **Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education** in terms of focusing attention on best practice, providing resources such as Prepare for Success or the International Student Calculator and giving direct grant funding for pilot projects and partnerships.

Future plans

Areas which institutions have identified to develop in future include **collaborations** with students' unions, other departments, local or regional institutions and local communities. Further developments are also likely in increased use of **online services** for students.

By benchmarking their provision against sector norms as measured in this report, institutions can increase the chances of keeping up with, or ahead of, the competition and continuing to satisfy the expectations of international students.

About the survey

UKCISA members were invited by email to respond to an online survey which was kept open from early December 2010 to the end of January 2011.

The survey broadly followed the patterns of our two previous benchmarking surveys, of higher education (HE) in 2007 and further education (FE) in 2008. However, as the format of some questions was not identical across the three surveys, it was not always possible to make like for like comparisons across the time period. Comparability was also limited by the different sets of respondents; 45 respondents to this survey also responded to our 2007 HE survey and 20 had replied to the previous FE survey. This is a good level of overlap, but leaves open the possibility that some of the differences noted are due to changes in the composition of the responding groups rather than sector-wide changes over time.

We received usable responses from 119 institutions. Of these, 80 were public sector universities, 38 were public sector further education colleges and one was a private college. For the purposes of the analysis, the one private college was included with the public sector colleges, and where there appear to be sectoral differences, results are reported under the headings "HE" and "FE". The distribution across the UK nations is given in Table 1.

The FE colleges (FECs) responding reported enrolling an average of 592 non-UK EU students and 227 non-EU students, with a range from 29 non-UK students at the smallest to 4,800 at the largest. HESA figures for the participating HE institutions (HEIs) gave an average of 929 non-UK EU and 2067 non-EU students, with a range from 80 to 8,800 non-UK students.

Table 1

Location and type of responding institution

Type of college/ location	University/ HEI	Public FE	Private FE	Total
England	64	26	1	91
Scotland	12	6	0	18
Wales	5	3	0	8
Northern Ireland	1	1	0	2
Total	82	36	1	119

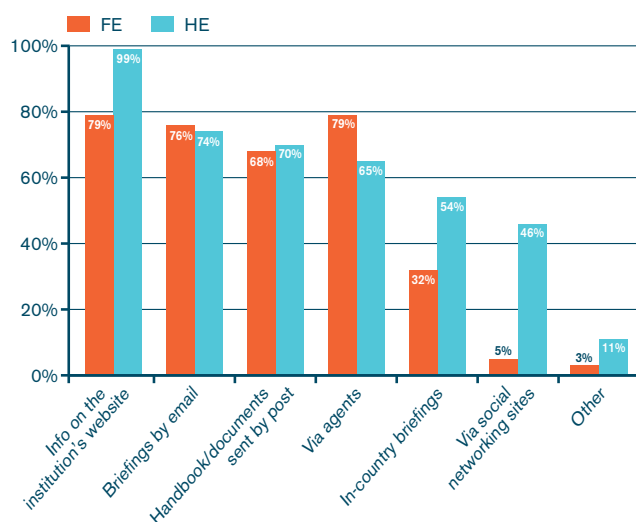
The survey findings

Predeparture information

The responses about predeparture information show a clear shift from paper to electronic sources compared to the previous surveys, with the institution's website becoming the primary source (92%), supplemented by email bulletins (75%) and hard copies (70%). Agents are also widely used, especially in FE (79% compared to 65% in HE), and just over half of HEIs provided in-country briefings. The biggest difference between HEIs and FECs is in the use of social networking sites, used by 46% of universities, but only 5% of colleges.

Figure 1

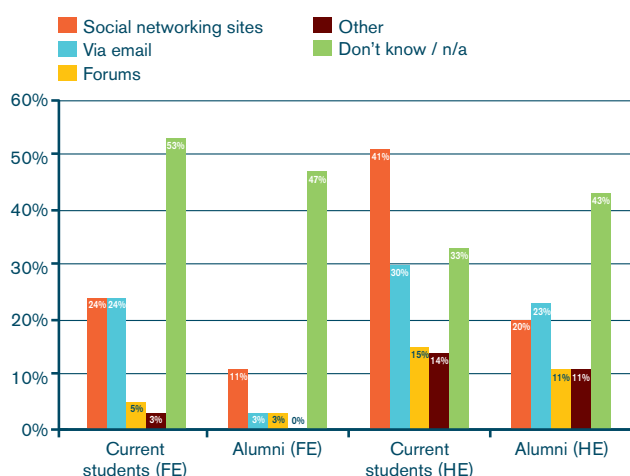
In which ways does your institution provide predeparture information to students?



Social networking is also the primary means used by HEIs to put prospective students in touch with current students (36%) and alumni (19%), followed by email and some use of online forums in HE. The easy availability of internet communication is no doubt facilitating this kind of pre-departure contact, as this year's survey suggests 77% of HEIs and 50% of FECs put students in touch with their peers before arrival, compared to 49% of HEIs in 2007 and 22% of colleges in 2008.

Figure 2

Does your institution help new international students make contact with current students and/or alumni before departure using any of the following?



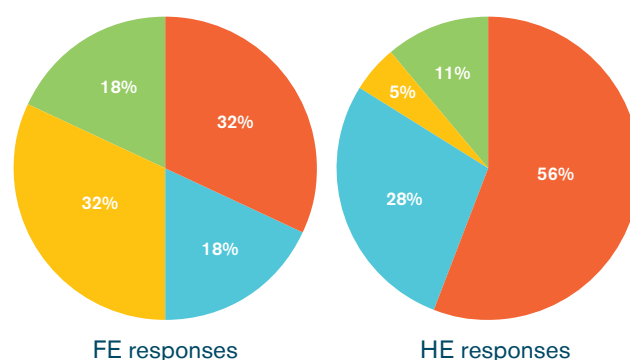
Arrival and orientation

Most institutions continue to offer meet and greet services to some extent. FE colleges are more likely than HE to offer year-round meet and greet services, which may be related to a different programme of course starts, or different logistical arrangements applying to small rather than large numbers, or greater concern to ensure the safe arrival of students who are in general younger, and have lower language capabilities at the start of their programmes.

Figure 3

Does your institution offer a "meet and greet" service?

■ Yes at the start of each year only
 ■ Yes, all year round
 ■ Yes, at the start of each term/semester
 ■ No meet and greet service offered

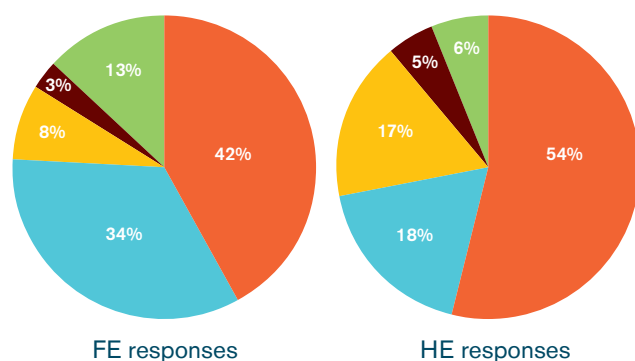


96% of respondents offer an orientation programme for international students, and the commonest model remains a separate event prior to freshers' week. In FE 34% of respondents hold international orientation in parallel with orientation week, compared to 18% of those in HE.

Figure 4

At the start of the year, do you hold your international student orientation separately from, or at the same time as events for new UK students?

- Separate international student orientation prior to freshers week/week zero
- International student orientation runs in parallel with freshers week/week zero
- International student orientation is integrated into freshers week/week zero
- No specifically-designated international student orientation offered
- Other (please specify)



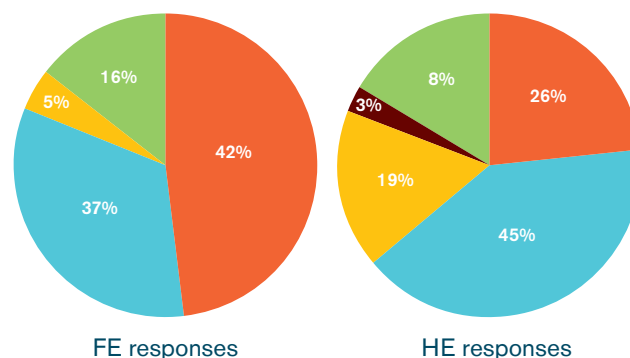
Integration between home and international students' orientation programmes is slightly more common in HE (17% as opposed to 8% in FE). Although separate events are more common, there has been a small trend towards integrated orientation programmes. In the last three years 12% of respondents have moved from separate to integrated orientation programmes, and a further 7% are contemplating such a move. (It has been suggested that separate events can impact on the formation of friendships as segregation leads to international students bonding together, rather than with the wider student body.)

In HE the most popular length for orientation programmes is 3-5 days long, compared to 1-2 days in FE.

Figure 5

How long does the international students orientation programme last?

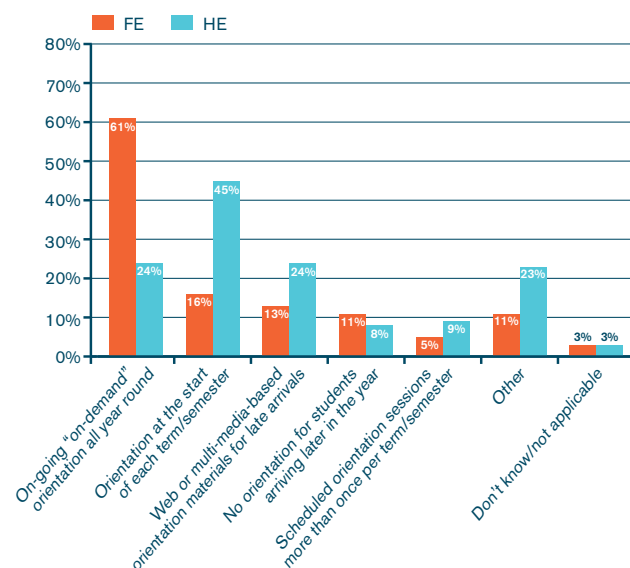
- 1-2 days
- 3-5 days
- >5 days
- Don't know/not applicable
- Other



As with meet and greet programmes, the FE sector does more "on-demand" orientation year round than the HE sector. However, the HE sector makes more use of web or multi-media based orientation materials for late arrivals and scheduled "late" orientation programmes. Both sectors have increased their use of web and multi-media materials since our previous surveys (from 5% and 10% respectively to 13% and 24%).

Figure 6

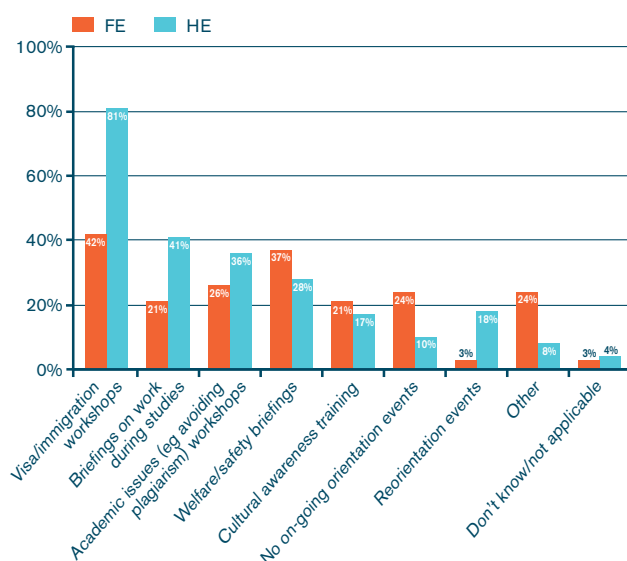
For international students arriving later in the academic year, what orientation do you provide? (Multiple responses allowed)



In our previous surveys, only 43% of HE and 18% of FE institutions offered any kind of on-going or follow-up sessions to supplement orientation. This has grown hugely to 90% of HE and 76% of FE respondents. Most institutions offer sessions on immigration issues; other popular topics include work during studies, academic issues and welfare or safety. A small number offer cultural awareness training for students. Other comments included the use of tutorial systems to offer ongoing induction, and that much follow-up advice and support takes place in academic and other support departments not only in international student offices.

Figure 7

Do you offer follow-up orientation sessions on any of the following through the year to supplement the start of year orientation? (Multiple responses allowed)

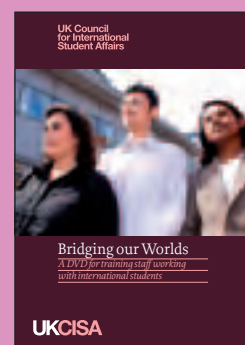


Want to improve your practice?

Planning and running orientation programmes for international students provides an overview of all the key areas that staff in student services should aim to cover when organising such programmes, and gives staff a wide range of workshop ideas and icebreaker sessions which they can use in their work.



Bridging Our Worlds DVD
This DVD is aimed at trainers wishing to increase awareness of international students' experiences and concerns among staff and students within universities and colleges and is accompanied by a Trainers' Manual.



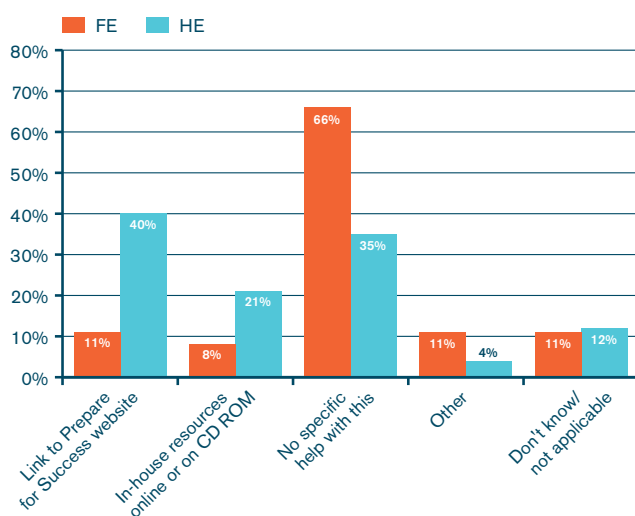
www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/publications.php

Language and study skills support

53% of HE respondents provided some type of pre-arrival help with study skills or language, compared to 23% of FE respondents. In both cases the commonest source was a link to the Prepare for Success website (40% of HE respondents, 11% of FE), followed by in-house materials (21% and 8% respectively). However, it is clear that not all respondents were aware of links to Prepare for Success from their institution's website, as tracking statistics for the Prepare for Success demonstrate that at least 47 of the responding HEIs have links, although only 32 of them said they had. In many ways, given that Prepare for a Success is a free resource accessible to all, it is surprising that not all respondents linked to it.

Figure 8

Do you offer any pre-arrival help with study skills or language (excluding foundation and pre-sessional courses)?



Diagnostic language testing on arrival is more widespread in FE than HE, probably due to the nature of courses, eg this is standard practice for many English language programmes. There was no significant change since previous surveys, suggesting no increased levels of concern about language levels of arriving students.

Want to improve your practice?

Learning activities to prepare international students for study in the UK

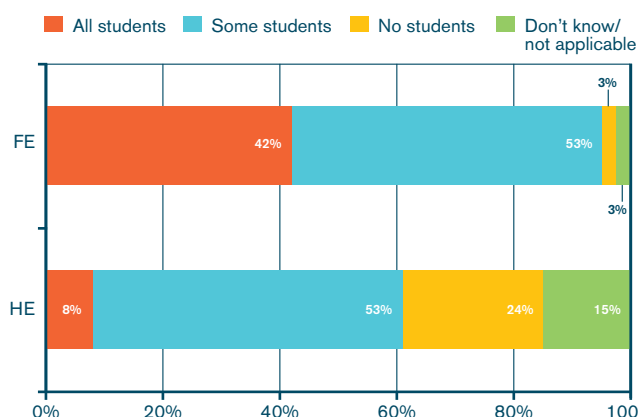
prepare for success

Prepare for Success is an interactive pre-arrival learning tool for international students who are getting ready to come to the UK to study. The learning resources about different aspects of academic life in the UK help students to find out what British academic life is like and what kind of academic skills will be needed for effective study. The activities also provide scope for improvement in English language skills.

www.prepareforsuccess.org.uk

Figure 9

Does your institution give diagnostic English language tests to new students on arrival?



67% of FECs and 85% of HEIs offer free in-sessional classes to at least some international students; 51% of FECs and 70% of HEIs offer this service to all international students. This would appear to be broadly in line with previous findings.

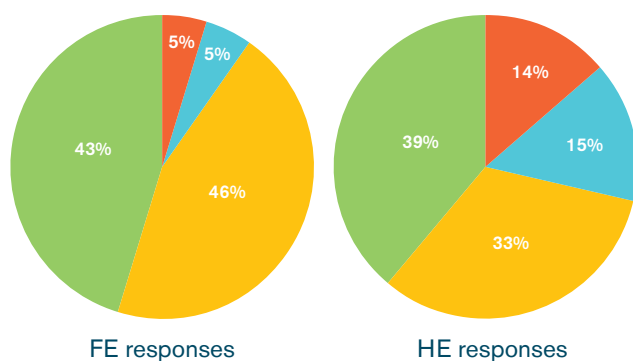
Surprisingly, 14% of HEIs and 5% of FECs said they offered free pre-sessional classes to all students, unfortunately there was no follow-up question included to find out more about this provision.

Figure 10

Does your institution offer free pre-sessional or in-session English or study skills classes to international students?

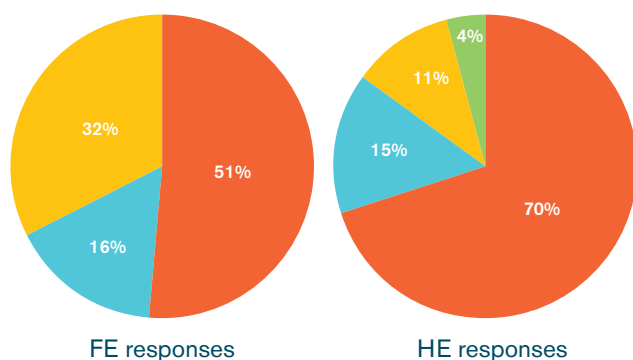
Pre-sessional

- Pre-sessional for all students
- Pre-sessional for some students
- No free pre-sessional
- Pre-sessional – don't know/n/a

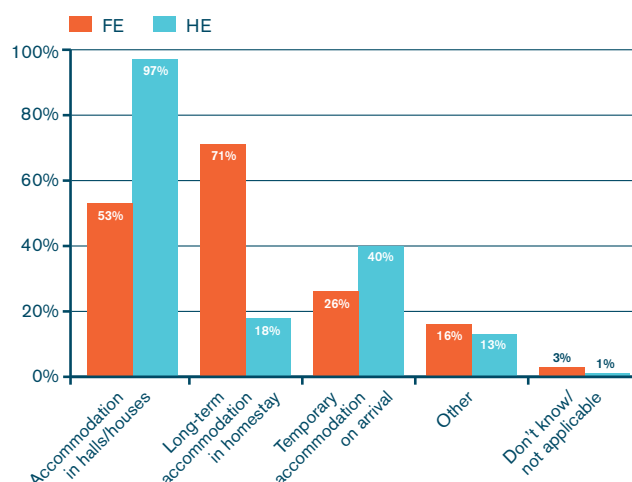


In-session

- In-session for all students
- In-session for some students
- No free in-session
- In-session – don't know/n/a

**Figure 11**

What accommodation does your institution provide to international students (whether owned by the institution or a third party)? (Multiple responses allowed)



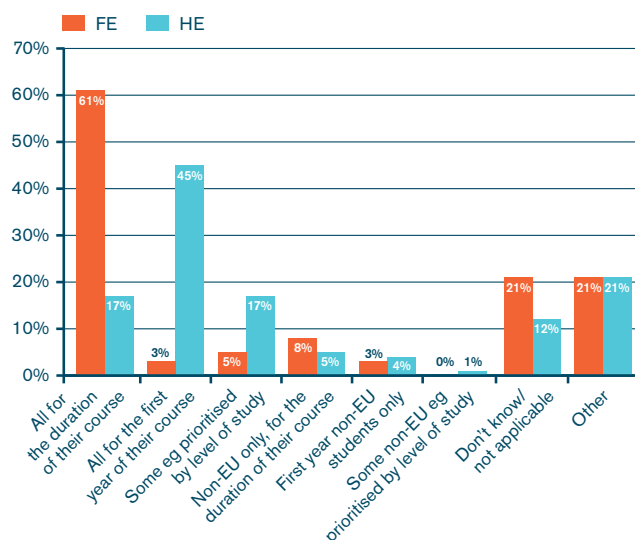
The majority of institutions in both FE and HE house international students for at least the first year of their course. Fewer HEIs house students for the duration of their course (perhaps because of longer courses). In most cases EU students appear to be treated on a par with non-EU students when it comes to accommodation, with only a few institutions prioritising non-EU over EU students, and some treating all non-local students on a par. Some institutions commented on the various constraints they faced in trying to house students, and many emphasised the importance of students applying before deadlines.

Accommodation

Almost all HEIs offer international students accommodation in halls or houses, although many also make use of temporary accommodation for new arrivals, and a few use long-term homestay arrangements. By contrast long-term homestay is the main source of accommodation for FE colleges, followed by providing accommodation in halls or houses. The use of long-term homestay may explain the lower level of use of temporary accommodation on arrival at FE colleges.

Figure 12

Which international students are you able to house (excluding late and unexpected arrivals)?

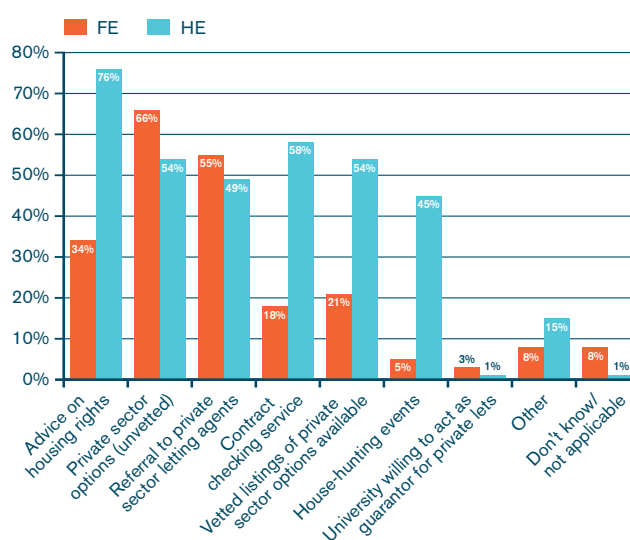


Accommodation for students with dependants still poses a difficulty, but provision does seem to have improved significantly since the previous surveys. Now 52% of HEIs and 22% of FECs (compared to 35% and 8% respectively in previous surveys), provide some accommodation for students with dependants.

Institutions provide a wide range of other help to international students with finding accommodation (see Fig. 13). FE colleges are slightly more likely to refer students to outside agencies such as private letting agents, and to provide lists of private sector provision. HEIs are more likely to provide advice on housing rights, contract checking services and house-hunting events. Quite a few institutions commented that this service was run by the students' union. Several mentioned running their own in-house letting agencies.

Figure 13

What other help do you give international students with house hunting? (Multiple responses allowed)



Want to improve your practice?

Managing accommodation for international students: a handbook for practitioners

Compiled by Unipol, this UKCISA guide is aimed at staff who deal with international students in residential accommodation in HE and FE institutions as well as policy-makers,

students' unions, voluntary organisations providing accommodation services and commercial providers. The guide sets out good practice on the provision of accommodation and associated services and maps out the issues for consideration either where practice is too context-specific for meaningful generalisation or where it has not yet been established in the sector.



www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/publications.php

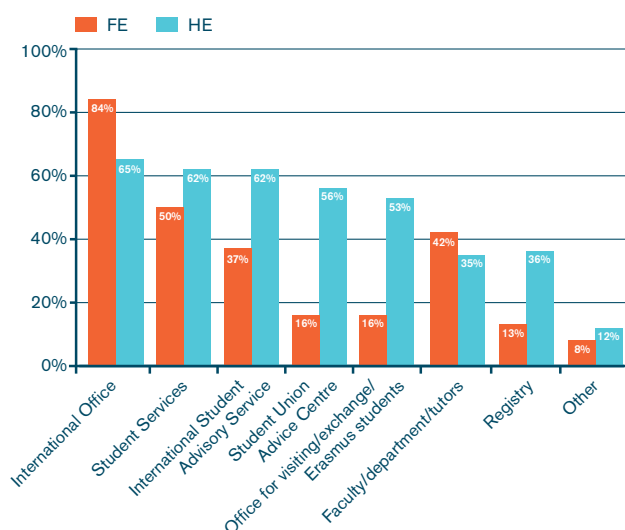
International Student Support

In HE, specialist support and advice for international students is spread over a mixture of the International Office, Student Services, dedicated International Student Advisory Services, offices focusing on exchange and study abroad students (including Erasmus), and Students' Union Advice Centres. A third of HE respondents also indicated that such support took place at faculty/department level. No significant change was discernable in the availability of support compared with previous surveys.

By contrast, in FE support is more heavily concentrated in international offices, although also offered by student services and dedicated international student advisory services, with a slightly higher use of support from departments and tutors. The specialist support available in FE appears to have increased markedly, or at least been brought together to provide a centralised service: 84% of FE respondents in 2010-11 offered specialist support from the international office, whereas fewer than half did so in 2008.

Figure 14

Which of the following provide specialist support and advice for international students at your institution?
(Multiple responses allowed)



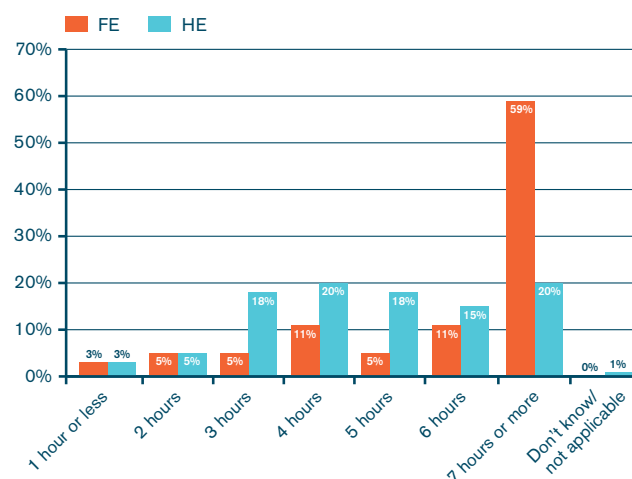
As in previous benchmarking studies, there is no clear correlation between the number of international students, and the number of specialist international student advisers. For example, the average number of

advisers in FE is two and in HE is three – despite HEIs having on average four times as many international students as FECs.

Advisers in HEIs are more likely than in FECs to be available to see students for only a restricted number of hours per day, perhaps because of the need to manage high volume. Whereas 59% of FE advisers are available to see students all day, 46% of advisers in HEIs are only available to see students four hours a day or less.

Figure 15

Approximately how many hours per day are international student advisers available to see students?



A 24 hour emergency contact number is available all year in 57% of FECs (up from 34% in 2008) and 48% of HEIs. A further 8% of institutions in both sectors provide such a contact during arrival periods only.

Under 18s

Provision for under-18s is well embedded in FE and awareness of the issues is clearly high. HE respondents appeared much less certain of what provision was in place in their institutions, perhaps because they deal with smaller numbers of them. Nevertheless, awareness has increased in the last few years, with the number of institutions requiring a nominated UK-based guardian rising from 26% to 38% in HE and from 30% to 50% in FE. In FE parental consent forms are now required in 80% of institutions, compared to only 52% previously, and emergency contacts of guardians are required by 72%, up from 52%.

Want to improve your practice?

International students under 18: guidance and good practice

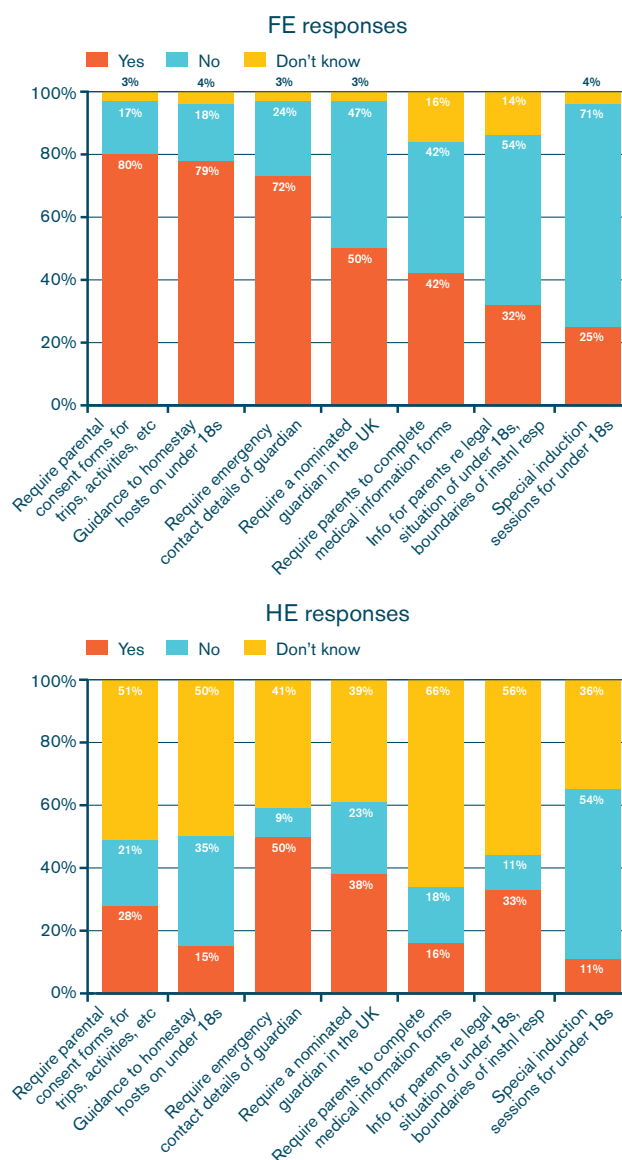
This guide draws together descriptions of regulatory requirements affecting different sectors and nations within the UK and examples of good practice, provides sector and country-specific guidance where applicable, and brings together general points of relevance where sectors can learn from one another.

www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/publications.php



Figure 16

Which of the following procedures does your institution have in place for under 18s?



Note: Scottish respondents were advised to tick "Not applicable" as the age of majority there is 16. However, two Scottish institutions responded to the questions, while several institutions in other UK nations clicked "Not applicable", even though with the ban on age discrimination, it would not normally be possible for them to refuse to accept international students on the basis of age, and the relevant provision therefore would be needed. The latter should perhaps therefore have been counted as "Don't know", which would have increase the proportion in that category still further.

Immigration advice and police registration

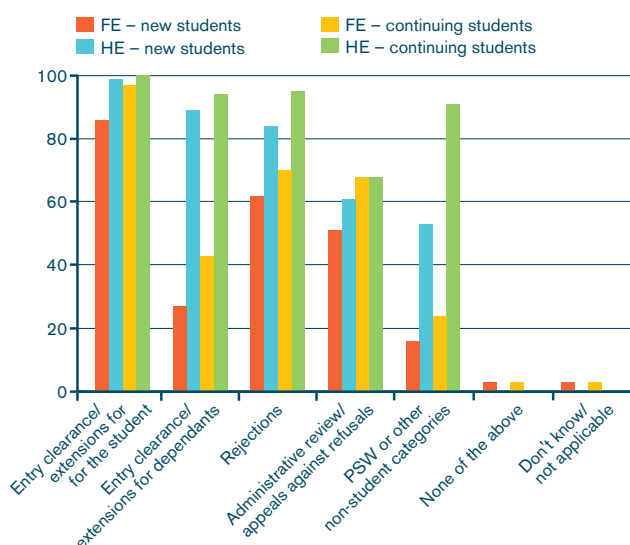
In both FE and HE almost all institutions offer advice to students on obtaining or extending visas. Many also help students whose applications are rejected, and nearly as many provide some help with administrative reviews and appeals against refusals.

HEIs are more likely than FECs to offer visa advice for dependants and help with other non-student categories such as Post Study Work (of course, fewer students in FE are likely to have dependants, or be eligible for PSW).

further 13% of HEIs and 24% of FECs accompany students to local police stations to register. Some provided other help such as arranging transport, helping with late registrations, getting another student to accompany students whose English was not good. Two London-based institutions arranged weekend sessions specifically for their students at the Overseas Visitors Records Office in Borough to avoid the lengthy queues in the week. One institution arranged for police registrations to be returned to campus for students to collect.

Figure 17

Does your institution provide advice/assistance on any of the following areas of immigration for new and continuing students? (Multiple responses allowed)



65% of HEIs and 43% of FECs made the Batch Scheme available to all students; 8% of HEIs (but no FECs) restricted it to complex cases only. The proportion of FECs using the Batch Scheme has increased from only 26% in 2008 (the proportion in HE was unchanged). Of those institutions which didn't use it, some commented that their numbers were too small to make it worthwhile.

47% of HEIs and 27% of FECs have successfully arranged for local police to come to campus to deal with students who need to register with them. A

Want to improve your practice?

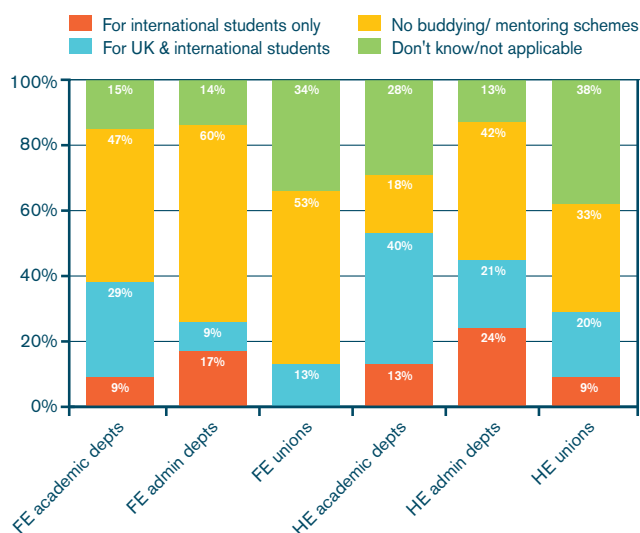
Information about using the Batch Scheme is available at www.ukcisa.org.uk/members/batch_scheme.php

Facilitating social interaction

According to respondents, buddying and mentoring schemes specifically for international students are most often organised by administrative departments such as the international office or student services, while those involving both home and international students are most often organised by academic departments. Some such schemes are also offered by students' unions.

Figure 18

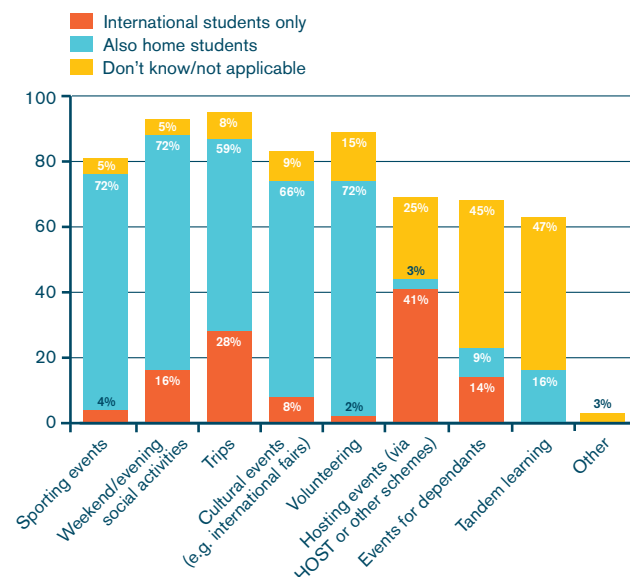
Does your institution offer any buddying or mentoring scheme for students, organised by any of the following?



Almost all institutions arrange trips and social activities for international students and in most cases these are (in theory at least) also open to home students. Volunteering, cultural and sporting opportunities are also provided by more than 80% of respondents. Just over 40% of respondents offered social contact with local communities through hosting schemes. Just over 30% offered social events for dependants, and 25% offered tandem learning schemes. The picture was very similar for both FE and HE, except with respect to hosting schemes which were offered by 76% of HEIs but only 28% of FECs, and events for dependants, which were offered by 42% of HEIs but only 10% of FECs. Opportunities for volunteering and tandem learning were also more widely offered in HEIs than FECs.

Figure 19

What activities and support does your institution or union arrange for international students, and which are also open to home students? (Multiple responses allowed)

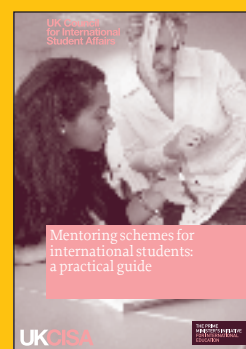


Want to improve your practice?

Volunteering and international students: a practical guide
A guide to the issues in setting up a scheme using international students as volunteers. It also addresses practical matters such as risk management, legal issues and recruiting volunteers.



Mentoring schemes for international students: a practical guide
provides practical support to staff who are considering setting up such schemes specifically for international students and provides a range of sample documents which can aid their efforts.



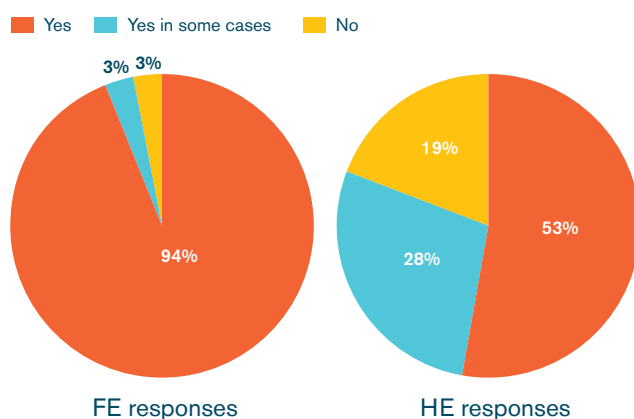
www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/publications.php

Finance

94% of FECs require international students to pay a deposit on acceptance of their offer, compared to 53% of HEIs, although a further 28% of HEIs required a deposit in some cases (as did 3% of FECs). Only 3% of FECs and 19% of HEIs did not require a deposit for any courses. While there has been no change in FE, HEIs are now more likely to ask for a deposit from students.

Figure 20

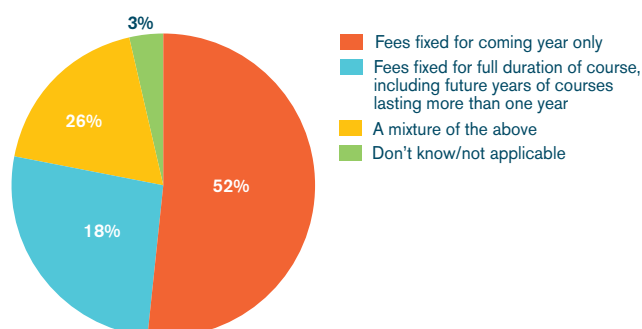
Are international students required to pay a deposit on acceptance of offer?



52% of institutions fixed fees for one year ahead only. 26% set fees for the full duration of the course, and 18% did a bit of both.

Figure 21

How far ahead are fee levels fixed for international students?

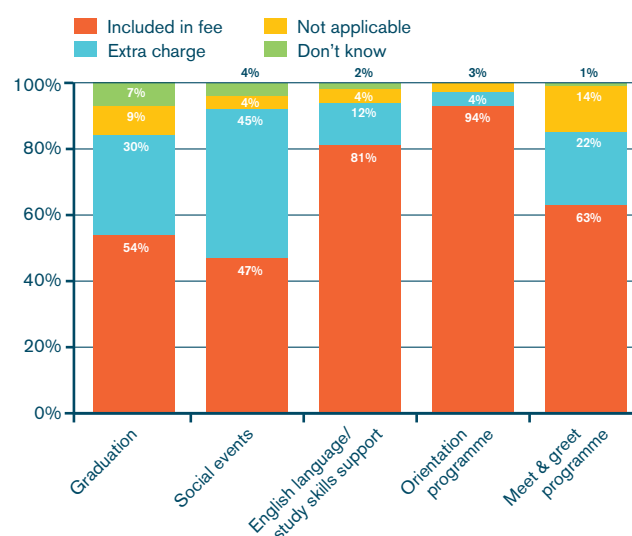


85% of HEIs allow all students to pay fees in instalments, and a further 9% will allow it in some cases. Among FE respondents, 33% allowed all students to pay in instalments, and a further 31% allowed instalments in some cases.

Most institutions include the cost of orientation and language/study support within the standard fees package. Additional charges are most commonly made for social programmes, graduation (where applicable – mostly for HE), and meet and greet programmes.

Figure 22

Which services are provided as part of the package, and which incur additional charges?

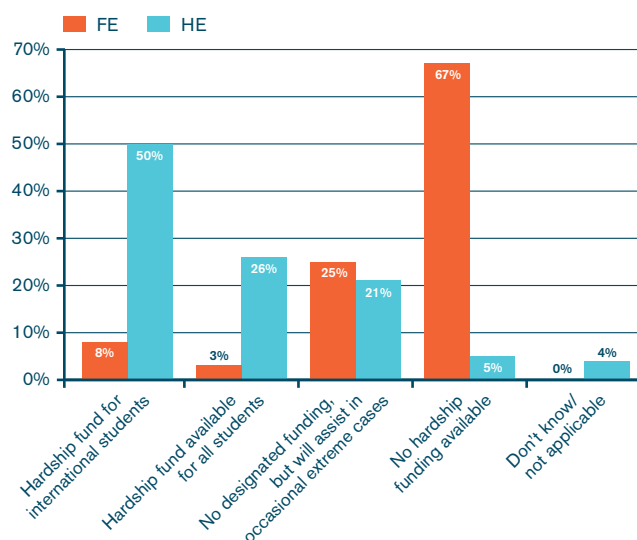


The most common form of budgeting assistance was the inclusion in pre-arrival information of a recommended amount for cost of living (provided by 90% of respondents). Only 48% included detailed breakdowns of cost of living, although 64% provided links to such information via the International Student Calculator and 57% linked to other external sources such as the British Council. HEIs were slightly more likely than FECs to provide information in most of these categories, and were more than four times as likely to provide advice or workshops on budgeting (53% compared to 11%).

There is a very stark difference between FE and HE when it comes to providing hardship funding. 67% of FECs had no hardship funding for international students compared to 5% of HEIs. 50% of HEIs, but only 8% of FECs had a hardship fund specifically for international students, and international students were more likely to have access to general hardship funds in HE than FE (26% compared to 3%).

Figure 23

Does your institution have hardship funding available to international students? (Multiple responses allowed)



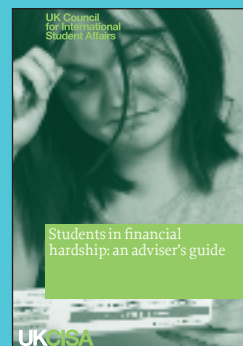
Want to improve your practice?



The International Student Calculator helps international students plan and manage their money for studies in the UK
www.studentcalculator.org.uk/international

Students in financial hardship: an adviser's guide

This guide aims to help you and your institution to minimise the occurrence of financial hardship and to establish a realistic approach for dealing with requests for help from those students who do experience financial problems.



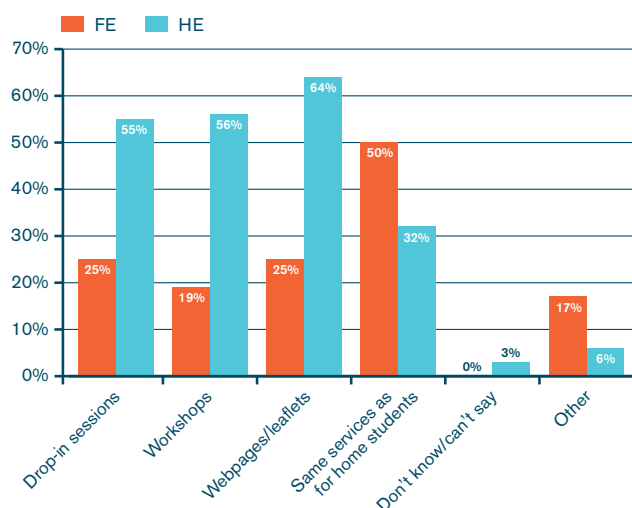
www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/publications.php

Employment

Both sectors have increased specialist provision for international students seeking part-time work, from 34% to 65% in HE and from 27% to 50% in FE. HEIs offer more extensive services than FECs, including workshops (56% v 19%), drop-in sessions (55% v 25%) and webpages or leaflets (64% v 25%).

Figure 24

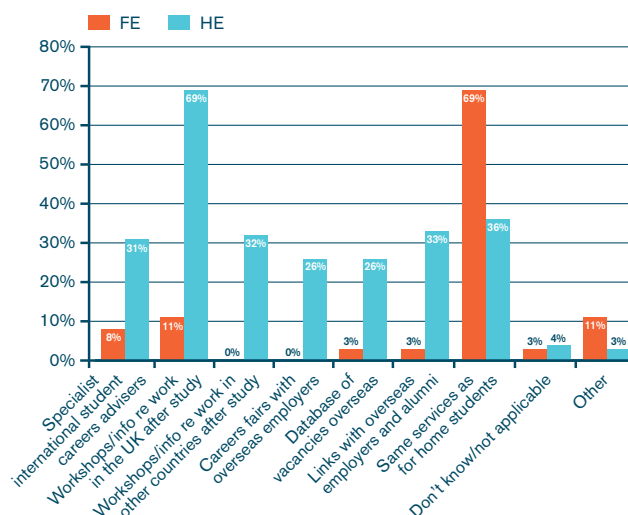
Does your institution provide specialist help for international students seeking part-time work while studying eg on employment regulations, writing a CV, NI numbers, etc? (Multiple responses allowed)



With respect to specialist help with careers or further study decisions, provision has increased from 42% to 60% in HE. 69% offered workshops or information about working in the UK after their studies; 33% made links with overseas alumni and employers; 32% offered workshops or information about working in other countries after study; 31% had specialist international student careers advisers, and 26% offered careers fairs with overseas employers and databases of vacancies overseas.

Figure 25

Does your institution provide specific help to international students with careers or further study after leaving your institution? (Multiple responses allowed)



69% of FECs offered international students the same services as home students, 8% had specialist careers advisers and 11% offered workshops or information about working in the UK after their studies.

Want to improve your practice?

See details of PMI2 employability strand projects at www.nases.org.uk/pmi2

Reorientation and return

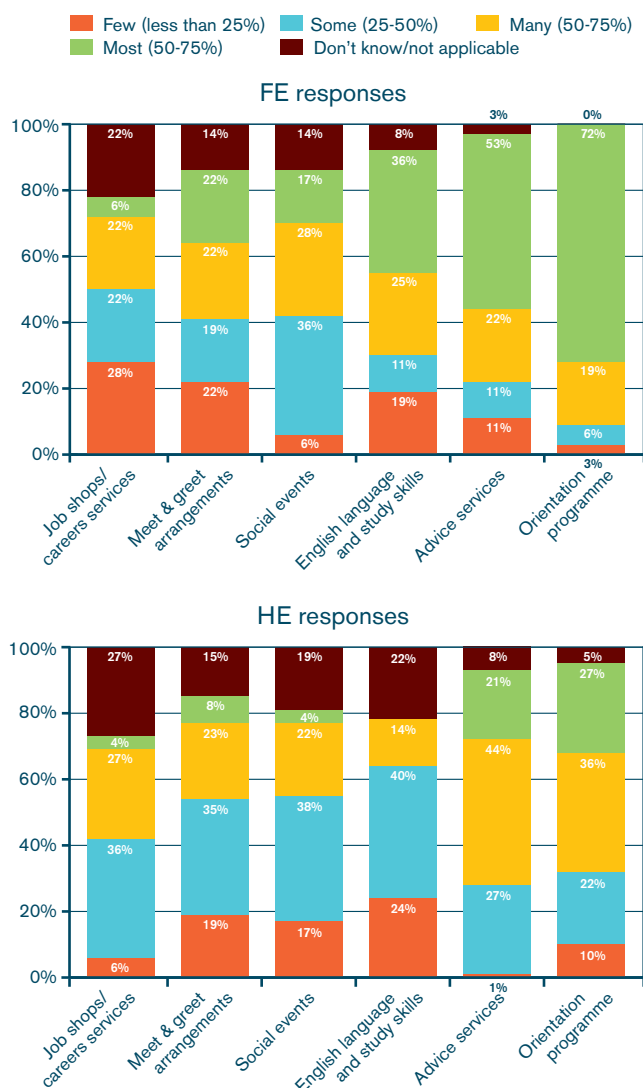
Re-orientation programmes remain rare: only 11% of respondents offered one. Similarly, few institutions offer graduation ceremonies overseas. 11% of FECs and 14% of HEIs offered this, and a further 3% of FECs and 23% of HEIs offered this only for students whose programme was run overseas.

Take up of services

We asked respondents to estimate what proportion of their new international students took up the various services offered. Their estimates are below.

Figure 26

What proportion of new international students do you estimate use each of the following services?



In general take up appears to be higher in FE than HE for all services except careers (where there is less specialist provision to take up than in HE, and which in any case may be less relevant for students at earlier stages in their studies). It is possible the higher take-up rate is due to the smaller scale of their numbers, creating a more personal connection between students and staff. It may also be a factor of student demographics, eg students who are younger on average, and who feel the need for more support. A third possibility is that the services are more available and easier to access.

Student representation and feedback

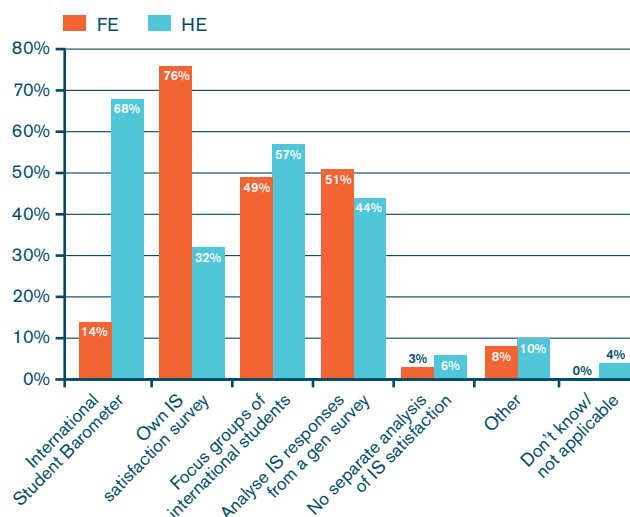
Thirteen respondents (11% of the total) said that their students' union had a full-time elected sabbatical International Student Officer (although this is surprisingly high, so some respondents may have thought this was a question about international students having been elected to other sabbatical posts). A further 41% reported having an elected part-time International Student Officer.

34% of respondents said there was an International Students Committee in their institution or union.

Institutions are actively making use of surveys and focus groups as a means of obtaining feedback. 68% of HEIs and 14% of FECs participate in the i-Graduate International Student Barometer, and 76% of FECs and 32% of HEIs run their own international student surveys. Additionally or alternatively, 51% of FECs and 44% of HEIs analyse international student responses to satisfaction surveys sent to all students. 54% of respondents used focus groups.

Figure 27

How does your institution seek international student feedback? (Multiple responses allowed)



Want to improve your practice?

See the Internationalising Students Union audit toolkit at <http://bit.ly/e5e5hP>.

The impact of national policies

The open-ended survey responses confirmed that the Points Based System has had a huge resource implication.

The introduction of PBS has had a significant impact on our budget as we have needed to invest in new systems/processes as well as additional staffing resources. This includes purchasing document manager at a cost of approximately £20,000 to ensure we are compliant in relation to storing visa/passport copies; a newly created role of Head of International Compliance and an International Compliance Officer post. The demand for visa advice has grown dramatically, in the academic year in 2008/09, our International Student Advice team dealt with 5,501 enquiries which compares with 8,215 the following year 2009/10.

PBS requires a lot more staff time: student batch appointments (now 45 mins each instead of 20 mins previously), visa workshops (which we've had to introduce (2 x 2hrs per wk) and extra admin time (we now use a 0.5 administrator to help with this). We have also spent a lot more time trying to correct UKBA administrative errors on visas decisions and BRPs. (There is no clear contact for this which doesn't help.) As a result of the extra time spent on PBS tier 4, other services have had to be reduced.

This theme of focusing more resources on immigration advice having a detrimental effect on other services for international students is widespread:

PBS and all the changes introduced thereafter have made it difficult to spend much time on pastoral care or integration - most time is spent giving visa advice.

PBS affected the range of international student services due to the immigration responsibilities of educational institutions (sponsor licence requirements) which results in less resources/staff time being available for welfare issues.

... it has created a huge volume of work, across the institution, often very frustrating and the number of students who have had applications refused for minor reasons has drastically increased which in turn leads

to further advice work. This has created a strain on the service. It has also meant that non-immigration advice work has suffered.

I am a 0.5FTE International Student Adviser. who also now deals with the CAS administration. All other welfare and social events have been dropped for this reason. Staff and financial resources are extremely tight and system is far from ideal. I feel I can no longer advise students on immigration as I do not have enough time to read and absorb the new regulations for applications and feel there is a conflict of interest as I also advise my institution on their responsibilities under Tier 4.

The last comment picks up on the way PBS potentially changes the role of the international student adviser and is echoed by another respondent who talks of PBS "altering fundamentally the relationship between international student support services and students".

Some institutions also reported that the additional workload from Tier 4 meant they had to stop offering the Batch Service, so even an increased level of resource going into immigration advice was not enough to prevent a decrease in service levels.

Some respondents reported positive as well as negative aspects to the introduction of PBS:

The introduction of PBS did prompt a restructure and increased levels of work. As a result we recruited a second member of staff who provides International Advice in conjunction with funding. I felt PBS affected the International Advice service in a positive way as it elevated the profile of provision for International students and led to service improvements and better resources.

The introduction of the PBS has meant that new systems have had to be implemented in the University and while it did create a lot of work, it did bring positive change in terms of course start and end dates being properly set, and other processes. It did create anxiety for international students and resulted in increased workload for international student advisers.

PBS – positively – interlinking the offer of accommodation to Tier 4 sponsorship has sharpened business processes. In general, many teams who had not previously worked together have developed tight and effective working processes and established good working relationships. It has also raised the profile and status of international student advisers – staff in the institution now have an understanding of the work, the complexity of it and the level of responsibility. At Institution X, it led to the decision to take on immigration advice work within the university and create two new posts (advice had previously been done in the Students' Union). This has improved quality of immigration advice – in particular to applicants who were previously less well supported.

By contrast, the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI2) was widely welcomed for contributing to the quality of the international student experience, although it would appear some respondents were only partially aware of its range of activities. Some of its impact was generic, relating to generally available resources or its influence on thinking:

PMI has focussed support staff thinking.

The PMI has had a positive effect on the student experience in increasing resources for advisers and for students. The Prepare For Success website in particular has been very useful.

PMI has generated excellent ideas for improving support for students. We have adopted a variety of ideas and would like to do more if we had the resources, both human and financial.

PMI – resources useful and have saved time in implementing.

But in addition, quite a number of respondents mentioned specific benefits of having received small grants towards activities including partnerships, pilot projects and staff development, for example:

PMI2 The outcomes of the student experience project have had an indirect but very positive effect on our

international students. We have placed the International Student Calculator on the college system in an area that can be accessed by students and encouraged them to make full use of it. In addition, the International Manager has reviewed the outcomes of the Pilot Projects and Overseas Study Visits and has analysed and disseminated information and good practice that she feels will help colleagues to provide an improved service for international students. The FE Partnerships strand has also enabled the college to significantly improve the quality of the service we offer to Chinese students. This funding has made it possible for staff to travel to China in order to undertake collaborative project work with Chinese colleges and schools. This experience has given them an insight into the Chinese system of education that they have used to inform decisions on curriculum delivery and support for students from China.

Future plans

A number of institutions spoke of planning to work much more closely in future with their students' union, with other departments, other local or regional institutions and local communities. Some wrote of planning to use technology more for online services for students. Given the current climate, it is a testament to the creativity and energy of staff that they can contemplate such developments. It gives grounds to hope that future benchmarking studies will show new ways in which the sector continues to develop and improve for the benefit of all international students coming to the UK.



UKCISA Training

Training courses

UKCISA offers a range of training courses including:

- eight immigration courses for new and experienced staff covering the student immigration system, refusals, compliance, work after study, and dependants
- fee status assessment, Student Support, funding and hardship
- student services including cultural awareness, advisory skills, orientation and mental health

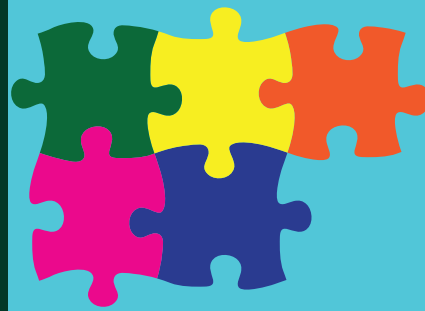
For full details of all our courses, see www.ukcisa.org.uk/training

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UKCISA members also have free access to our online training for new staff.

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www.ukcisa.org.uk/training/new_to_international.php



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