

What do prospective students think about international students?

HEPI and Kaplan commissioned YouthSight to ask higher education applicants for their views on international students and staff.

Introduction

In recent years, the UK has recruited more international students than any other country apart from the United States. Students from outside the UK make up 18% of the total student body.

But the competition for international students is fierce, particularly among English-speaking countries. In 2012/13, the number of international students from outside the European Union in the UK higher education system fell for the first time since records began in 1994/95. While the numbers have grown again since, the British Council have warned of 'a continued decline' in the UK's market share of new international students.

This record may partly reflect mixed messages from the Coalition Government. While the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills have adopted an ambitious *International Education Strategy*, the Home Office have refused to remove international students from their target to reduce net migration.

Liam Byrne, the Shadow Minister for Universities, Science and Skills and a former Minister for Borders and Immigration, recently told *Total Politics* magazine:

people know that [international] students are good for Britain, not bad for Britain, they know that they are critical for our future influence in the world, they know that they bring money into our country and they also know that they create a richer and more interesting classroom for their own kids.

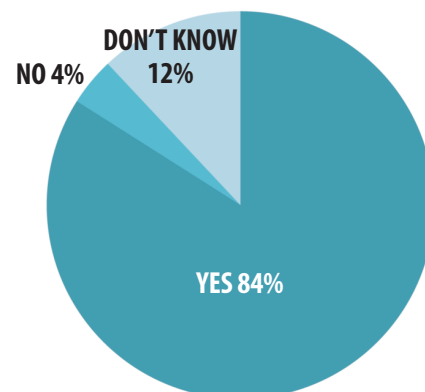
A great deal is known about the economic benefits to the UK of attracting international students, which have been estimated at over £10 billion a year. Less is known about the educational benefits and what home students think of studying alongside people from other countries.

HEPI and Kaplan wanted to see if people on the threshold of higher education believe international students can help create a better learning environment. We used the YouthSight Applicant Omnibus to poll 500 young people who have applied to attend higher education in the current UCAS application round.

Expectations

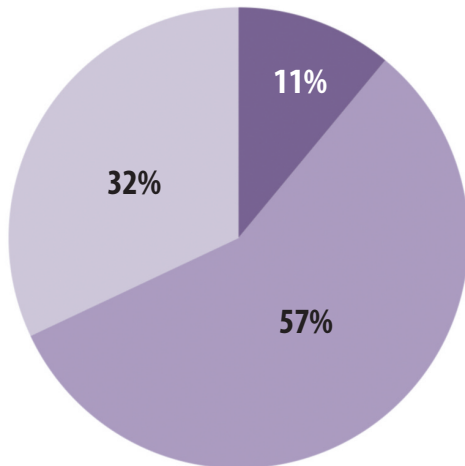
The vast majority of people – 17 out of every 20 – applying for higher education expect to study alongside students from other countries. The number who do not expect to is negligible at less than one in 20.

Do you expect to study alongside international students at university?



This partly, but not entirely, reflects people's experience before reaching higher education: only one-third (32%) of higher education applicants have never studied alongside international students before.

Have you studied alongside international students before?



- Lots: there are many international students studying at my school/college
- Some: there are some international students studying at my school/college
- None: there are no international students studying at my school/college

Applicants to higher education believe their own education will be improved by studying alongside students from other countries.

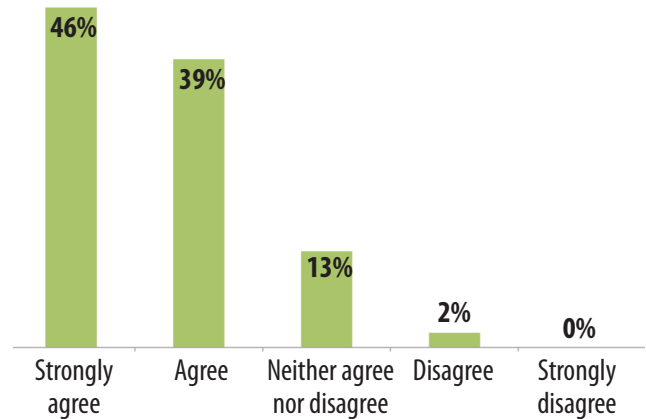
- 87% agree or strongly agree it will give them a better world view, with only 2% expressing any disagreement
- 76% agree or strongly agree it will help them develop a global network, with only 5% expressing any disagreement
- 68% agree or strongly agree it will provide them with opportunities to practise their foreign language skills, with only 11% expressing any disagreement

Working in a global environment

The applicants were asked whether studying alongside international students would prepare them for working in a global environment: 85% of

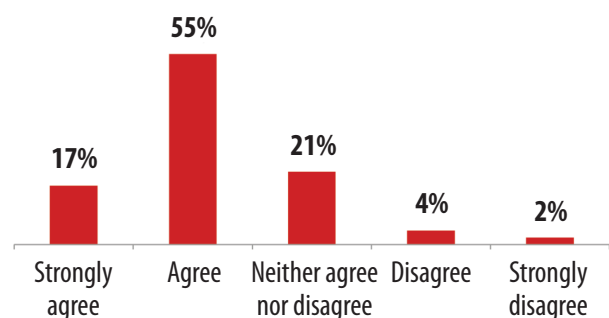
respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this proposition. Fewer than 10 people out of the total 500 respondents expressed any disagreement with it.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that studying alongside students from other countries when you reach university will be useful preparation for working in a global environment



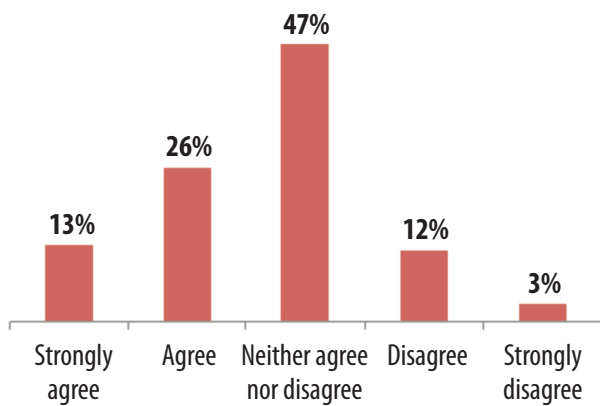
Respondents were told, 'Many university students in the UK study alongside international students.' They were then given a series of statements, positive and negative, on how this might affect their learning. A large majority (72%) expressed agreement or strong agreement with the notion that students have to be more aware of cultural sensitivities when studying alongside people from other countries.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that students have to be more aware of cultural sensitivities



Intriguingly, there is lower support for the idea that studying alongside international students will improve respondents' employment prospects, with nearly half (47%) saying they neither agree nor disagree with this idea.

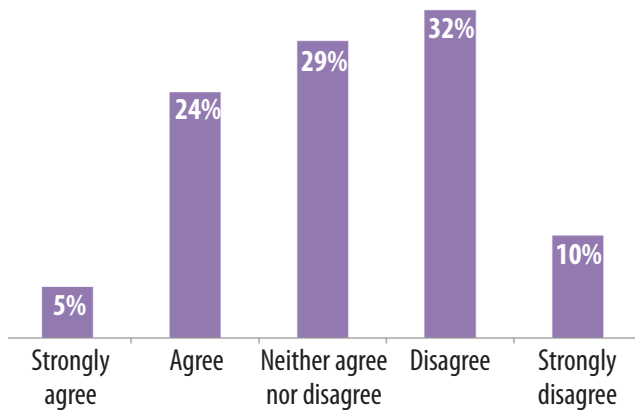
To what extent do you agree or disagree that it would improve my employment prospects



Concerns

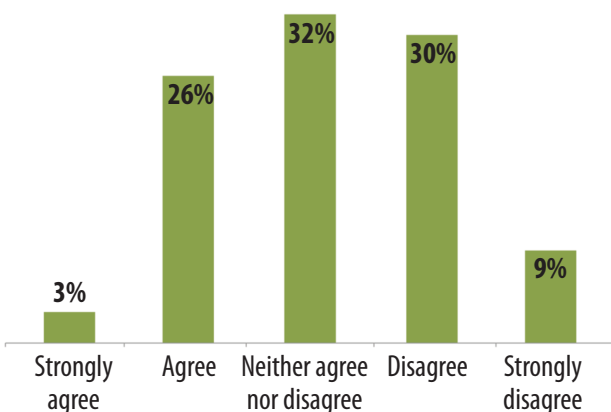
Overall, the applicants are optimistic but not naïve in their approach to international students.

To what extent do you think students who don't have English as their first language would slow down the class



Almost one-in-three (29%) worry that learning alongside people for whom English is not their first language could slow down a class – although a bigger proportion (42%) disagree or strongly disagree with this notion.

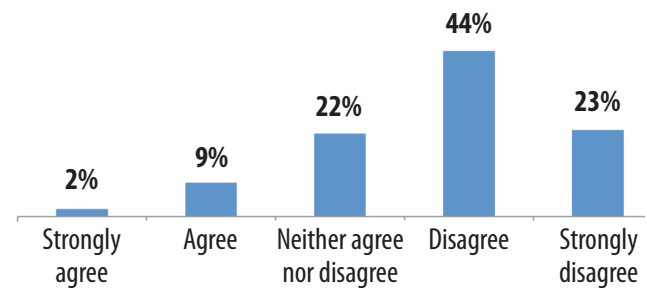
To what extent do you agree or disagree that international students require more attention from the lecturer



Similarly, 29% of applicants agree or strongly agree that international students need more attention from teaching staff, although 39% dispute this.

However, two out of every three students (67%) disagree or strongly disagree that 'Academic discussions would be of a lower quality' when studying alongside international students.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that academic discussions would be of a lower quality

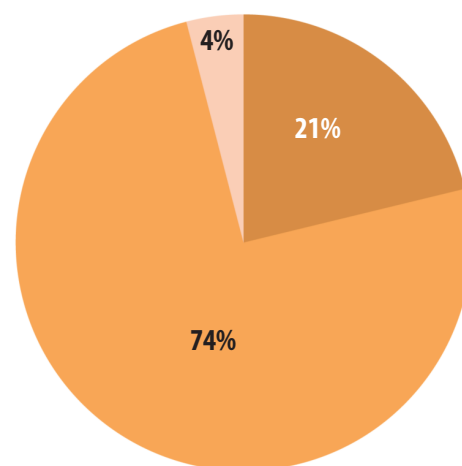


So it seems UK students are keen to hear the points of view of people with different social, cultural and economic backgrounds even though this might risk affecting the class in other ways too.

Staffing

Higher education is increasingly a global endeavour, which means there are more international staff as well as more international students. So we also tested the applicants' views on teaching staff.

All universities have a number of professors and lecturers that are originally from other countries. Which of the following statements most closely reflects your feelings about this?



- I hope that some of my lecturers are from other countries
- I don't mind either way where my lecturers come from
- I hope I don't have lecturers from other countries

Three-quarters (74%) do not mind where their lecturers hail from, while one-in-five (21%) hope some of their lecturers are from abroad. This could be interpreted positively as students simply wanting the best lecturers irrespective of their background or it could be interpreted more negatively as applicants giving little regard to international experience among those teaching them.

Conclusion

The higher education sector is seemingly at one in wanting the UK to offer the warmest possible welcome to international students. There is also evidence to suggest that, while a majority of British voters do worry about the impact of mass migration, only a minority regard legitimate international students as migrants.

This new research testing the views of people who are hoping to join the higher education sector in the near future shows they are positively attracted by the possibility of learning alongside people from the rest of the world. While not naïve about some of the potential challenges in the classroom, they are international in outlook and see more positives than negatives.

Methodology

Fieldwork for this research was conducted by YouthSight between 6th and 7th of February 2015. The sample consisted of 500 interviews with applicants, representative of the UK in terms of gender, age and school type. Further details on the methodology are available from YouthSight or HEPI.

HEPI was established in 2002 to influence the higher education debate with evidence. It is a charity that is UK-wide, independent and non-partisan.

Kaplan International Colleges opened the first university pathway college in the UK, Nottingham Trent International College, in 2005. Kaplan has since built a network of eight pathway colleges in partnership with 12 leading universities in the UK and a number of other pathway and preparation programmes abroad, offering foundation and pre-masters courses for international students looking to gain entry into Kaplan's partner universities. Preparation courses equip students with the academic skills, key subject knowledge and English language ability they need to progress on to university. In 2014, Kaplan recruited more than 6,500 international students for entry to UK universities. Kaplan International Colleges is part of Kaplan Inc., which is a subsidiary of Graham Holdings Company.