

Broadening Horizons: The value of overseas experience

Executive summary



THE PREMISE

The US and the UK have traditionally experienced an imbalance of mobile students, with the number of international students far outnumbering home students who elect to study abroad. In order to address the issue, the UK Strategy for Outward Mobility and Generation Study Abroad in the US aim to promote overseas study to ensure home students are able to develop the broad range of skills fundamental to success in a growing global knowledge economy.

In Broadening Horizons: The value of the overseas experience, we examine UK and US student sentiment regarding study abroad and what steps can be taken to encourage further mobility.



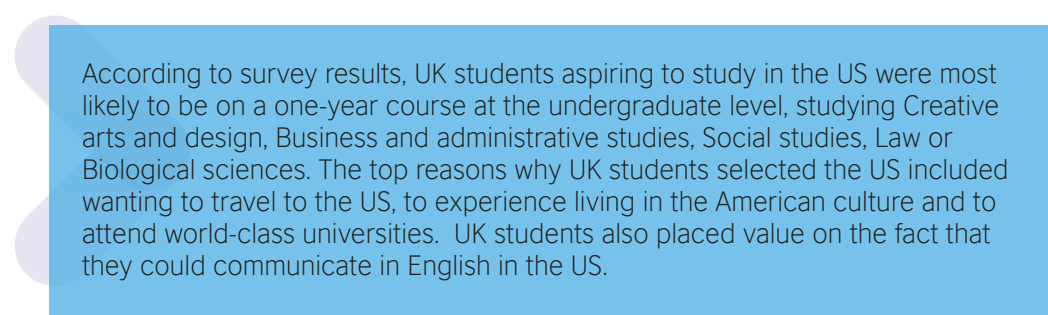
SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The British Council administered surveys in the UK and the US in order to understand UK and US students' current perceived drivers of and barriers to overseas study. The surveys were distributed and completed in March and April of 2015. A total of 7,481 responses were collected: 2,856 from full-time UK-domiciled students and 4,625 from full-time students who were American citizens or permanent residents.




UK AND US STUDENT PROFILES

Both UK and US students interested in study abroad selected the other country as the top destination choice. The research looks in depth at what each set of students aspire to.



According to survey results, UK students aspiring to study in the US were most likely to be on a one-year course at the undergraduate level, studying Creative arts and design, Business and administrative studies, Social studies, Law or Biological sciences. The top reasons why UK students selected the US included wanting to travel to the US, to experience living in the American culture and to attend world-class universities. UK students also placed value on the fact that they could communicate in English in the US.



US students interested in study abroad in the UK were most likely to want to do it for one semester at the undergraduate level, studying Business and administrative studies, Creative arts and design, Education, or Computer science. The main drivers to want to study in the UK, according to survey results, include wanting to travel to the UK and to experience living in British culture, though US students also indicated that the ability to communicate in English was a top consideration.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Thirty-four per cent of UK students and fifty-four per cent of US students expressed interest in study abroad
- The majority of UK students and US students not interested in or undecided about overseas study stated that they did want to travel and live abroad
- For both UK and US students, the cultural experience of studying abroad was a significantly stronger driver than academic- or employability-related factors
- Students who had previously studied overseas were more likely to draw links between employability and study abroad and want to live and work abroad
- UK students were more likely to be motivated to study abroad by factors related to employability than US students
- UK and US students who had previously studied abroad were less concerned about overseas tuition being high than those who hadn't studied abroad
- Costs, personal well-being and a lack of language skills were the main perceived deterrents to study abroad and the top concerns for those who aspire to overseas study for both UK and US students
- UK and US students not interested in study abroad would most be incentivised to change their minds if they have help with funding and foreign language training
- Forty-two per cent of UK respondents stated they wanted to study in non-Anglophone countries
- Sixty-five per cent of US respondents were interested in non-Anglophone destinations
- US students were more likely to be satisfied with the amount of information they had prior to making their overseas study experience
- Thirty-five per cent of UK students and sixty-three per cent of US students who had already studied abroad knew about government-sponsored programmes for overseas study

CONCLUSION

UK and US students had notably similar sentiments with regards to overseas study. With travel and adventure as top motivators and costs and language skills the main concerns, the overall value of study abroad as a tool to build personal, academic and professional skills was less recognised. Those who had studied abroad were more able to observe the broader benefits of outward mobility, including increased career prospects and a more global outlook.

In order for students considering overseas study to understand the value of the experience, information available should highlight not only the cultural outcomes but the skills that could be gained, alongside practical information addressing opportunities, programmes and scholarships. Ultimately, a more comprehensive approach to information delivery should be administered, inclusive of students, faculty and employers sharing their experience to incentivise students to consider study abroad in any of its forms.