
How International Student Mobility (ISM) builds trust and long-term relationships around the world

Report for the
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1. Aims and Objectives

- The research on which this report is based sought to generate, collate and synthesise evidence of whether and how large-scale International Student Mobility (ISM), as a key dimension of the wider internationalisation of tertiary education, builds trust, influence and long-term relationships around the world.
- The building of trust, influence and long-term relationships around the world is essentially the aim of Cultural Relations which was defined within the Cultural Value Project (2018) as:



Cultural Relations are understood as reciprocal transnational interactions between two or more cultures, encompassing a range of activities conducted by state and/or non-state actors within the space of culture and civil society. The overall outcomes of cultural relations are greater connectivity, better mutual understanding, more and deeper relationships, mutually beneficial transactions and enhanced sustainable dialogue between people and cultures, shaped through engagement and attraction rather than coercion

British Council, Cultural Value Project, 2018

- For the British Council, as the UK's cultural relations organisation, the aim of the research can therefore be restated in more simple terms as:
 - To generate, collate and synthesise evidence of whether and how large-scale International Student Mobility (ISM) exemplifies Cultural Relations
 - To identify and understand the benefits that flow from these Cultural Relations aspects of ISM.

2. Background

- Crossing international borders to access educational opportunities is not new (see, for example, Tournès and Scott-Smith, 2018 for a historical review).
- The Rhodes scholarship scheme at the University of Oxford (initially restricted to male applicants from countries that are today within the Commonwealth, Germany and the United States) was founded in 1902. In the 1930s more than 17,000 international students were studying in Paris, at that time considered to be the intellectual centre of western culture. During the Cold War, many Asian, African, Latin American and Middle Eastern students travelled to study in the Soviet Union, often encouraged and financially supported by the Soviet government. The Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University was founded in 1960 in Moscow *"to give an education to people who had liberated themselves from colonialist oppression."*
- What is new, and what has become a defining feature of tertiary education in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, is large-scale International Student Mobility (ISM) on a global basis; the mass movement of predominantly young people across borders to access, on a self-funded basis, courses previously available almost exclusively to domestic students in the host countries.
- An Internationally Mobile Student (IMS) is defined by UNESCO (2023) as *"an individual who has physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective to participate in educational activities in a destination country, where the destination country is different from his or her country of origin."*
- The number of Internationally Mobile Students increased from 1.1 million in 1985 to 4.1 million in 2013 and had reached 6.3m in 2020 according to UNESCO. The global Covid-19 pandemic halted the historic growth trend but evidence suggests that there has been a further surge in IMS numbers now that the pandemic has ended. Most forecasts envisage further strong growth.
- The global market for IMS has a number of important features:
 - The host country market is dominated by OECD countries of which the four large English-speaking countries – USA, UK, Australia, Canada - are pre-eminent. These four countries, alongside Germany, France, China and Russia, account for more than half of all enrolled IMS globally but the number of countries actively encouraging inbound IMS is rapidly increasing. This number now includes all EU countries, those such as India and China which have historically been identified primarily as source countries and a widening group globally including Singapore, UAE, Turkey, Indonesia and South Africa. One of the defining images of the early days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was that of international students from Asia and Africa, many enrolled in Ukraine's schools of dentistry and medicine, fleeing from the conflict. On the flip side, a significant number of students from Ukraine are currently studying in China.
 - Students from Asia form the largest group of international students enrolled in tertiary education programmes at all levels, totalling 58 per cent of all mobile students in OECD countries in 2020. Over 30 per cent of internationally mobile students in OECD countries come from two countries, China and India.
 - In total across OECD countries, IMS accounted for 7 per cent of total enrolment in tertiary programmes in 2020 but in all but a few countries, the share of IMS enrolled in tertiary programmes increases with the level of tertiary education. Across the OECD, IMS account for 14 per cent of total enrolments at Masters level and above.
- UK Higher Education Providers (HEPs) hosted 680,000 Internationally Mobile Students in academic year 2021-2022 according to HESA.
- In 2021, a refreshed International Education Strategy from the UK government had restated a commitment to host 600,000 IMS by 2030; so that target was reached ten years earlier than originally envisaged. The Department for Business and Trade's International Education Team and the Department of Education are the co-leads of the International Education Strategy and are working closely with the British Council, the sector and other government departments on international student mobility, among other priorities.
- This *massification* (Marginson, 2022) of International Student Mobility can clearly be seen as one important element within wider patterns of globalisation and global mobility underway in the 21st century.
- It is against this background that the present research seeks to answer questions about the wider Cultural Relations and soft power impacts of such a large-scale movement of young people.

3. Research Activities

- The research programme on which this report is based comprised five main activities:
 - A literature review,
 - In-depth interviews with 9 British Council sector experts,
 - In-depth interviews with 23 ISM alumni,
 - In-depth interviews with 17 external HE-sector stakeholders,
 - 2 further external stakeholders provided written input rather than undertake an interview.
 - Re-analysis of the British Council's Global Perceptions Survey data (2021). In the remainder of this report, this data is referred to in shorthand as 'the G20 data'
- The **literature review** included academic and practitioner literature. Much of the practitioner literature has been produced by the British Council. Several of the external stakeholders who were consulted provided further suggestions for literature to consult.
- As part of the scoping phase of the research, **interview consultations** were held with 9 regional and sector experts from across the British Council. These provided a range of perspectives and also suggestions for literature to consult. One of the nine interviews focused on understanding the latest iteration of the British Council G20 data. The full list of British Council consultees is provided in Appendix 1
- **23 interviews were held with ISM alumni.** These alumni were chosen to represent a mix of source and host countries and to have finished their international study at least three (and in most cases five) years previously, so that the longer-term impact of ISM could be assessed. Some had received scholarships and some had studied in multiple international countries. The interviews were conducted to a pre-determined discussion guide and lasted 30-40 minutes. The profile of alumni interviewed is provided in Appendix 2.
- Re-analysis of qualitative feedback from international students within Impact Stories' International Student Insight Service (ISI) was also undertaken. The ISI service contains an original research element among international students in the UK, a benchmarking element for HEPs and a student enrolment forecasting element.
- **The 17 external HE-sector stakeholder interviews**, each lasting 30-40 minutes, were held with a mix of academics, sector body representatives, Government agencies and HEPs. Managers with responsibility for Internationalisation at 6 UK HEPs and one FE College were interviewed.
- In addition, one further academic provided written input with suggested references and one further UK HEP provided written input rather than undertake an interview.
- The full list of external stakeholders consulted is provided in Appendix 3.
- The final element of the research consisted of **re-analysis of the British Council's G20 data.** Through this established research study, the British Council explores a wide range of issues around Cultural Relations, soft power and perceptions of the UK around the world.
- The G20 research surveys educated young people (aged 18-34, with at least secondary education). A 1,000 nationally representative (online) sample per country is sourced from public panels across each of the G20 countries. There is a boosted sample for the UK (2,600 in the 2021 wave) to allow for devolved country analysis. The 2021 wave also included respondents from five non-G20 countries; Ukraine, Egypt, Pakistan, Nigeria, Kenya.
- The analysis for this report draws on data collected in the 2021 wave of the G20 study (fieldwork September/October 2021).
- The particular value of the G20 data for the analysis in this report is that all of the young people within the sample are asked whether they have studied in any of the other G20 countries, including in the UK. It is, therefore, possible to identify ISM alumni within the sample on a self-reported basis.

Analysis of British Council G20 data

To exemplify wider patterns, the analysis of British Council G20 data used within this report is focused on China as a source country for Internationally Mobile Students and the UK as a host country.

China is the single largest source country for IMS globally and the UK is second only to USA in terms of the number of IMS hosted. China is the largest source country for the UK as measured by first year enrolments in 2021/2022 recorded by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). China also has no direct language or colonial ties to the UK which might otherwise impact the results.

Each global combination of source and host country for IMS has its own particular context of geography, history, trade, language and culture which can impact the specific results. The focus on China and the UK provides a consistent set of data and exemplifies findings which are broadly representative of other combinations of source and host country within the data. However, the findings for individual country combinations may sometimes differ in detail.

- Strictly, the question within the G20 survey includes those who have studied internationally ‘*at school, college or University*’, so it not a pure sample of ISM alumni. However, in the case of young Chinese studying in the UK it is likely to be largely tertiary level internationally mobile students, including some who have studied at both UK independent schools and at a UK HEP. [In comparison, the sample of Italian or French young people self-identifying within the G20 data as having studied in the UK would most likely include many ELT students].
 - Much of the analysis of G20 data presented in this report compares the characteristics and perceptions of four, mutually exclusive sub-groups of young Chinese based on their international exposure, using a cross-section of the following two questions:
 - Q15a.1. Have visited the UK/any of the G20 countries,
 - Q15a.3. Have studied (at school, college or University) in the UK/any of the G20 countries.
- The four sub-groups are defined as:
 1. Young people who have studied in the UK – defined as those who (Q15a.3.) *Have studied (at school, college or University) in the UK;*
 2. Young people who have visited, but not studied in the UK – defined as those who (Q15a.1.) *Have visited the UK and who (Q15a.3.) Have not studied (at school, college or University) in the UK;*
 3. Young people who have studied abroad but have not visited or studied in the UK – defined as those who (Q15a.1.) *Have not visited the UK and who (Q15a.3.) Have not studied (at school, college or University) in the UK and (Q15a.3.) Have studied in (at school, college or University) at least one of the G20 countries, other than in the UK;*
 4. Young people who have not studied abroad – defined as those who (Q15a.3.) *Have not studied in (at school, college or University) any of the G20 countries.*



4. Dimensions of International Student Mobility

- The focus of this report is young people who have left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study in a tertiary education institution.
- This broad group can be subdivided into several subgroups.
- The largest sub-group, and the main focus of this research, is degree mobile international students. i.e. students who will graduate in their host country. Two features of this sub-group are particularly relevant:
 - **Long length of stay:** According to UNESCO, the length of stay in the host country for IMS is “... typically more than one year and up to 7 years.”
 - **Self-funding status:** Most Internationally Mobile Students are paying tuition fees (as well as the costs of living and accommodation in the host country) out of their own family resources or loans. Course fees are often higher than those charged to domestic students.
- Funding status is important because it highlights the strong motivation which most IMS have around access to educational excellence, improved employability and career enhancement. It also means that even in an age of mass ISM it remains true that the majority of Internationally Mobile Students still come from relative elites, economically and culturally, within their origin country societies (Gu and Schweisfurth, 2015). Wider sections of those societies cannot yet afford to participate in ISM.
- While this orientation to elites raises important questions of equity, it does mean that source countries are educating the young people who are relatively more likely to rise to positions of influence within their origin country or elsewhere. A recent Economist article exemplifies the phenomenon in relation to China.
- In contrast, **Credit Mobile students** are students who are temporarily studying abroad to gain academic credit within the framework of a tertiary education programme at their home country institutions, most commonly at UG level. The majority of credit mobile programmes are for less than one year – and are often far shorter – and in many cases, the students receive support which means that the funding requirement is often not significantly greater than the costs of the domestic programme on which they are already engaged.
- Erasmus and other EU programmes accounted for the vast majority (69 per cent) of credit mobile graduates in OECD countries in 2020 and on average across the European countries that are members of the OECD (EU22), 10 per cent of 2020 graduates had benefitted from credit mobility.
- A considerable amount of external research and literature on the impacts of international study focuses on short-term, credit mobile rather than long-term degree mobile students. For example, the Erasmus+ mid-term review (2014-2020) commissioned by the European Commission found Erasmus+ students to have high levels of awareness of the value of cultural differences as well as greater confidence as a result of the experience.
- A further sub-group which receives a considerable amount of attention within academic and practitioner literature is scholarship-funded international students. While many IMS receive some small level of scholarship or bursary funding, often from their host HEP, a minority receive the near 100 per cent funding which makes the difference for non-affluent families between being able to study abroad and not.
- There are many scholarship programmes and all the main host countries such as USA (e.g. Fulbright), UK (e.g. Chevening), Germany (DAAD) offer them. Many other countries, including Saudi Arabia, China and Brazil have run programmes of significant scale to sponsor their domestic students to study internationally. All of these programmes have specific objectives aligned to their funding which are typically around issues such as capacity building, leadership development or values exchange.
- Inbound (host-country funded) scholarship programmes are typically designed with an overarching soft power objective and through their funding provision can create a sense of gratitude and obligation among recipients that is potentially absent from self-funded ISM.



Today, over 20 per cent of Central Committee members—the 370 most powerful party officials in China—have had some foreign education, mostly at Western universities. That is up from 6 per cent two decades ago, according to Cheng Li of the Brookings Institution, a think-tank in Washington. Eight of the 24 members of the Politburo have studied in Western countries, the most ever by far.

The Economist, March 9th, 2023

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Living internationally for education makes you develop an unconscious bias and inclination towards the host country. It all boils down to a positive experience in the country. Because our studies were sponsored by the country, we tend to say good things about them

Japan Alum, Nepal

- Many scholarship programmes, such as the Mastercard Foundation Scholarships at Edinburgh University offered to students from Africa, also provide specific cultural integration and network building events for scholars while in the host country; activities which are not necessarily available for most self-funded IMS.
- In 2016, Wilton Park held a specific conference on how to maximise the impact from international scholarships and in its report wrote:

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International scholarships are evidently beneficial; scholars are an important source of talent, skills, and diverse thought to countries providing scholarships. Scholarships are also effective tools in promoting and enhancing a country's soft power, investing in future leaders, providing access and equity, and increasing research excellence in a nation's academic institutions.

Wilton Park, 2016

- Matt Mawer (2018), formerly of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, has written an important review of the impact of scholarship programmes based on evaluations undertaken between 2006 -2016.

5. The different impacts of International Student Mobility

- In its 2022 report, *Education at a Glance*, the OECD summarised the drivers of mass ISM as follows:

“

Many factors at the individual, institutional, national and global levels drive patterns of international student mobility. These include personal ambitions and aspirations for better employment prospects, a lack of high-quality higher educational institutions at home, the capacity of higher education institutions abroad to attract talent and government policies to encourage cross-border mobility for education.

Bhandari, Robles and Farrugia, 2018

“

The needs of increasingly knowledge-based and innovation-driven economies have spurred demand for tertiary education worldwide, while increasing wealth in emerging economies has prompted the children of the growing middle classes to seek educational opportunities abroad. At the same time, economic (e.g. costs of international flights), technological (e.g. the spread of the Internet and social media enabling contacts to be maintained across borders) and cultural factors (e.g. use of English as a common working and teaching language) have contributed to making international study substantially more affordable and easier to access than in the past.

OECD, 2022

- This summary highlights that the phenomenon of mass ISM is being driven by both push and pull factors.
- In terms of the push factors, the OECD has identified the high-level areas of value within ISM which encourage young people to (pay to) study abroad:
 - “Studying abroad can be a way to:
 - “...access high-quality education at a prestigious institution and acquire skills that may not be taught at home (King and Sondhi, 2018),
 - It is also seen as a means of accessing career opportunities abroad and improving employability in increasingly globalised labour markets,
 - and for some, it is a first step to migrate to another country in the long-term (Crossman and Clarke, 2010[2]; Wintre et al., 2015),
 - Other motivations include the desire to expand one’s knowledge of other societies and to improve language skills, particularly English (Sánchez, Fornerino and Zhang, 2006; Wu, 2014).”
- On the pull side, the demands of young people and their parents are increasingly reflected in implicit or explicit national strategies oriented to internationally mobile students.
- In a discussion paper written nearly twenty years ago, the OECD (2004) identified four, broad national approaches to cross-border education which it saw emerging. These approaches map on to four broad areas of value or impact to which ISM contribute. Importantly, the OECD emphasised that these approaches/areas of value were not mutually exclusive and arguably in the twenty years since the report was written, the overlap between these approaches in national strategies has become even greater.
 - **The mutual understanding approach** encompasses political, cultural, academic and development aid goals,
 - **The skilled migration approach** shares the goals of the mutual understanding approach but gives stronger emphasis to the recruitment of selected international students and tries to attract talented students to work in the host country’s knowledge economy, or render its higher education and research sectors more competitive,

- **The revenue-generating approach** shares the rationales of the mutual understanding and skilled migration approaches, but offers higher education services on a full-fee basis, without public subsidies,
- **The capacity building approach** encourages the use of foreign post-secondary education, however delivered, as a quick way to build an emerging country's capacity.
- In most host countries, including the UK, each of these four approaches is now represented to some extent in implicit or explicit national strategies for attracting Internationally Mobile Students and for developing associated scholarship programmes.
- For example, the economic value of ISM to the UK economy through the revenue-generating approach is tracked through research and analysis commissioned by HEPI and Universities UK (London Economics, 2021).
- The research underlying this current report focuses on the impact and value of ISM realised through its Cultural Relations dimensions which sit broadly within what the OECD terms the **mutual understanding approach**.



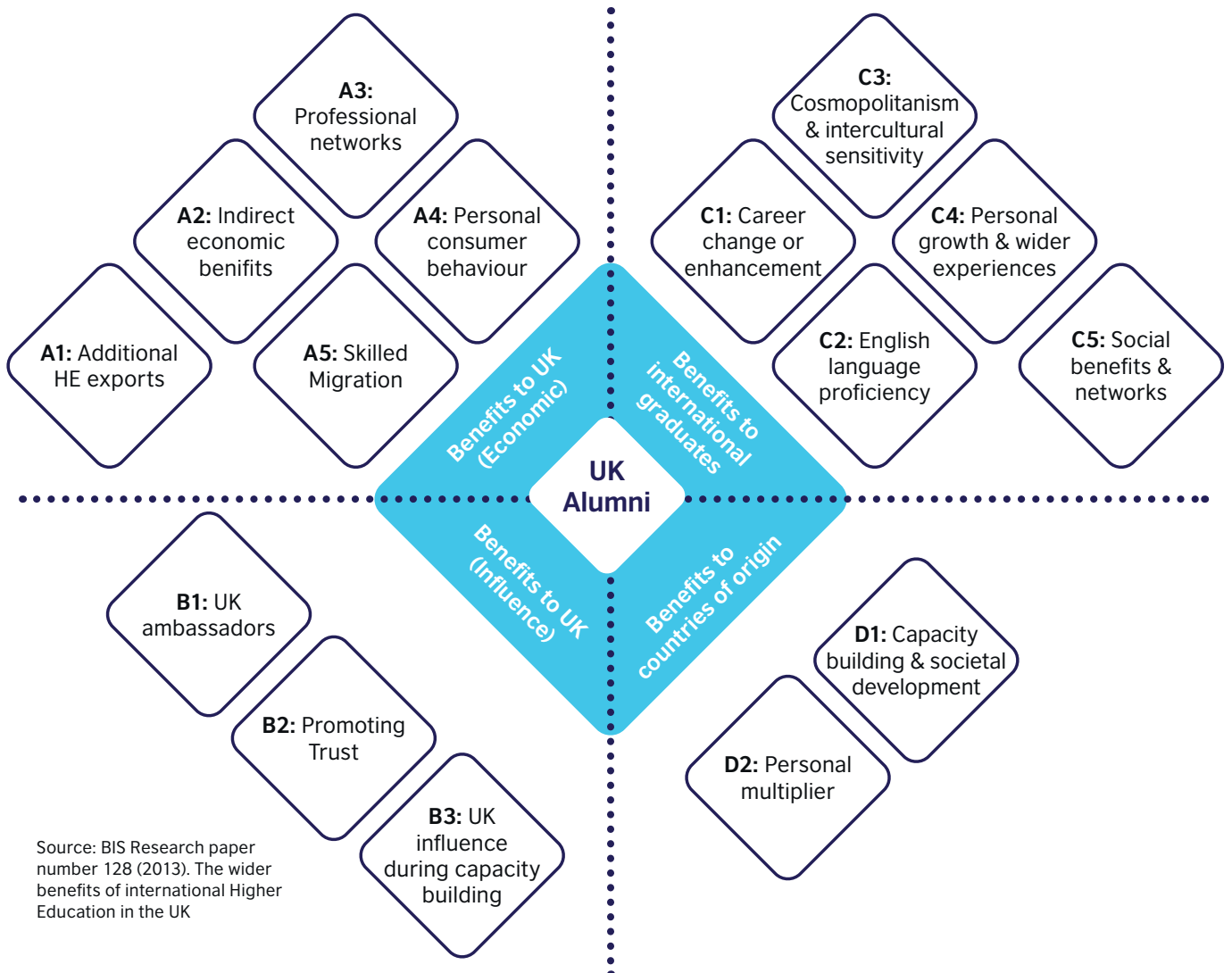
6. Frameworks for Assessment of Impact through Cultural Relations

- Within both the academic and the practitioner literature around ISM, the main focus is typically on the motivations of young people who engage in International Student Mobility and the mechanisms for influencing their choice of host country and HEP. Other literature focuses on academic achievement, career enhancement or economic value to host countries. Literature which focuses on the wider impacts and benefits of ISM around mutual understanding is far rarer (see, for example Luo, 2023 for a general review of literature around ISM).
- Within the existing literature, two frameworks are particularly useful for understanding the dimensions of Mutual Understanding. The first was developed by

the research team at the then Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) and although developed in 2013 is still a very relevant reference point. The research was commissioned to develop understanding of wider benefits of ISM to the graduates, their countries of origin and, especially, to the UK.

- The resulting benefits framework, Chart 1, was based on analysis of 100 in-depth interviews with international alumni from non-EU countries 5-10 years after graduation from the UK. Development of the framework drew on earlier work undertaken by De Wit (2002).

Chart 1: BIS Framework 2013: The Wider benefits of International Higher Education in the UK



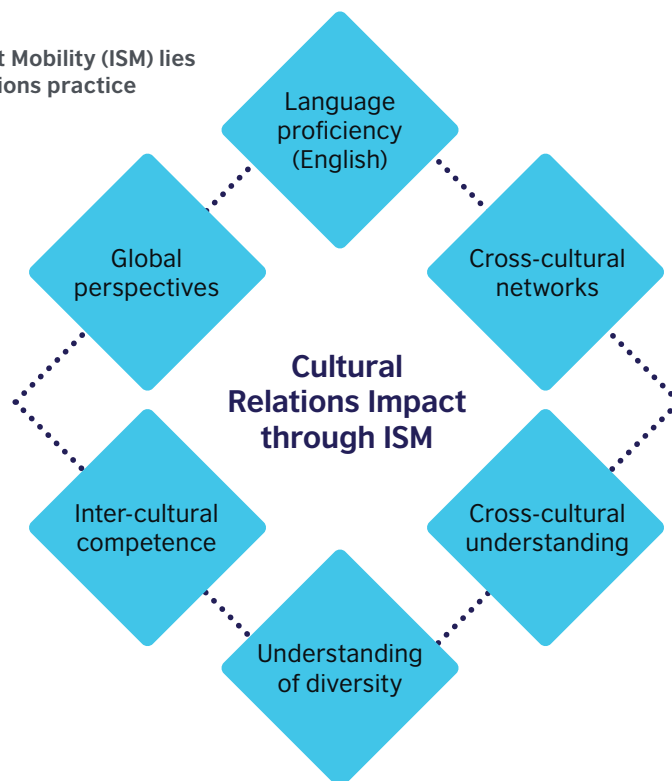
Source: BIS Research paper number 128 (2013). The wider benefits of international Higher Education in the UK

- The framework excluded analysis of direct academic benefits and any impact on UK HE institutions and the student community from the presence of international students. It identified four main areas of benefit which have strong echoes in the four OECD approaches discussed above:
 1. Economic benefit for the UK,
 2. Benefits to the country of origin,
 3. Wider benefits to international students,
 4. Influence for the UK.
- The Wider Benefits and Influence for the UK areas within the BIS framework are directly relevant to this study. Under wider benefits for international students, the authors identified five sub-categories:
 - Career change or enhancement,
 - English language proficiency,
 - Cosmopolitanism and intercultural sensitivity,
 - Personal growth and wider experiences,
 - Social benefits and networks.
- Under Influence for the UK, the authors identified three sub-categories:
 - UK ambassadors,
 - Promoting trust,
 - UK influence during capacity building.
- The second useful framework was developed by Roy et al (2019). It was developed specifically to understand the benefits of short-term international student mobility but it also has clear application to the study of longer-term ISM, too. The authors undertook a systematic literature review and identified three broad outcomes areas: cultural, personal, and employment/ career outcomes.
- Under cultural outcomes, which is the area directly relevant to this present study, they identified existing research in eight different areas:
 - cultural awareness,
 - cultural intelligence,
 - global mindedness,
 - cultural sensitivity and empathy,
 - cultural adaptability,
 - language skills,
 - cross-cultural communication skills,
 - intercultural competence.

7. Six areas of Cultural Relations Impact through ISM

- Using the frameworks discussed above and the results of the original research undertaken for this report, six key areas of impact through Cultural Relations generated by ISM have been identified (Chart 2). The evidence of impact in each of these areas is discussed below.
- The evidence is stronger in some areas than in others and the nature of the evidence – quantitative or qualitative - and the extent to which the findings of this research are supported by other academic studies differs. One of the wider conclusions of this research is that there is an opportunity to strengthen the evidence base in some areas in part by undertaking longitudinal research with a larger and more representative group of ISM alumni.

Chart 2: International Student Mobility (ISM) lies at the heart of Cultural Relations practice



Development of language proficiency

- Proficiency in a non mother-tongue language is often both a gateway to opportunities for international study and a significant outcome of the time spent studying outside the student's home country.
- The desire to study internationally is itself one of the major drivers of interest among young people in foreign languages. Most, if not all, countries which accept international students have a language proficiency requirement. Usually that requirement relates to the host country language but if not, it will typically relate to English.
- English Medium Education (EME) is becoming more and more common around the world. Countries with a native language which is not widely spoken increasingly teach courses in English and/or accept English speaking students as a way of attracting both international students and international academics. The Netherlands is an example of a country in which English has become an accepted language of tertiary education.
- The pathway to international study is of course a major driver of demand for both British Council English language courses and for British Council administered exams such as IELTS.
- International students not only study at universities but also participate in social life on campus and in the wider communities in the host country in which they live. Somebody who studies and lives in a country with a different language to their own for one to seven years is quite naturally likely to emerge from the experience with a better knowledge of the language than they had when they started. Degree level study places high demands on language ability and many countries and individual HEPs actively support language learning during study.

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Language was the key which enabled me to navigate everyday life, the people and the way things worked

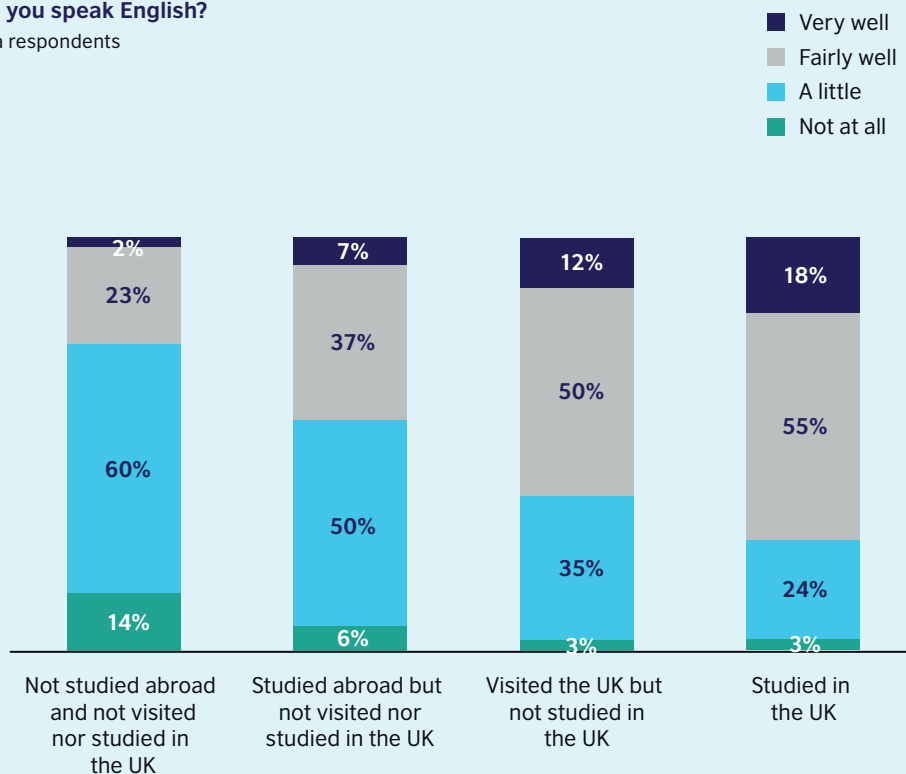
Germany Alum, Romania

- Indeed, for many students, increasing competence in the host country language is a specific desired outcome of a period of international study. Research for the GREAT/Study UK programme managed by the British Council has shown that the opportunity to improve competence in English is very often a major motivator for EU students in particular who choose to come to the UK to study.
- The British Council's G20 data provides evidence of the impact of ISM on language proficiency. To take one example, among all the young, educated Chinese in the 2021 research, 13 per cent said that they spoke Japanese proficiently. But among the young Chinese in the sample who had studied in Japan, the percentage saying they spoke Japanese proficiently rose to 44 per cent. A similar pattern is seen for almost all the other source-host country combinations within the data.
- English proficiency is explored in greater depth within the G20 research. Again, taking young Chinese as an example, Chart 3 shows that Chinese who have studied in the UK have, on average, greater self-reported proficiency in English, not only compared to young Chinese who have not studied in the UK but also compared to young Chinese who have visited the UK but not studied in the country.

Chart 3: Young people who have studied in the UK tend to speak better English

How well do you speak English?

Base: All China respondents



Source: British Council G20 research data (2021); Analysis by Impact Stories

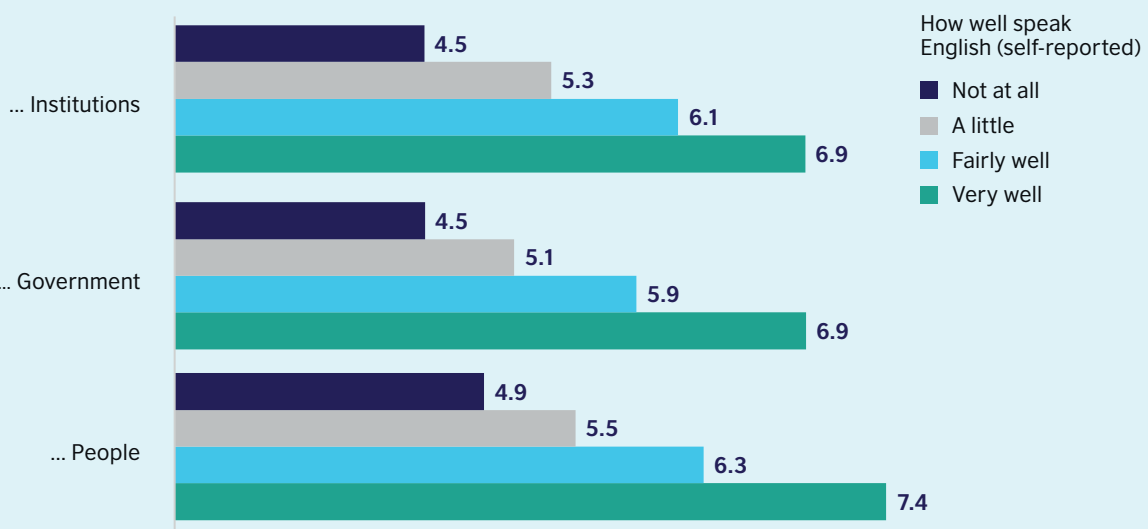
Base: All China respondents - Studied in the UK (73); Visited the UK but not studied in the UK (120); Studied abroad but not visited nor studied in the UK (247); Not studied abroad and not visited nor studied in the UK (562). Data is weighted.

- A focus of academic research into international students has been on the challenges to participation in courses on an equal footing with domestic students. Language competence has, not surprisingly, been identified as a key aspect of this challenge (see for example Andrade, 2006).
- Several studies have found that the challenges tend to decrease with time spent in country, in part as a function of an increase in competence – and possibly more importantly – confidence in the host language. This is itself part of a wider process of ‘acculturation’, an individual’s adaptation and socialisation to the host culture (García, 2001). Cheng and Erben (2012), for example, found that among Chinese graduate students in the USA, students who stayed longer had lower levels of language anxiety. The study also found that female students had lower levels of anxiety than male students and that arts students had lower levels of anxiety than science students, in part as a consequence of the greater communication demands of their course. Many HEPs now offer Foundation Courses to accelerate language learning for prospective international students.
- The data of Chart 3 also highlight another important aspect of international study. While young Chinese who have studied in the UK have the highest level of self-reported ability in English, the English ability of young Chinese who have studied elsewhere - but not in the UK - is also typically higher than that of their peers who have not studied outside the country.
- Many of those Chinese will have studied in other English-speaking countries but the same finding also applies to, for example, the young Chinese who have studied in Japan; their self-reported proficiency in English (as well as in Japanese) is higher than that of their peers. And broadly the same pattern is seen with other non English-speaking origin and host country combinations; typically, the self-reported level of English is higher for young people who have studied outside their origin country, irrespective of where they have studied and the native language of that country.
- So, international study in itself, irrespective of where it is undertaken, is associated with an increased ability in English, in part because of the spread of EME but also because of the more general trend for English to function as the language of international travel and global engagement.
- The impact of English in a wider context has been explored in great depth by the British Council over the years. English facilitates access to a wider and more international set of information resources offering a greater range of views on global topics than might be available through purely national and home language sources. It also facilitates access to wider and more diverse friendship networks, especially in the age of social media.
- As far back as 2012, the British Council’s report, Trust Pays, showed the statistical relationship between ability in English and levels of trust in the UK which flows from these types of mediating impacts. The data from the 2021 G20 research reinforces this finding (Chart 4). Again, taking young Chinese as an example, the data show there is a clear statistical relationship between self-reported ability in English and self-reported levels of trust in all three of UK Institutions, UK Government and UK People. The effect is especially noticeable at higher levels of self-reported ability in English.

Chart 4: Young people who speak English better tend to trust the UK more

To what extent do you distrust or trust from the United Kingdom?

Base: All China respondents rating the UK – mean scores (0-10 scale)



Source: British Council G20 research data (2021); Analysis by Impact Stories
 Base: All China respondents rating the UK by ability to speak English – Not at all (95-97); A little (514-518); Fairly well (325); Very well (59). Data is weighted. Data excludes Don't know. Data presented are mean score ratings on an 11-point scale where 0= Strongly distrust, 5= Neither trust nor distrust, 10= Strongly trust.

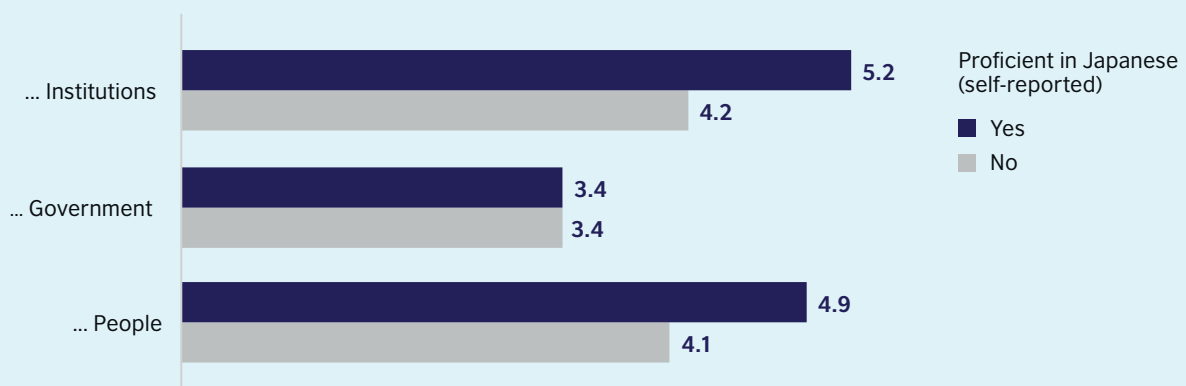
- Data on the proficiency of respondents in languages other than English is collected at a less granular level within the G20 research but there is some support for the conclusion that the relationship between knowledge of a language and levels of trust in countries speaking that language is a more universal one.
- For example, Chart 5 shows that the young Chinese who claim proficiency in Japanese tend to have higher levels of self-reported trust in People from

Japan and in Institutions from Japan, albeit there is no difference in average levels of trust in the Government of Japan. A hypothesis would be that the same mechanisms which apply to English and the UK – access to more diverse media and information sources, access to more diverse friendship networks and access to host country cultural products (films, literature, art etc.) - also apply to the case of Japanese and Japan and by extension to any combination of native language and country.

Chart 5: Young people who speak Japanese better tend to trust Japan more

To what extent do you distrust or trust from Japan?

Base: All China respondents rating Japan – mean scores (0-10 scale)



Source: British Council G20 research data (2021); Analysis by Impact Stories

Base: All China respondents rating Japan by proficiency in Japanese – Yes [proficient in Japanese] (43); No [not proficient in Japanese] (194); Data presented are mean score ratings on an 11-point scale where 0= Strongly distrust, 5= Neither trust nor distrust, 10= Strongly trust

NB: Sample size is relatively small for respondents claiming proficiency in Japanese.

Development of cross-cultural networks

- Academic research highlights the often profound impact of a period of international study on personal development, confidence and resilience (De Graaf et al. 2013; Gu et al. 2010). The vast majority of internationally mobile students are young people. In the UK, data collected by HESA shows that 86 per cent of all international students enrolled in 2021/2022 were under 30. Many of the stakeholders and alumni interviewed for this report have observed that the period of international study commonly coincides with a crucial period of the individual's life when they are becoming independent adults, learning how to be responsible for themselves emotionally and practically and forming their own opinions and perspectives on the world. Many alumni themselves reflect on the personal transformation they underwent while abroad.



I was on my own for the first time and had to learn how to be independent, to budget and to orientate myself.

UK Alum, China



It is also about living on your own, bearing responsibility, and solving problems/ challenges on your own ... I came back with a toolbox on how to manage my emotions and fears. I was a completely different person after the end of the program.

UK Alum, Egypt

- Not surprisingly, socialising and making friends is often a focus of these young people’s lives outside their country of origin as much as inside it. Many actively throw themselves into social and cultural life in their host country in areas such as travel, sport or arts, sometimes as a way of overcoming homesickness.



Making new friends and learning new things about another culture is a great experience.

UK Alum, Mali (ISI 2021-2022)

- What is very striking in conversations with ISM alumni is that the focus of their social networks is not simply, or indeed mainly, with people from their host country. Indeed, more commonly it is with other young people like themselves from all over the world who are in the same position of having travelled to a new and different country.

- This development of multi-national friendship networks is a characteristic of ISM that has been much commented on in the academic literature (Robinson et al 2020). Indeed, as large-scale student mobility has developed around the world, a research focus has often been on the relative difficulties encountered by international students in making friends with domestic students in their host countries as opposed to with other students from their home country or with other international students (Ward, 2006; Gu et al., 2010; Rienties, Nolan-Davies 2014).
- Importantly, ISM experienced in countries such as the UK, USA, Australia or NZ is now a truly multicultural rather than bicultural experience in which the international student will be among students from all over the world on campus and potentially among citizens from all over the world in their local community.
- In the age of social media, sustaining contacts with friends scattered all over the world after graduation is far easier than used to be the case and feedback from this research suggests that many friendships made during ISM become longstanding. Friendship networks, centred on the HEP are also supported by the active alumni networks in which most HEPs now invest.



What else would take me by surprise was the impact of the other international students. You almost feel like because you’re going over to an English-speaking country, you’d fall in with Americans. But actually, the best relationships I formed were with other international students from around the world. And that was your group, because I suppose we were all going through a similar experience. You know, you had all moved away to another country.

USA Alum, UK



I’ve made lifelong friends with some of the international students. We might not see each other that frequently but we like to know what we are all doing and to help each other if we can.

UK Alum, China



I have more friends outside Nepal than in country. I am still connected to my professors, my ex-employers and am part of the alumni network from my university.

USA Alum, Nepal



I met a lot of people and had so much fun making friends from all around the world.

UK Alum, Sweden (ISI 2021-2022)

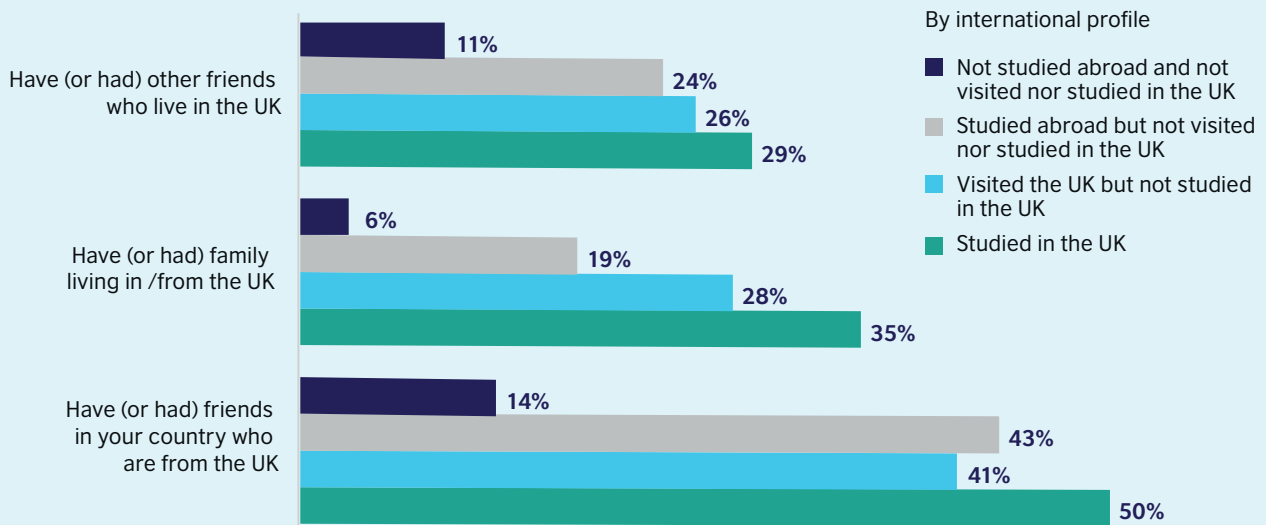
- The British Council's G20 data shows that young Chinese who have studied in the UK are more likely than their peers to be connected to the UK through friendship and family relations. As Chart 6 shows, they are more likely to have friends who live in the

UK, to have friends in China who are from the UK and to have family members in the UK. Broadly speaking a similar pattern of greater connectedness is also seen within the data for other combinations of home and host country.

Chart 6: Young people who have studied in the UK tend to have more personal connections to the UK

Which, if any, of the following apply to you? Please consider anyone you may know, whether in-person or online.

Base: All China respondents



Source: British Council G20 research data (2021); Analysis by Impact Stories

Base: All China respondents rating the UK - Studied in the UK (73); Visited the UK but not studied in the UK (120); Studied abroad but not visited nor studied in the UK (247); Not studied abroad and not visited nor studied in the UK (562). Data is weighted.

- There are also many examples of academic cooperation continuing between alumni and their host faculty, especially given that the majority of IMS study at Masters or PhD level and a significant minority go on to pursue academic careers themselves, often maintaining links to the research and faculty they worked with during their ISM experience. An example from an alum interviewed for this research is illustrated in the quote below.
- The importance of these connections formed during international study is that they are typically associated with an increase in trust in the host country. For example, young people in the G20 research sample who have personal connections to the UK typically have higher levels of trust in the institutions, government and people of the UK (Chart 7).



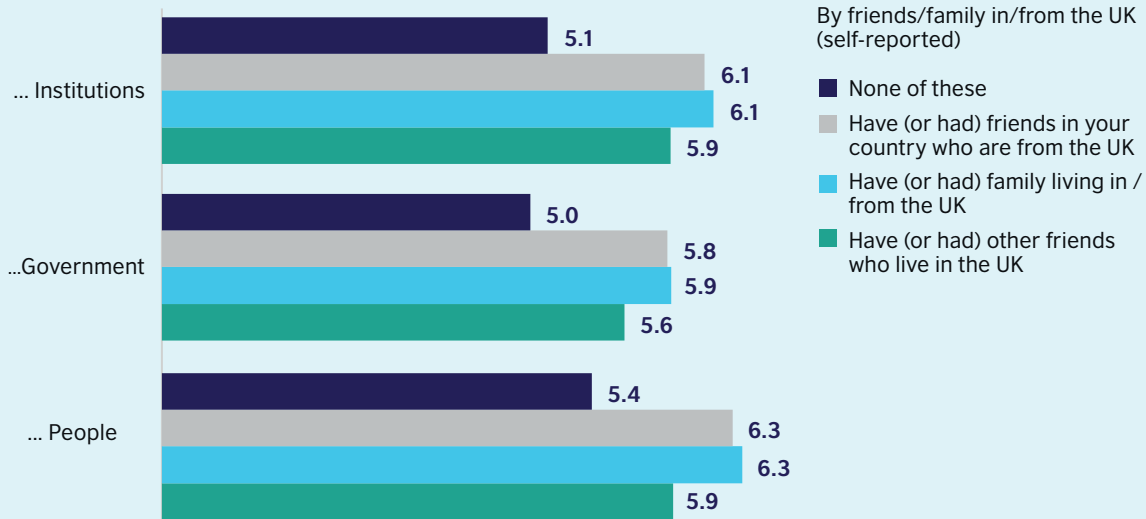
Some of the networks/experiences that I connected to have been useful to bring out Papua New Guinea experience to the global arena and vice versa. We have our own community well connected to [HEP] and its alumni. Some of my lecturers who have been doing participatory programming have been supporting my work, and they are also learning from us - e.g. indigenous way of learning/evaluation.

UK Alum, PNG

Chart 7: Young people who have personal connections to the UK tend to trust the UK more

To what extent do you distrust or trust ... from the United Kingdom?

Base: All China respondents rating the UK – mean scores (0-10 scale)



Source: British Council G20 research data (2021); Analysis by Impact Stories

Base: All China respondents rating the UK - Q16a. Which, if any, of the following apply to you? Please consider anyone you may know, whether in-person or online.: Have (or had) family living in / from the UK (140); Yes - Have (or had) friends in your country who are from the UK (276-277); Yes - Have (or had) other friends who live in the UK (171-172); Yes - Have (or had) friends in/from the UK - Have (or had) any (585-586); None of these (410-412); Data is weighted.



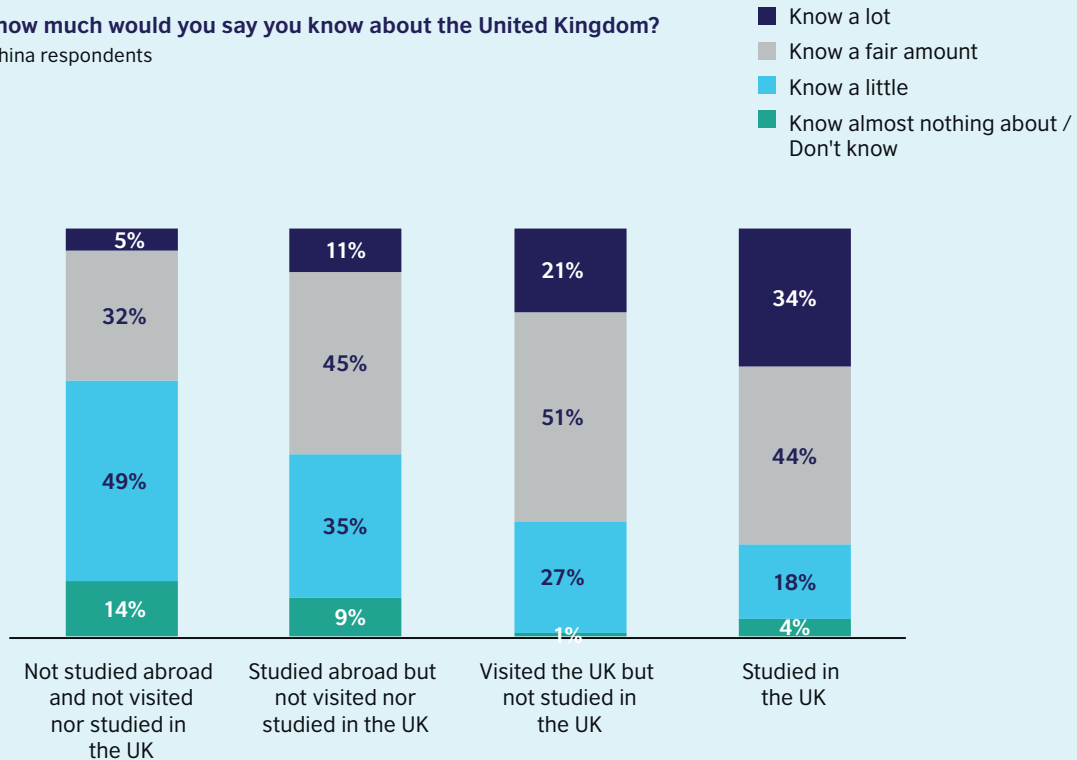
Development of cross-cultural understanding

- Research among international undergraduates at 4 UK HEPs undertaken by Gu et al. (2010) found that over half (54 per cent) of respondents reported that their understanding of the host (UK) culture had improved during their studies.
- Analysis of the British Council's G20 data confirms that young Chinese who have studied in the UK are more likely than their peers to feel that they know a lot or a fair amount about the UK (Chart 8). Again, broadly speaking the same pattern is shown within the data for other combinations of source country student group and host country.

Chart 8: Young people who study in the UK tend to get to know the UK better

Overall, how much would you say you know about the United Kingdom?

Base: All China respondents



Source: British Council G20 research data (2021); Analysis by Impact Stories

Base: All China respondents rating the UK - Studied in the UK (73); Visited the UK but not studied in the UK (120); Studied abroad but not visited nor studied in the UK (247); Not studied abroad and not visited nor studied in the UK (562). Data is weighted.

- In conversations with alumni it is striking that their first reference point when discussing their international experience is typically the comparison between the education system in the host country relative to what they are used to.
- Many students coming to the UK from outside the EU have grown up in relatively formal and hierarchical, teacher-centric systems. They often note their initial shock at encountering a UK system which appears relatively informal and which encourages, indeed demands, active student input.

“

The teaching experience, the relationship you had with your professors was more akin to the relationship that you would have had in school than you would have had in a UK university. And I really enjoyed that.

USA Alum, UK

“

It was very different to learning in China where you had to memorise things to learn. In the UK you were encouraged to share your opinions and have a voice. That was quite hard.

UK Alum, China

- The systemic difference is encapsulated in an anecdote from an internationalisation manager at a UK HEP.

“

We had a Nigerian lecturer at the university and one of the things I remember him saying was, in my country, if you write what I've told you in the lecture, then you'll pass. Whereas in this country, if you write what I've told you, it's probably called plagiarism.

Internationalisation Manager, UK HEP

- At the same time, international students bring their own expectations, norms and experiences to share in the classroom and lecture theatre (Berry, 2005). While most UK HEPs would advocate strongly for more UK students to experience international study, they see that learning alongside students from other countries is a positive experience which brings at least some of the benefits of studying internationally themselves.

“

It's very easy to see the world as we see ourselves. If you've been used to being taught in a particular way, then [by learning alongside international students] you can appreciate that somebody else has learned about something differently, and why that's not necessarily wrong. It's just a different approach....and even just understanding that people are learning from a very different perspective.

Internationalisation Manager, UK HEP

“

If I am teaching a class in African politics – or indeed a class in politics generally – and I have students [from Africa] who can talk about their lived experience, it makes such a difference and the other students really value it

Academic

- International students spend time on campus and also within communities in their wider host societies. Through participation in daily life, they experience how their host society functions, and are exposed to its norms and values in ways which go beyond the often stereotyped and formulaic representations of that culture which many have previously encountered through literature and film.

“

So I had a lot of stereotypes about British people in British life; broadly speaking that I got from watching the Vicar of Dibley and Luther and Downton Abbey and all that stuff

UK Alum, USA

- Of course, internationally mobile students are engaged in academic study. Many study for higher degrees, including PhDs, and especially where their studies have a historical, political or cultural focus they will often combine insight gained through formal study with their daily lived experience to develop a deep and nuanced understanding of their host country's culture and/or of important aspects of that country's role in the world.

“

And my grandfather....was just the most Irish American and so had very specific opinions about the British intervention in Ireland and all of that, and about the troubles.I would have grown up just understanding the conflict as the IRA in a liberation struggle against the British Army and not really having any understanding of a nuance to that at all. And so, I distinctly remember studying for this course, and coming walking downstairs to my mom and saying, Mom, have you ever heard of loyalism?..... apparently, there are people in Ireland who consider themselves British....and she was like, what are you talking about?

UK Alum, USA

- Several academic studies have shown that working while studying can be a positive influence on the richness of inter-cultural experience for students. Research by Kwadzo (2014) among international students in the USA found both positive and negative impacts of working while studying but noted that, *“Some of the benefits of working include development of students’ interpersonal relation and communication skills and these could serve as assets for their future job prospects”*
- Feedback from both UK HEPs and alumni points to a belief that working can help international students get more involved in the daily life of the host society inside and outside of the campus and can facilitate language acquisition by ‘forcing’ students to use their host country language more frequently and actively.

“

We encourage international students to work while they are with us as it all helps with the wider exposure to the country. We try to integrate them with the local community as much as possible be it through part-time jobs (which they get themselves), volunteering or working with local businesses

Internationalisation Manager, UK HEP

“

Working was a good way to see more of the local community outside the university where everyone was like minded. It was sometimes hard to understand them but it did give me a different perspective on life

UK Alum, Nigeria (ISI 2021-2022)

- After graduation, many employers (in both source and host countries) are attracted by bicultural understanding which comes from lived experience, alongside improved language proficiency, because it means that their employees are better equipped to undertake business within and between the two societies.
- In an influential study among alumni who had studied in the UK and then returned to China, Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) note that the demand for intercultural understanding is increasing even within the national borders of countries such as China.

“

Working with foreign nationals in the Chinese workplace is also becoming more common, and it is partly a question of language but also, as Ning reported, a kind of intercultural empathy that is in particularly high demand in inter- national or joint Sino-foreign capital ventures.

Gu and Schweisfurth (2015)

- Gu and Schweisfurth use the term, ‘Intercultural empathy’ which emphasises that what is important is a level of understanding which transcends simple facts and figures and builds on the type of lived experience gained by IMS. The idea is captured perfectly by the quote of one of their interviewees:



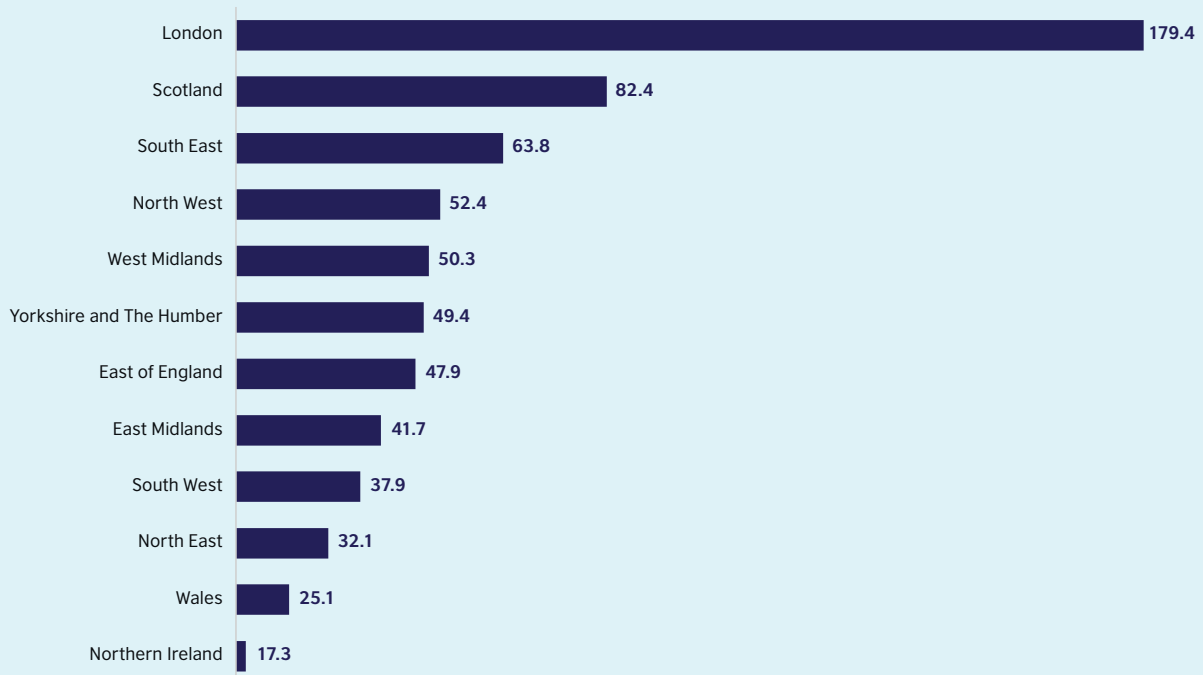
The study-abroad experience has changed the course of my life. . . . My present boss is an Englishman. My experience in Britain makes it easier for me to communicate with him. . . . With the knowledge of the English language, the culture and the people, I can better understand my boss’s decision and his ways of thinking. Now there are two groups of employees in our company: one with the overseas experience and the other without. The former group find it easier to understand their western colleagues whilst the latter often experience conflicts and misunderstandings. I don’t mean foreigners are always right, but that they do have different ways of thinking

UK Alum, China (quoted in Gu and Schweisfurth (2015))

- In the context of the UK, it is also striking how widely spread around the country are internationally mobile students. In 2021-22 a total of 227 HEPs across the UK reported international student enrolments to HESA. UK HEPs stretch from Falmouth University in West Cornwall to the University of the Highland and Islands in North-West Scotland. Both of these institutions currently host students from more than 50 countries.
- Huge amounts of money have been spent encouraging international tourists to venture beyond the obvious draws of London and Stratford-upon-Avon but nearly three quarters of all international students in the UK do study at HEPs outside the capital, including 82K in Scotland, 32K in the North-East, 25K in Wales and a rapidly increasing 17K in Northern Ireland (Chart 9).
- As comments from a student from the USA who had studied in Northern Ireland illustrate, this geographic dispersion means that the knowledge and understanding of the UK which IMS develop is often rooted in a local and regional understanding far ahead of that of the vast majority of international tourists or business travelers. The affection and connections which IMS develop with the UK may then also be carried forward into academic or business careers which are connected to the city or region of the UK in which they studied.

Chart 9: Regional distribution of International Students in the UK (2021-2022)

Number of international students (EU and non-EU) in UK by region of HEP



Source: HESA, 2021-2022; Analysis by Impact Stories

- Most studies of the financial impact of IMS on their host country factor in incremental spending from friends and family who come to visit them. Naturally, most of these friends and family spend time in the city or town where their host is studying and this time can also help to build understanding of both the host country and the local community among a wider group of people than the students themselves.
- Chart 10 confirms that within the G20 dataset there is a very clear and graduated relationship between levels of knowledge of the UK among young people from China and average levels of trust in the people, institutions and government of the UK.



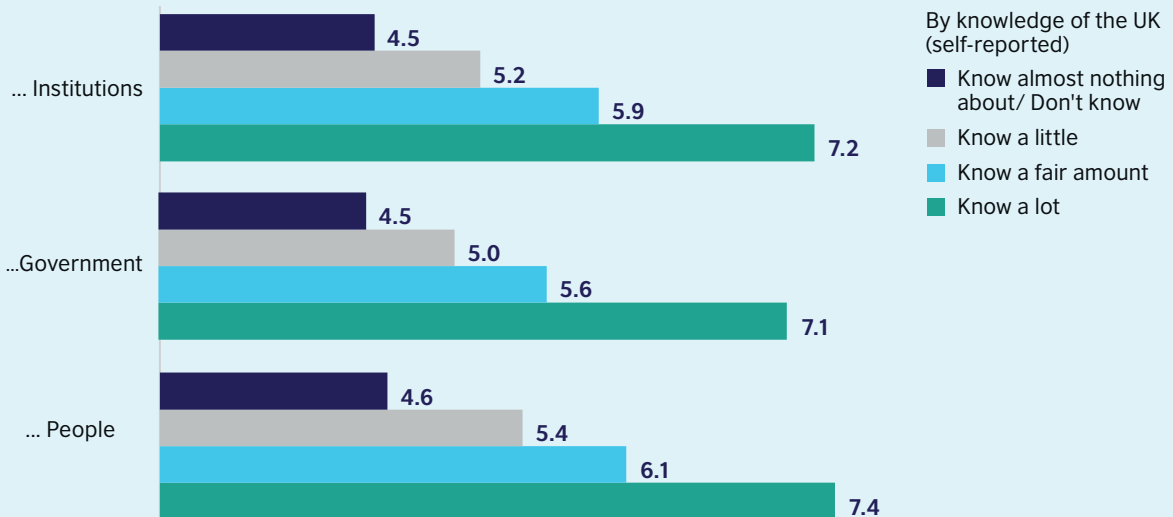
My parents would come separately at least once a year during my PhD and grew to love Belfast and love people in Northern Ireland. And it changed their understanding of British politics, Irish politics, global politics, and really expanded their empathy. And it's kind of like the ripple effect.....if you live abroad, family always wants to come visit you. So, I've had lots of family come visit me. And it's, it's always an opportunity, I think, to have conversations like this, where you can kind of expand somebody's understanding or their empathy for people that they may be operating on stereotypes or misconceptions or outdated historical awareness.

UK Alum, USA

Chart 10: Young people who know the UK better tend to trust the UK more

To what extent do you distrust or trust ... from the United Kingdom?

Base: All China respondents rating the UK – mean scores (0-10 scale)



Source: British Council G20 research data (2021); Analysis by Impact Stories

Base: All China respondents rating the UK by knowledge of the UK – Know almost nothing about/Hadn't heard of before today/Don't know (98); Know a little (403-404); Know a fair amount (385-386); Know a lot (109). Data is weighted. Data excludes Don't know. Data presented are mean score ratings on an 11-point scale where 0= Strongly distrust, 5= Neither trust nor distrust, 10= Strongly trust.

Development of understanding of diversity

- According to data from HESA, in 2021-2022 (a period impacted by the pandemic) there were students from 210 different countries and territories studying at UK HEPs. While China and India were by far the largest origin countries, there were more than 1,000 students in the UK from each of 64 different countries and territories and the total included small numbers of students from countries and territories as diverse as Vanuatu, San Marino, Cape Verde, The Aland Islands, Eswatini, Kosovo, Laos, Benin, Christmas Island and, perhaps most surprisingly of all, 15 students from North Korea.
- Given the number of international students in a country such as the UK and this diversity of backgrounds, it is not surprising that ISM very often leads to the development of diverse friendship groups as discussed above.



A major part of studying abroad is getting to know people from other places, getting to know the diverse cultures and everything else that comes with it.

UK Alum, India (ISI 2021-22)

- In fact, ISM experienced at a HEP in a country such as the UK exposes individual students to a breadth and diversity of cultures and perspectives in a relatively compressed timescale in a way which is almost certainly unique in their lifetime. Indeed, it is difficult to think of any other activity (with the possible exception of the Olympic Games), which does bring together so many young people from such diverse national backgrounds.
- HESA data for 2021-2022 shows that in the UK there were 245 students from the Occupied Palestinian Territories and 540 from Israel; 6,330 from EU Cyprus and 155 from non-EU Cyprus; 125 from Armenia and 535 from Azerbaijan.
- Of course, students from different sides of globally significant disagreements will not necessarily be in the same classes, nor even in the same HEPs. And many HEPs have student societies actively advocating for starkly different positions on major global conflicts such as that between Arabs and Israelis. The point is that in the eyes of most HEPs,

academics and students, while the diversity of perspectives on campus can occasionally be challenging, on the whole it is an unambiguous positive for the academic and personal development of the young people involved. And the international students themselves value it.



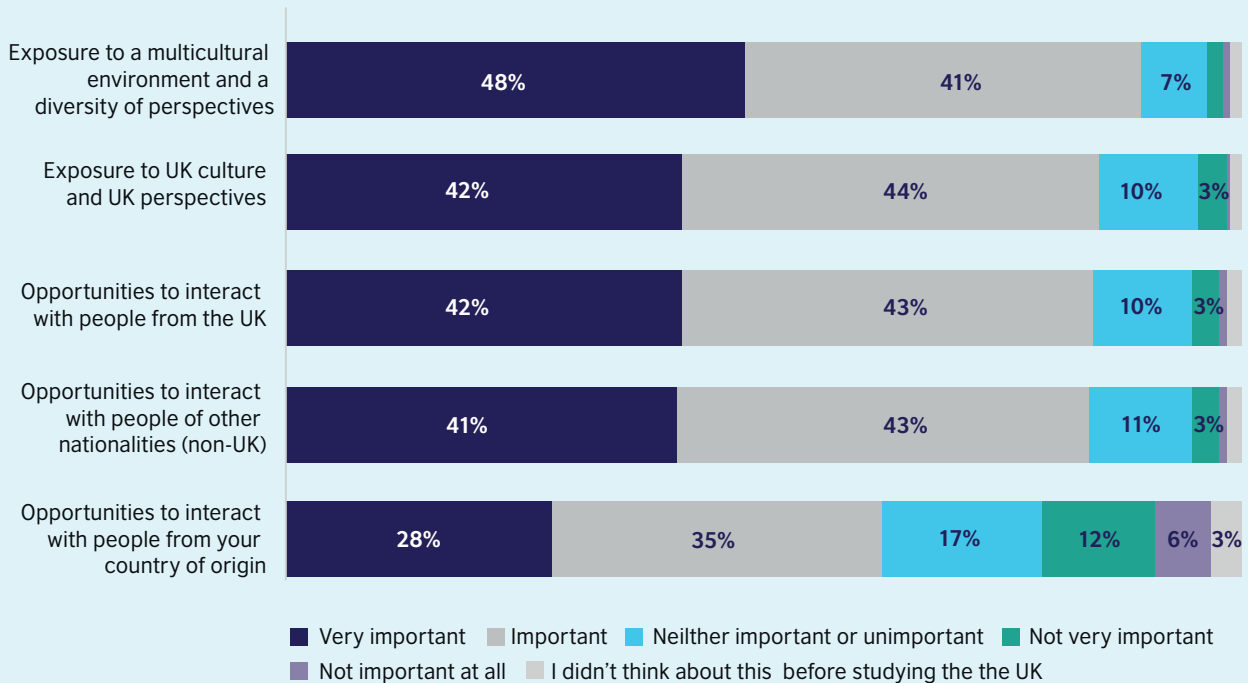
“I think being able to learn from different countries, diverse populations, and marginalized groups was interesting. (...) I now see the tensions that exist around the world, and how that affects us.

UK Alum, Egypt

- Recent research undertaken by the British Council (British Council 2022a) among 1,181 international UK alumni found that the opportunity to engage with the diversity of UK society and the diversity of backgrounds encountered on campus were positive attractions of the UK ISM experience for international students (Chart 11).

Chart 11: Exposure to Diversity is viewed by IMS as an attractive aspect of study in the UK

Thinking about what you wanted from your time studying in the UK, how important were the following aspects of the experience?



Alumni UK

U30. Thinking about what you wanted from your time studying in the UK, how important were the following aspects of the experience?

Base: All (1,181)

Source: British Council (2022) Alumni Cultural Report (Internal)

- The research by Gu et al. among international undergraduates at four HEPs in the UK concluded that the international experience did indeed lead to a greater acceptance of diversity, “..... ample evidence suggests that the consequences of the international students’ intercultural experiences transcend their improved perceptions of the host culture. They had become more accepting of people with different attitudes and values. This was confirmed by 70 per cent of respondents in the second survey.” (Gu et al. 2010)
- UK HEPs tend to view the diversity of the student body as being beneficial to domestic students as well. They are typically keen to encourage domestic students to have greater exposure to different nationalities and to learn in a more international environment as a spur to potentially undertaking their own study abroad experiences and developing a more global outlook.

the first step towards encouraging that interesting engagement with international opportunities more widely.

Internationalisation Manager, UK HEP

- Nationality is only one aspect of diversity. HEPs and many of the wider communities in which they sit in a country such as the UK exhibit and embrace many other dimensions of diversity which may be unfamiliar to young people from some countries and backgrounds. Indeed, HEPs are often environments in which young people encounter and explore attitudes and behaviours around politics, social and economic systems, religion, morality, sexuality and gender in more intense ways than in the rest of society. Even having men and women in the same lecture theatres, having places of worship for different faith groups or accepting same sex relationships as an unremarkable part of everyday life can be novel and challenging for some international students.



Encouraging our domestic students to have the confidence to interact with students from other countries with international perspectives in classes is

- Some students will reject aspects of diversity which they can't accept. But the considerable body of evidence collected since Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) was first developed suggests that the type of positive contact between different groups which occurs between diverse student groups in UK HEPs can and often do reduce prejudice and promote more tolerant and inclusive attitudes.



Our culture does not really promote co-existence such as different gender orientation, sexual orientation, nationalities, religion etc., I realised that those barriers were only in my head and that I was manipulated to see people from other cultures/backgrounds differently. Knowing that there is an entire world out there with a completely different point of view changed my perspective towards the world.

UK Alum, Egypt



Thanks to my international exposure I have now become more progressive and tolerant on issues of inclusion and diversity.

USA Alum, Nepal

- International students can also impact the wider diversity of the communities in which we they live. This is especially noticeable where campuses are outside large cities and in communities which have until recently been relatively un-diverse. The impact of international students in towns such as Pontypridd (University of South Wales) or Derry/Londonderry (Ulster University) are examples.
- The impact of international students in Northern Ireland is perhaps a special case in the UK context. Here, there is a view within both local HEPs and the devolved administration that the growth of international students within the population has served both as a marker of the normalisation of Northern Ireland society and as positive supporter of efforts to depolarise that society. In simple terms, a society with multiple identities can contribute to dissipating the tension between the two historically dominant identities.

Development of intercultural competence

- The fostering of increased intercultural competence (ICC) is one of the main goals of cultural relations.
- Employers increasingly recognise that commercial success in a globalised economy will demand employees who can understand the perspectives, attitudes and behaviours of people from different backgrounds and also work constructively with them.
- The British Council made the point well in its 2013 report, Culture at Work:

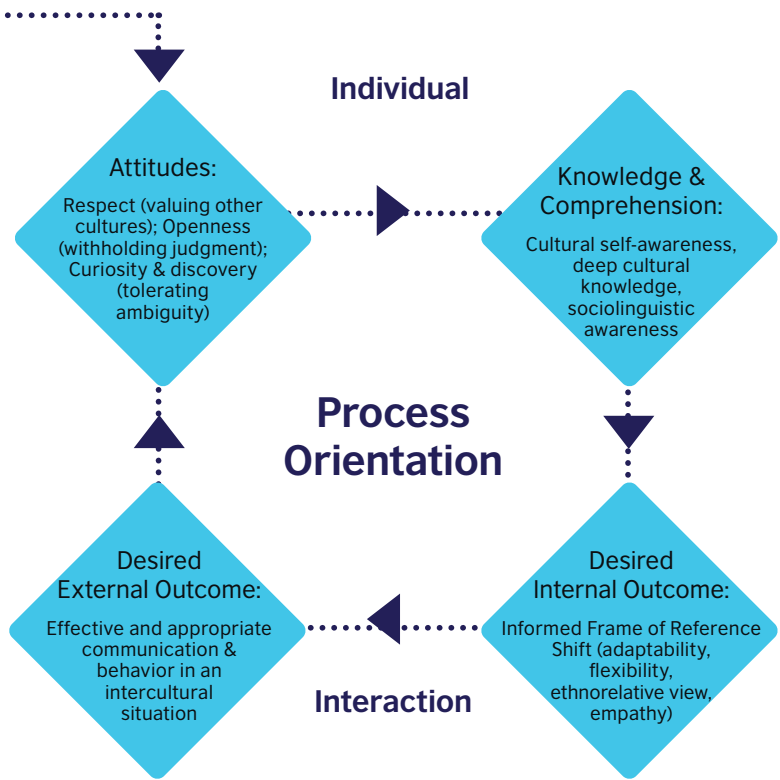


Our ability to engage successfully with other countries, organisations and people will depend to a large extent on whether we possess the necessary intercultural and foreign language skills to make fruitful connections, whether in trade and investment, charity/NGO programmes or as government and international organisations. This is fundamentally changing the way in which employers value and seek to develop intercultural skills in the workplace.

British Council, Culture at Work, 2013

- An increasing body of evidence suggests that diverse teams, so long as they can *work cooperatively together*, make better decisions across a whole range of business and organisational areas (Rock and Grant, 2016). Management Consultants McKinsey have undertaken a series of analyses and now have data from more than 1,000 large companies in 15 countries. The data show that top-quartile companies for ethnic and cultural diversity outperformed those in the fourth quartile by 36 per cent in profitability (McKinsey, 2020).
- It is therefore not surprising that intercultural competence is a more and more important goal of education systems around the world and that IMS – who by definition are often among the brightest and most ambitious of young people in their societies – desire increased intercultural competence as a specific target outcome of their education.
- There is a huge literature on what ICC is and how it can be measured. In the field of education, work by Darla Deardorff is among the best known and her process model of ICC (Chart 12) is often referenced (Deardorff, 2006, 2009).

Chart 12: Deardorff's process model of Intercultural Competence



Source: Deardorff, Darla K. (2006) Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization, Journal of Studies in International Education 10(3); Deardorff, Darla K. (ed) (2009) The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence

- Typical dimensions of ICC within conceptualisations such as Deardorff's include Self awareness, Ability to reflect, Empathy, Ability to listen, Respect for difference and Openness; dimensions which are also a very close match for typical descriptions of the dimension of Cultural Relations.
- Recent multivariate analysis undertaken in Turkey among both domestic and international students concluded that, "the intercultural effectiveness level of international students was found to be significantly higher than that of local students" (Avcilar, Gök,

2022). The authors also found a strong relationship between intercultural effectiveness and having friends from different cultural backgrounds, a finding echoed in earlier research (Del Villar, 2010).

- The research undertaken by the British Council (British Council 2022a) among 1,181 international UK alumni found that IMS not only rated their intercultural competencies highly but also believed that their experience in the UK had had a positive impact on those skills (Chart 13).

Chart 13: UK alumni view their international experience as having contributed to their development of intercultural skills

	per cent who rate themselves as 'strong' in this skill	per cent whose study experience in the UK has a positive impact on this skill
My ability to self-reflect and recognise how my own values and norms have been shaped by my experience of the world	78 per cent	91 per cent
My ability to work successfully with people from all over the world	77 per cent	91 per cent
My capacity to be open and unprejudiced when encountering people from different cultures	76 per cent	90 per cent
My English language skills	76 per cent	91 per cent
My awareness and understanding of different cultures and perspectives	75 per cent	90 per cent
My capacity to empathise with people who are different to me	75 per cent	89 per cent

I10 How would you rate yourself in the following areas?
 IM40 What impact, if any, do you feel your study experience in the UK had on the following? Base: All (1,181)
 Source: British Council (2022) Alumni Cultural Report (Internal)

- The same research found that alumni believed that the most valuable thing that universities can do to help students gain exposure to different cultures and perspectives while studying at a university in the UK is to, “Ensure a mix of students of different nationalities on group projects within courses.”
- Increasingly, HEPs try to do this because they believe it improves academic outcomes and because they recognise the wider benefits of increased intercultural competence.



The students really develop their international skills. The staff are really keen to make sure students have opportunities to work in mixed groups to help broaden perspectives

Internationalisation Manager, UK HEP

- And importantly, they try to involve domestic students as well. They believe that UK students can benefit from exposure to diversity as much as international students and that the act of global mobility itself can improve skills from which domestic students can learn and benefit.



So, we see that in classes like I teach, where it’s quite evident that the students who’ve had to move country in their life have more media literacy or political literacy, because they’re used to comparing things all of the time. Whereas our students from the UK don’t have that ability.

Academic

- The British Council research cited above found that many alumni credited their increased intercultural skills with having a positive impact on their future careers. Personal testimonies collected through the research for this report bear out that finding.



My career increasingly involves working with people from Western cultures to help them make investment decisions in China ... Living and working in the UK has given me a deeper inter-cultural understanding of different nationalities to help me maximise opportunities

UK Alum, China



Post study I had opportunities to work with people from around the world. I found myself very comfortable and confident to collaborate with people from anywhere around the world. And it was only possible because of that study experience. It would have been challenging for me to do so without having studied in the UK.

UK Alum, Egypt

- This research did not take feedback directly from employers but one of the UK HEPs consulted for this research provided direct feedback which they had received from several local employers which illustrated the value they found in employing international students with the necessary intercultural competence and bicultural understanding.



We worked with Japanese and Indian graduates in the UK HQ for 6-9 months and they were sent back to their home countries to set up the company’s overseas office. With the 6-9 months of working experience in the UK, they developed the mindset, value and drive to carry on working for the company overseas.

Feedback from UK employer to local HEP



A Chinese student worked as a Programme Developer and eventually became the company's business partner in China, overlooking the operation of the company's Chinese office.

Feedback from UK employer to local HEP



I used to work for the government in PNG earlier and have now shifted to civil society. The study abroad experience showed me the power of civil society and advocacy for people's rights.

UK Alum, PNG

Development of global perspectives

- The notion of the 'global citizen' embraces the idea of individuals who have the opportunity and skills which are required to work in multiple countries and/or to work for the multi-national organisations which are a feature of the 21st century economy. Most obviously these are multinational businesses exemplified by Google, Apple or Facebook but the idea also extends to influential multilateral organisations such as the European Commission, the World Bank, the UN or international NGOs such as Greenpeace or Amnesty.
 - One of the specific attractions for IMS of the UK and other western countries as places to study is that these countries' qualifications are widely recognised around the world. In undertaking ISM, many students are seeking formal qualifications which will facilitate an ambition to work and live as global citizens. Most IMS recognise that alongside the formal qualifications the intercultural competences discussed earlier are just as important in facilitating global citizenship.
 - A common criticism of ISM is that it facilitates emigration of the brightest and best individuals from developing countries and therefore reduces their capacity for development. But by providing a platform for global citizenship, even those young people who do not return to their home country after graduation may go on to work in globally influential positions and have a perspective on their home country which can be positive for its future development.
- **After the international experience/exposure, I decided to focus on international development and priorities working with rural communities and changing their lives.**
- USA Alum, Indonesia
- Education systems around the world are consciously trying to build international awareness and understanding into their courses in recognition of the global pressures and opportunities likely to impact the future careers of their young people. Most obviously, international perspectives are routinely reflected in courses focused on business and economics because so much business is now global. HEPs and academics often argue that the presence of International students on business courses has both driven a more rapid internationalisation of the curriculum and also informed and enriched how it is taught.
 - Most would go further and argue that few areas of academic enquiry can now sensibly be taught without a global perspective. In areas such as history and politics this is contributing to a reappraisal of traditional perspectives on issues such as colonialism, gender and black history.
 - IMS are therefore benefiting from courses which have more globally relevant perspectives and studying those courses alongside other students who can offer varied international perspectives.



It was an eye opener to other opportunities, cultures and knowledge out there in the world

UK Alum, Nigeria (ISI 2022-23)

“

The thinking and learning was enhanced by the breadth of experience and practice that students had from across the world; we greatly benefited from this rather than just being taught about how things were done in the USA

USA Alum, India

- IMS are themselves contributing to the greater internationalisation of courses and providing global perspectives which also enrich the understanding and widen the horizons of domestic students.

“

And so, it's great for the UK students, when suddenly they realise, oh, this person I'm sitting next to in my class, they've got this whole story of how they've moved, and eventually they've ended up in the UK. Am I ever going to have a story like that? Or what can I learn from a story like that? It's just it's a whole new area to think about. Because it forces them to think about their own identity, and their own trajectory of where they're going in their life course.

Academic

- HEPs also see a reinforcing mechanism at play in which academics respond to the presence of international students on their courses by making those courses more internationally relevant.

“

The presence of international students in the classroom encourages staff to engender a globalised understanding of teaching and research, which benefits home students.

Internationalisation Manager, UK HEP

- The ability of IMS to bring wider experience and global perspectives to domestic students is perceived to be particularly important by those UK HEPs whose domestic catchment areas have traditionally been relatively local. Unlike Russell Group universities which have long recruited from all over the UK, many others, including most new universities, have tended to recruit primarily locally, with many students living at home while studying. International students are therefore seen to bring wider experience and perspectives into the campus, possibly in the absence of perspectives from even London or Scotland.

“

.....the fact that people live their lives in other parts of the world and come to study here. And that should mean something for the students as well, [for] home students, people who've lived in this area their whole life..... they've got a window into the rest of the world by travelling 10 minutes from their house.

Internationalisation Manager, UK HEP

- However, the idea of global citizenship is to an extent too restricted a framing of the real perceptual impact which ISM has on many of its participants. Irrespective of whether the young people go on to live and work outside their country of origin as global citizens, feedback from alumni suggests that the experience of international study often leads to a profound change in their understanding of their own identity and place in the world. It provides them with opportunities to contextualise their own personal experience in a far wider and more diverse set of experiences which offers a truly global perspective.

“

There were rich and very poor friends. It really shocked me as I could see huge disparity of the world. From Kim Jim II's grandson to a war refugee from South Sudan. It all made me mature.

USA Alum, Nepal

“

I now think of myself as a global citizen ... I am more accepting of others, especially if they have a different viewpoint to you. Growing up as a majority gave me a mindset that there is nothing wrong in my society. Suddenly becoming a minority in another society made me realize how minorities feel about themselves in their own country.

Germany Alum, Nigeria

“

It changed my vision but did not change who I was and where I was from. I now understand that people from different cultures have different values, and you have to respect that. You have to understand their value and culture before you react.

Germany Alum, Ghana

- The research of Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) with 652 alumni who had returned to China after taking their degrees in the UK discussed this idea in terms of the development of complex transnational identities and perspectives which continued to impact the personal and professional lives of the alumni even after their return to China.

- Alongside this reflection on the individual's own identity often runs an equally profound reflection on the individual's own society which again places that society in a wider and more nuanced set of perspectives. Gu and Schweisfurth's (2015) research found that among UK alumni who had returned to China:

- 75 per cent felt that they were more knowledgeable about their own Chinese backgrounds and home culture than those who had never stayed abroad for a lengthy period of time,
- 88 per cent felt different from others around them in China,
- 85 per cent reported feeling more comfortable with people who had shared a study abroad experience, whether or not they had been part of their circle while in the UK,
- 93 per cent rated international awareness as a quality that was significant to their work (93 per cent).



8. The national benefits of Cultural Relations impact through International Student Mobility

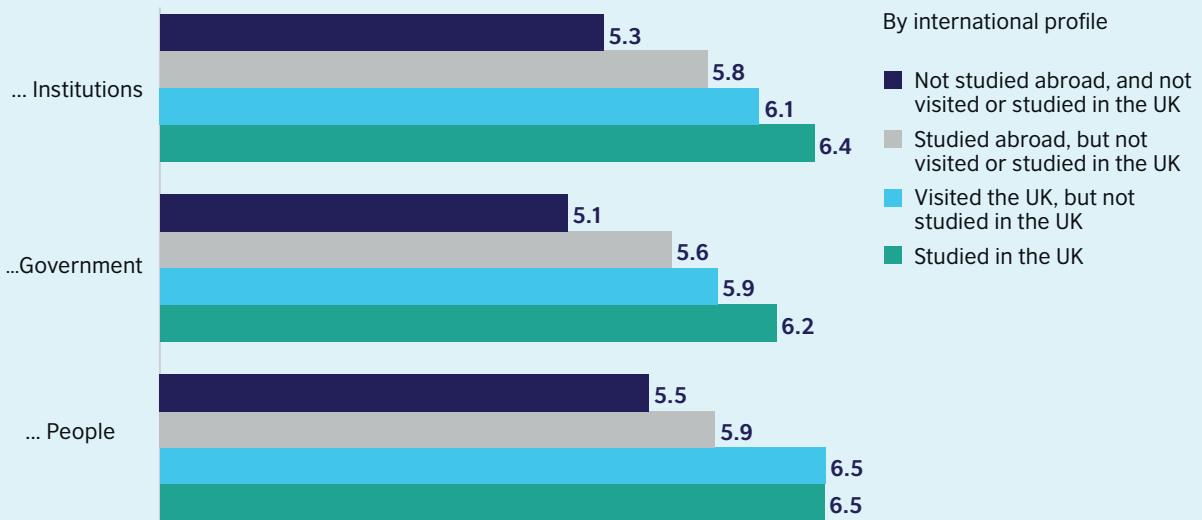
Increased trust and long-term relationships

- The discussion above highlights that through ISM many students develop a better understanding of the language of their host country, more extensive personal and professional friendship networks involving that country and a deeper understanding of that culture’s norms, practices and values, set against a deeper understanding of their own culture’s norms, practices and values.
- Chart 4 and Chart 9 showed that increased understanding of a country’s language and increased understanding of the country itself are strongly associated with increased levels of trust in that country. In line with Contact Theory, people who have friends from a particular culture and country background are also likely to feel more positively about that culture and country (Chart 7).
- Therefore, the data in Chart 14, again drawn from the British Council G20 dataset and focused on young people from China, follows quite logically. It shows that on average, young people who have studied in the UK are more likely than their peers to trust the UK’s people, institutions and government.

Chart 14: Studying in the UK is associated with a higher average level of trust in the UK

To what extent do you distrust or trust ... from the United Kingdom

Base: All China respondents rating the UK – mean scores (0-10 scale)



Source: British Council G20 research data (2021); Analysis by Impact Stories
 Base: All China respondents rating the UK by their international profile - Studied in the UK (73); Visited the UK, but not studied in the UK (119-120); Studied abroad, but not visited or studied in the UK (245-247); Not studied abroad, and not visited or studied in the UK (557-558). Data is weighted. Data excludes Don't know. Data presented are mean score ratings on an 11-point scale where 0= Strongly distrust, 5= Neither trust nor distrust, 10= Strongly trust.

- And this finding of increased trust echoes the finding of the BIS research undertaken in 2013.

“

Alumni's perceptions of the UK, as a nation and society.....seem to underpin a general impression that the UK and its people can generally be trusted, as well as having an international outlook and being potentially 'open for business.' It would be hard to generate a more positive set of qualities (brand values) for a nation seeking to do business on the world stage.

BIS, 2013

- The sense of connectedness which IMS develop with their host country is often reflected in their ongoing interest in elements of popular culture such as sport.

“

I follow the Bundesliga closely since returning and I have some favouritism for the German football team.

Germany Alum, Nepal

“

It's the football team, the Nebraska Huskers. They were playing an international game in Dublin and my husband and I went to the game.

USA Alum, UK

- Many alumni are also deeply conscious of the way in which their ISM experience has allowed them to become bridges between countries and that this presents both opportunities and, for some, a sense of obligation.

“

From studying and working in the UK I know the people and systems so much better in the UK and can help to improve links with China ... most people there have limited exposure to the world and so there are many misunderstandings ... It works both ways as I am able to help Westerners understand China and they too have a lot of misperceptions about the country.

UK Alum, China

“

I think international education is the one and only way of building bridges between the nations and enhances understanding between countries .. we understand people in both countries and this always helps in enhancing trade, intercultural dialogue or even marriage. It fosters more ties between the countries

USA Alum, Nepal

- From the perspective of Cultural Relations, the role of ISM in building trust and long-term relationships has to be seen very much as a multicultural, rather than bicultural activity. As stressed above, many of the connections and contacts that IMS make are with other international students. Their exposure to diversity is truly multicultural and therefore to a considerable extent, International Student Mobility hosted in a country such as the UK can be seen as playing the role of a giant, nationally distributed exercise in Cultural Relations.
- The idea of ISM as a multicultural exercise in Cultural Relations also aligns to emerging notions of international education as Knowledge Diplomacy (Knight, 2019, 2020).

Soft power



Power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one prefers, and that can be accomplished by coercion, payment, or attraction and persuasion. Soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment.

(Nye, 2017)

- The attractiveness of a country’s education system to individuals, institutions and governments internationally has featured as an important soft power asset since notions of soft power were first developed. The attractiveness of the UK’s education system has long been identified as one of its key soft power strengths. Therefore, the sheer volume of Internationally Mobile Students in a country such as the UK is in itself a validation of the soft power value of its education system.
- Many studies have shown that word of mouth recommendation from IMS alumni is a major influence on the host country choices of future IMS and that typically, satisfaction with the ISM experience is very often high among international students in the UK. There is thus a self-reinforcing boost to the UK’s soft power from ongoing recommendations to future generations of IMS.

- Data from the British Council’s G20 research reinforces the conclusion that on average, young people who have studied in the UK find the UK more attractive than their country peers (Chart 15).



And then you think, Oh, this was just a disinterested student that was more interested in could he or she improve their CV to get the job that they want.....But then 10 years later, they’ve got kids by then maybe they bring their kids back to England.....it does show that they’re comfortable with the country, that they find the country attractive. And so there’s been a bit of identification with us, even in a transactional student

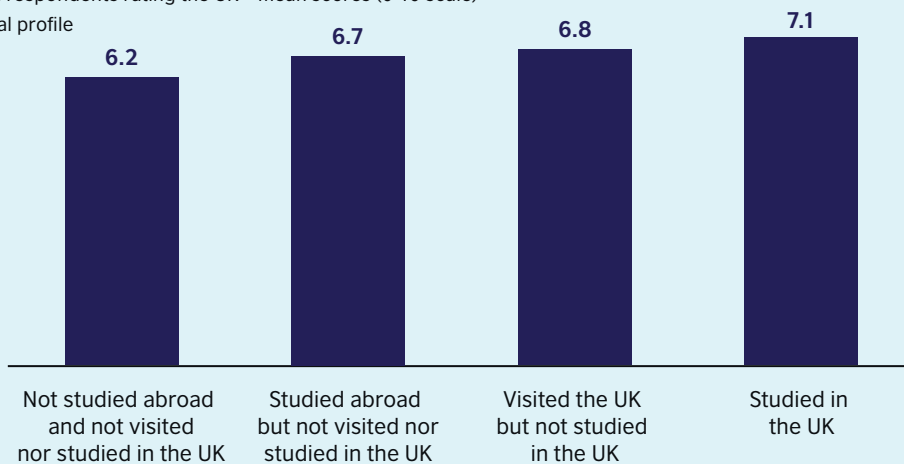
Academic

Chart 15: Studying in the UK is associated with a higher likelihood of finding the UK attractive

And taking everything into consideration, how attractive overall do you find the UK?

Base: All China respondents rating the UK – mean scores (0-10 scale)

By international profile



Source: British Council G20 research data (2021); Analysis by Impact Stories

Base: All China respondents rating the UK - Studied in the UK (73); Visited the UK, but not studied in the UK (120); Studied abroad, but not visited or studied in the UK (247); Not studied abroad, and not visited or studied in the UK (559). Data is weighted. Data excludes Don't know. Data presented are mean score ratings on an 11-point scale where 0= Very unattractive, 5= Neither attractive nor unattractive, 10= Very attractive.

- More subtly, the analysis presented above shows that the experience of study abroad exposes IMS to approaches, perspectives and values which are often very different to their own. For many, the experience allows them to consider and explore for the first time different models for how societies can operate.
- Many gain a greater critical distance enabling them to question their own and other's assumptions and values in a positive way. They gain a deeper understanding of different contexts, expand their horizons and are better able to view issues from different perspectives.
- It is then tempting to make the leap to suggest that study in a country like the UK can impart western values such as tolerance, respect for democracy and freedom of speech to international students and in doing so exert a soft power influence through values transfer.
- Much of the academic research in this area has concentrated on scholarship-funded ISM which may be a special case. In an influential article, Carole Atkinson showed through statistical analysis over the period 1980-2006 that, *"US-hosted exchange programs can play an important role in the diffusion of liberal values and practices across the borders of authoritarian states"* (Atkinson, 2010).
- The research for this report certainly suggests that this type of high-level values transfer can and sometimes does occur through ISM.



You can believe in democracy but understanding how it works in different contexts is something that I got to know more about. I believe in freedom of speech but when I see how freedom of speech is exercised in a certain country context, it broadened my perspective on that. Let's say the values were put in test and I got to test that during my international exposure.

UK Alum, Egypt



The essence of democracy and participatory culture is now super important to me. Study opened up a new way of thinking for me. As a result, I started working for the civil society and actively contributed to bring young people together for political debates/discussions.

UK Alum, PNG

- But there is also countervailing evidence and the idea that ISM in the UK (or in any other host country) is commonly or automatically a mechanism for the transmission of UK or western values is contested. However, this conceptualization of soft power influence through values transfer may miss the point. Many academics and HEPs argue that it is the opportunity for an open discussion of values which takes into account multiple perspectives - irrespective of the outcome of that discussion - which is really the key role of ISM and that this in itself is a potential source of soft power.



Just how we even talk about values is going to differ between different people. And so I think we have become more literate at engaging people from different parts of the world, or people with very different backgrounds, engaging them in discussions about values. Now, whether that means they take on more British values or not, is another question entirely. But it might be that our ability to stage those conversations in a more literate way now is actually an attraction and attractive value itself.

Internationalisation Manager, HEP

- Gu and Schweisfurth made a similar point in their reflections in how ISM in the UK encouraged Chinese students to reflect on their own culture and its influence on their sense of self and values.



An unexpected but powerful outcome of such analytical, empathetic and reflexive evaluation of their past in China and everyday experiences in the UK was a transnational perspective that enabled them to be more appreciative of their own cultural traditions and values. As Heusinkvelt (1997) pointed out, ‘indeed the greatest shock may not be in the encounter with a different culture but in the recognition of how our own culture has shaped us and what we do.’

Gu and Schweisfurth (2015)

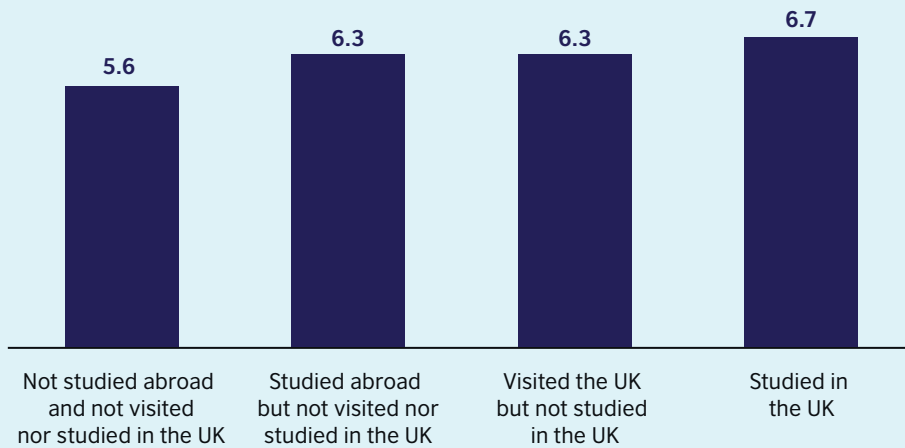
- This openness to debate and discussion encountered by IMS in the UK may be one reason why they are more likely than their peers to view the UK as a positive influence in the world (Chart 16).

Chart 16: Studying in the UK is associated with higher average perceptions that the UK is a positive influence in the world

Taking everything into account, how would you rate the United Kingdom on its overall influence in the world?

Base: All China respondents rating the UK – mean scores (0-10 scale)

By international profile



Source: British Council G20 research data (2021); Analysis by Impact Stories

Base: All China respondents rating the UK by their international profile - Studied in the UK (73); Visited the UK but not studied in the UK (120); Studied abroad but not visited nor studied in the UK (246); Not studied abroad and not visited nor studied in the UK (545). Data is weighted. Data excludes Don't know. Data presented are mean score ratings on an 11-point scale where 0= A very negative influence in the world, 5= Neither negative nor positive, 10= A very positive influence in the world.

- A further channel for soft power influence through ISM is from the creation of global ambassadors. This is certainly a specific goal of many scholarship programmes such as Chevening but HEPs increasingly try to engage all international alumni as institutional ambassadors, for example by inviting them to give outreach talks to new generations of students. Some HEPs also use their alumni to support wider programmes and initiatives around career development and mentoring.
- Many advocates of the role of education as a soft power asset for the UK point to the value of the 55 current world leaders educated in the country (HEPI, 2022). But as one interviewee for this research pointed out, the far greater ambassadorial value for the country comes through the enormous number of professionals and members of civil society who have been educated in the UK who now have roles of responsibility and influence within their societies and economies.

“

We see it as important to support and look after them and to see it as contributing to their longer-term positive experience. We hope to create ambassadors for the future, whether for the region, the town, the city, the UK in general. The students will go back and take the UK with them. It is hugely powerful and also personal.

Internationalisation Manager, UK HEP

“

We've [the UK] educated quite a lot of world leaders and politicians, but we've educated many more activists, social entrepreneurs, librarians, charity leaders... climate scientists, cancer scientists, and, you know, all of these people that don't get the kudos or the profile.

Academic

“

I am well connected with the alumni group, and I also contributed to the [HEP] mentorship program. I am mentoring some current students who are looking for career opportunities in the sector. If they have questions, they reach out to me.

UK Alum, Egypt

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1: British Council Internal Interviewees

Name	Focus Area
Aatreyee Guhathakurta	HE India
Duncan Hu / Cathy He	HE China
Adetomi Soyinka	HE SSA
Jacqui Jenkins	International Student Mobility
Brenda Giles	Going Global Partnerships
Alexis Brown	HE Insight
Andrew Chadwick	Alumni Engagement
Paul Culligan	Evaluation Manager, East Asia
Alistair MacDonald	British Council G20 Data

Appendix 2: International Student Alumni Interviewees

Nationality	Gender	Country of international study	Study Level
Madagascar	Male	Australia	Masters
Nepal	Male	Australia	Masters
Nepal	Female	Canada	Bachelors
Nepal	Male	France, USA, Italy	Masters
Nepal	Male	Germany	Masters
Romania	Female	Germany	Masters
Nigeria	Male	Germany	PhD
Ghana	Male	Germany, Ukraine	Masters
Nepal	Male	Japan	Masters, PhD
Nepal	Female	Thailand	MBA
China	Female	UK	Masters
Egypt	Female	UK	Masters, PhD
Nepal	Male	UK	Masters
Pakistan	Male	UK	Masters, PhD
Papua New Guinea	Male	UK	Masters
USA	Female	UK	Masters, PhD
Nepal	Male	Ukraine	Masters
India	Male	USA	Masters
Nepal	Male	USA	Masters
UK	Female	USA	Bachelors
Turkey	Female	USA	PhD
Nepal	Female	USA, Netherlands	Masters
Indonesia	Male	USA, Portugal	Masters

Appendix 3: External Stakeholder Interviewees

Organisation	Interviewee	Title
University of Toronto, Ontario	Professor Jane Knight	Adjunct Professor, Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne	Professor Christopher Ziguras	Professor in Higher Education
Centre College, USA	Professor Lori Hartmann	Hower Professor of International Studies
Royal Holloway, University of London	Professor Ben O'Loughlin	Professor of International Relations
Department of International Trade	Sarah Chidgey	Head of International Education
NI Department for the Economy	Orlaith Flynn	Head of Skills Mobility
North West Regional College (NI)	Bronagh Fikri	European and International Projects Officer
Ulster University	Mehvish Ashfaq	Assistant Director and Head of Global Opportunities and Experience
University of Bradford	Wesley Hackett	Head of International Transformation
University of Hertfordshire	Megan Knight	Associate Dean (Recruitment, Partnerships and International)
University of Sheffield	Santhana Gopalakrishnan	Senior Policy Officer (provided written input)
Teeside University	George Hunt	Director of International Development
Study USA / University of Pittsburgh	Tony Novosel	Lecturer in History; Former Study USA Support Advisor
Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at the University of Edinburgh	Sharon Boateng; Inga Ackerman	Mastercard Program Manager; Online Learning and Leadership Coordinator
Campus France	Olivier Marichalar	Head of Studies, Press & Communication
UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA)	Anne Marie Graham	Chief Executive
Association of Presbyterian Colleges And Universities (USA)	Jeff Arnold	Executive Director

NB: Professor Qing Gu, Director of the London Centre for Leadership in Learning (LCLL) provided written references
 One further Internationalisation Manager at a UK HEP was interviewed but declined to be referenced

