



Global Horizons: recruiting international students and graduates from UK universities

Helen Connor and Richard Brown



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Summary and Key Recommendations

This report is the fourth in our series on Global Horizons and how universities and businesses can work together to develop more globally aware graduates. It was commissioned by the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI2) which wanted to find out how more businesses, and especially small companies, might offer more international students a quality work placement and recruit more international graduates into their workforce. Previous work has shown that while international students appreciate the high quality of the UK's higher education system, they do not feel they are integrated enough on campus or have their employability sufficiently developed. Both can act as a brake in making the UK a preferred location for internationally mobile students.

We have undertaken an analysis of existing evidence, sought the views of a wide range of employers both through semi-structured interviews and through a sample survey as well as gained insights from a range of partners. Many of these guided our work by being on an Advisory Group. We are most grateful to all those who have helped inform our work. An Annex lists the members of the Advisory Group. I am particularly indebted to Will Archer and Jess Davison of *i-graduate* who undertook the survey for us and to Helen Connor ably supported by Stephanie Scott-Davies who led our work.

The report shows that there are clear benefits to businesses of employing international graduates or students at UK universities. They can bring specific skills and knowledge about different countries, languages and cultures that businesses need in order to develop new markets; they help businesses understand and deal more effectively with overseas customers/suppliers; and, importantly, they broaden the outlook of a company's workforce and can make the business more receptive to new ideas.

But businesses are confused about the new 'rules' governing the employment of international graduates and students, and feel there are too many and often conflicting sources of information. Some employers think that some international students and graduates lack good English language skills and are not culturally aware enough of British workplace and business practices. We make recommendations on how these and other concerns can be addressed.

It is important that the Government recognizes through a consistent set of policies and practices the value that international students bring to the UK, to our universities and to our economy and society. They enrich the student experience on campus and in our society as well as help our businesses be more internationally competitive. As our economy repositions itself to emerge from the recession, an international awareness and an ability to do business globally will be even more important. International graduates can help all organizations in the public, private and third sectors build bridges across the globe. We need to be open internationally and welcoming in the messages we give and practices we adopt. I hope this report will reinforce this stance which has been the hallmark of Britain over many centuries but which can all too easily be threatened by short-termism and short-sightedness especially when times are difficult. If we are to build for the future, we need to continue to benefit from the skills, drive, experiences and the differences that international students and graduates bring to us in this ever more globally connected and interdependent world.



Richard A Brown
Chief Executive

1. Introduction

Businesses are increasingly recruiting in a global marketplace. Many see that they need to recruit talent from a wide range of backgrounds to match their customers, suppliers and future market opportunities. Recruiting international students or graduates may help many UK businesses pull out of the current recession as they look to find new opportunities in overseas markets. But often employers are put off recruiting internationally by issues surrounding immigration and employment and are unaware of the benefits international students can bring to their business. Many students coming to the UK to study are disappointed about the opportunities to access the labour market, either during their time in study or subsequently once qualified.

The focus of this report is on the issues for UK employers in recruiting international students and graduates who have been studying at UK higher education institutions (HEIs). The main purpose is to identify clearly the benefits to employers of taking on international students, both during their studies and as graduates. It also examines the barriers that exist (or are perceived to exist) and how they might be overcome; thus encouraging more employers to take more international students or graduates in the future. The work has been undertaken for DIUS under the Prime Minister's Initiative on internationalising UK Higher Education (PMI2)¹ as a contribution to improving the employability of international students coming here to study, and the UK's attractiveness in this respect. A number of PMI projects are being delivered in universities and colleges to help and support international students and is one of a number of projects to directly involve employers.

The project has built on earlier work undertaken by the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) on Global Horizons² which highlighted global employment trends and the value that graduates with international experiences have to businesses. It has benefited greatly from the assistance given by members of the Advisory Group³ and the employers who took time to answer our questions in the on-line survey conducted by our partner i-graduate and in interviews.

1 See at : http://www.dius.gov.uk/dius_international/education/prime_ministers_initiative

2 See 'Global Horizons and the role of Uk Universities' and other CIHE publications at www.cihe-uk.com

3 see Appendix A

2. Context and background research

2.1 Trends in students coming to the UK to study

The UK has been very successful in recruiting overseas students. In 2005/06 the UK hosted 12% of the 2.7 million students worldwide who enrolled in higher education institutions (HEIs) outside of their countries of citizenship, putting the UK in second position behind the US (with 23%). The UK has a growing share of this international student market⁴.

The number of non-EU students in the UK has increased by 16% since 2003/04, a faster rate of growth than the 5% overall growth in UK student enrolments⁵. In 2007-08, almost 350,000 international students (including 230,000 from non-EU countries) enrolled at UK HEIs, making up almost one in six of the total student population in the UK. At some institutions, mainly in London, the proportion of international students is even higher, over 20%⁶ and there can be further clustering on particular courses.

The pattern of enrolment of non-EU students is different from UK domiciled students. The non-EU students are more likely to enrol in postgraduate, especially masters, courses, and numbers here have grown faster over the last few years than at undergraduate level (see Table 1). Popular subject choices are business/admin studies (68,000 non-EU students, over a quarter of the total) and engineering and technology (31,000 non-EU). However, among postgraduate international research students, science and engineering is more popular. The largest country represented in the UK's international student population is China, but a wide range of other countries are represented also.

Table 1 Student enrolments in UK HEIs, 2007/08

	UK	Other EU	Non-EU	Total	% change in non-EU since 2003/04
Postgraduate	333,655	42,285	125,200	501,135	+22.7
Undergraduate	1,630,660	69,865	104,445	1,804,970	+9.7
All	1,964,315	112,150	229,640	2,306,105	+16.4

Source: HESA

2.2 International graduates staying on in the UK

In 2007/08, 134,000 international students graduated from UK HEIs; that is one in five of the total graduate output. This included 95,000 from non-EU countries (making up 14% of the total). The non-EU graduates are more likely to be masters graduates (56,000) than first degree graduates (27,000); and the vast majority have studied here full-time.

There is no accurate estimate of how many of this large number of international graduates stay on in the UK to work or go back to their own country. We know that it must be a sizeable number from the large volume of applications UK employers report receiving from international students, and also from the high levels of attendance at recruitment events organised by HE careers services. A

⁴ Source: UK Higher Education International Unit, at [www.uhttp://www.international.ac.uk/statistics/index.cfm](http://www.international.ac.uk/statistics/index.cfm)

⁵ New HESA data released in April 2009, suggests that this estimate is approx 100,000 higher.

⁶ According to an analysis of institutional audit reports, by QAA, 2008

survey in 2006 suggested that about a third of international students intended to work in the UK after graduation⁷, rising to over half of those from the Asian and South East Asian subcontinents.

2.3 Employment barriers

However, we know also from research that many of the international graduates who intend to stay on in UK experience problems in finding work here:

- Work and careers support is the main area of dissatisfaction when international students are questioned about their experience in the UK⁸.
- A UKCOSA survey in 2004 showed that around half of international students had experienced working since coming to the UK (which is similar to estimates for term-time working among students generally), but the non-EU students found it more difficult to find work, 64% reported difficulties compared with 26% of UK and other EU students. The greatest problem was around employers' "uncertainties about work regulations". Many international students were dispirited at the prospect of finding work in the UK after graduation, because of perceived Government restrictions as well as employers' perceptions about the difficulty of employing them.
- An AGCAS/ NASES survey⁹ in 2007 showed that issues around work permits and other legal processes were the main barriers to employing international graduates, including 40% who found the process of applying laborious and were put off doing it. Others were confused and ignorant of what they had to do and of the various schemes. There was also criticism then of the one-year employment scheme for international graduates (since changed to two years under Tier 1 PSW).
- A survey of employers in the East Midlands¹⁰ in 2006 showed that, there was varied awareness of the different schemes that existed then for employing international graduates and confusion in rules between EU and non-EU nationals.
- And most recently, in 2008, CIHE research¹¹ among international recruiters highlighted difficulties around 'work permits' and lack of awareness of the different schemes which could apply to students or graduate recruits. Other reported employment barriers included: weaker English language, literacy and communication skills (actual or perceived as likely to be deficient); difficulties adapting to the company or workplace requirements; and fears of retaining them for more than a year or two

In relation to international students seeking work while studying here, there seems to be a lack of awareness among employers of the schemes that apply to them rather than any resistance to taking them¹².

2.3 Employment rules governing international students and graduates

The rules governing employment of international students and graduates in the UK labour market have changed recently, and so some of these experiences and views reported in previous research may have changed.

In June 2008, the UK moved to a new points-based system (PBS) for employing foreign nationals which replaced existing work permit categories. This applies to migrants from outside the European Economic Area (EEA¹³) and Switzerland. Full details of the new system can be obtained from the UK Borders Agency at www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk. The new system is being phased in between 2008 and 2010.

The new system has five main categories which replaced various schemes relevant to graduate recruiters¹⁴. The category which is likely to apply to most newly qualifying international graduates and postgraduates that UK employers recruit is Tier 1 (Post Study Work, PSW), which came into force in 2008. This enables graduates to apply to any employer to work in the UK for up to 2 years

7 *Careers Advisory Services and International students*, HECSU, Briefing Paper, 2005

8 See International Graduate Insights group (1-graduate) Student Barometer

9 Survey of employers in 2007 by AGCAS Internationalisation Task Group in partnership with NASES and HECSU.

10 Burnapp (2007) A survey of employer attitudes to international students and graduates (part of the Internal Connections project in East Midlands involving the region's universities and supported by EMDA)

11 R Brown (2008) *Global Horizons and the role of employers*, Council for Industry and Higher Education

12 See EMDA research, footnote 9

13 The EEA includes all the EU countries, though there are some restrictions on nationals from some of new EU countries

14 Such as the Highly Skilled Migrants Programme (HSM), the Science and Engineering Graduate Scheme (SEGs), Training and Work Experience scheme and Work Permit scheme (for shortage occupations), and in Scotland, the Fresh Talent Initiative.

after qualifying. After 2 years on Tier 1 (PSW), they can stay in the UK for longer under one of the other categories if they have sufficient points. This could be Tier 1 (General) or Tier 2 (Skilled workers with a job offer). A new Student category (Tier 4) came into force in Spring 2009 for students wishing to enter the UK to study at a registered university.

International students currently studying at a UK university (and also future ones under the new Tier 4) are allowed to work during term-time for up to 20 hours per week and full-time during vacations. They can also take a work placement which is an approved part of their course (up to 50% of the time) or take an internship of up to three months.

The most significant facts for employers taking on international graduates or students are shown in the box below):

Tier 1 (PSW) - is for international students once they complete a UK undergraduate or postgraduate course . The graduates apply to register under Tier 1 (Post Study Work) within six months of obtaining their qualification. They then have free access to the UK employment market for up to two years. *Employers do not need to apply to the UK Boarder Agency (UKBA) for any "work permit" to employ them but need to check their documentation and ensure any other legal requirements of the longstanding illegal working regulations. The graduate has to have written proof of their qualification when applying, and also have funds in their bank account of currently £800.*

Tier 1 (General) - is for highly skilled individuals. It requires *applicants* to demonstrate they have sufficient 'points' from their education, work experience and earnings. The rules currently require them to have at least a masters qualification and an earning income of over £20,000 a year; many new graduates are unlikely to meet this. Once registered in Tier 1 (General) they are free to move around the labour market and *employers* need only check their documentation to employ them.

Tier 2 - applies only to certain shortage occupations (see UKBA list) and where the Resident Labour Market Test is satisfied, ie recruits cannot be found in the UK population. In this case, *employers need to register with UKBA* and obtain a Certificate of Sponsorship to become a licensed employer to recruit a foreign worker. If an International graduate is recruited into such a job, he/she usually has to remain with the original UK employer and a fresh application has to be made if they wish to move around the labour market.

None of these applies to most international students - they are free to work part-time during term time (up to 20 hours per week) and full-time during vacations. They can take an approved work experience placement or internship from a UK employer and are unlikely to need special permission from the UKBA (no change from old system). Only students with a passport stamp that says "no work" are prevented from working while studying.

N.B. There are variations and exceptions to these regulations, some international graduates may fall outside of these main categories highlighted above. More detailed information can be obtained from the UK Borders Agency.

These new arrangements have been designed to simplify legal issues, tighten up and clarify criteria for the benefits of both international students and employers, and also reflect changes in the UK labour market. They aim to provide a more streamlined process for employers with the onus being more on the graduates to meet requirements in many cases and less administration for employers. However, this is the first year of its operation and previous research (see above) has shown how graduate recruiters are confused by work regulations, so problems are likely to arise in the changeover period .

2.4 The value of employing international students and graduates

A wide range of businesses in the UK recruit international graduates and also international students in internship programmes and part-time work. The value to employers and the UK economy of having a global perspective has been highlighted in many recent reports, in particular by CIHE where the many advantages of recruiting international graduates, to both large and smaller businesses, have been demonstrated in several recent reports. These include:

- their broader perspective
- drive and work commitment
- diversity of backgrounds
- language skills and cultural sensitivities
- their flexibility, creativity and fresh ideas

The CIHE research has shown also that such graduate recruits can be valuable to UK employers in helping to open up new overseas markets or sustain operations outside the UK. Some multinational companies target international graduates for their particular nationalities or knowledge of geographic regions and cultures, as part of their global HR¹⁵ while others seek them to make up for shortfalls in business awareness and technical skills of home graduates¹⁶.

2.5 This research

In this report, these issues for employers are explored further.

A series of semi-structured interviews were undertaken in early 2009 with 16 employers of different sizes and from different sectors to get an up-to-date insight into current experiences of recruiting international graduates and students from UK universities. We also sought their views on how their concerns might be addressed (list of companies in Appendix A). This was augmented with a wider survey of graduate employers undertaken by i-graduate. We are grateful to members of the Advisory group, and also the AGR, the NCWE, STEP Enterprises, Prospects and several university careers services for the help they gave in identifying employers to interview and also for encouraging survey participation.

Note: The term 'international' is sometimes used for all non-UK students and graduates, to include citizens from both EU and other countries. In the context of this research, the focus was on students from non-EU countries, as this is the main focus of the PMI2 programme.

¹⁵ See research by Miller and Salt among Heads of Careers Services, reported in CIHE (2008)

¹⁶ As highlighted among East Midlands employers, op cit

3. Employers views and experiences of international students and graduates

3.1 Interview evidence

Information was sought from a range of employers who have current experience of international student and graduate recruitment, mainly with graduate recruitment personnel (though in the case of small employers, with company chairman or managing director). They included very large global organisations, medium sized UK-based businesses with some overseas operations, and smaller companies with more specialist interests in developing overseas markets. Some had little or no specific current international business interests. They were asked questions about their own experiences in taking international graduates or students and what would encourage more employers to take them.

Positive experiences of international study recognised

Employers we spoke to generally recognise the positive experience of a period of international study, echoing some of the main messages from previous research (see previous chapter).

"...I find overseas students bring interesting insights add experiences, they have benefited from travel and they have different ways of looking at things which I like".
Managing director of a small information consultancy business

"International graduates have the get-up-and-go qualities and savvy the firm seeks".
Head of trainee recruitment, large law firm

"...the value of recruiting from different backgrounds produces more creative teams... if they have moved to different countries then they are likely to be more mature".
Graduate recruitment manager, investment bank

"...they tend to be harder working, more flexible (no family ties here) so can send them to any UK location".
Graduate recruiter, large construction firm

But drivers behind taking international students or graduates can vary...

Some large firms were seeking a global recruitment pool:

"We need international students and graduates to help us exploit overseas market opportunities, we need an international mindset".
Global recruitment manager, large consultancy firm.

Diversity was emphasised as a key business goal:

"As a company, diversity is one of our core values, so we want to take from different backgrounds... we find the company gets more creativity that way- hence international recruitment is encouraged".
Recruitment manager, large consumer product company.

"There is a strong interest in recruiting ethnic groups to meet business needs... priorities are Chinese, Malaysian, Indian, Pakistani, South African and Russian..."
Major accountancy and consultancy firm

"Young people in schools are increasingly from multi-cultural backgrounds in this country...having teachers and students in schools from similar backgrounds is a way of engaging them in education... they (students) have different talents and experiences to share"

Student associate scheme, Teacher Development Agency.

"They have helped us as a company to think more about different communities and diversity"

Graduate recruiter, large construction company.

Organisations ethnic diversity targets can be met from recruiting different ethnic groups from the international student population as well as UK domiciled students at UK universities.

Some businesses seek a combination of specific skills and knowledge which they find in certain international student groups. Languages was particularly important for some:

"We like to recruit Masters graduates who have done their first degree in China, [and] come here to do Masters. We need them to have very good speaking and writing English skills and a good level of understanding of Chinese language and culture. Have found this is best source"

Chairman of small specialist into-UK tourism company.

"Finding the right people with both the technical skills and right personal qualities is vital to our business. It's very much to our advantage to widen the pool of applicants"

Video games developer.

Others saw benefits in widening their recruitment search pool to include international graduates in their search for talent and skills:

"It's a pool you can't ignore - we know long term there is going to be a demographic downturn... International students can overcome shortages especially if they have specialist skills and experience"

International business consultancy.

"Only seeking to recruit the very best - the 'top of the top' graduates - its not that we can't find what we need in the UK graduate population, just would need to search more, spend more time and money finding them. International students provide easier source to access"

Consumer products company.

Some seek graduates from overseas for specific technical skills, to help make up for a shortfall in quality skills at home; this seems to primarily relate to STEM¹⁷ :

"The UK does not develop enough high quality STEM graduates and post-graduates whereas those from Eastern Europe have such skills"

Head of Resourcing, oil company.

17 STEM = Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths

Size of international intakes vary also

In some companies, international students represented a significant, and growing, proportion of their annual student or graduate recruitment, representing 20 or 30 per cent, while in others the experience of employers was based on a very small number of recruits, just one or two per year.

What brings success in recruiting international students?

Many of the larger companies are successful in attracting international students because they are a recognised name on the global stage or a worldwide brand, for example one company stated *“we are a household name from Nigeria to China”*. This makes it much easier for them to recruit and also to retain them. The students know that these companies have an international workforce, which encourages them to apply and makes it easier for them to make the transition into the company *“they can see others already working successfully in the firm from their own country”*. Building a profile and good reputation in home countries is also seen as important. This might come from taking part on specific schemes with countries. For one company for example, which had taken part in a China exchange programme, this had led directly to them having a significant proportion of their graduate intake now coming from China.

However, even if they are well known brands, they still need to get out on to campuses and target particular groups. On campus this can be done through student societies (e.g. Middle Eastern Society) or via the careers services, as well as through more general recruitment events on campus (e.g. Q&A panels, recruitment fairs). Building relationships with a number of universities where they are more likely to find particular groups of international students is seen as a good approach.

Smaller less well known companies tend to use a variety of sources - university job shops, press adverts, job centres, university careers services and vacancy websites - often because their recruitment is on an occasional basis. Location can be an advantage where there is a relatively high proportion of international students at a nearby university in for example London, or the other large cities. One small company director commented on the ease he experienced in recruiting IT students from the university job shops. He thought this was because he advertised as an equal opportunity employer and the location in South East London with several universities nearby where three or four times more overseas than UK residents applied to him from job shops.

But a main barrier is still seen as the legal work issues

Previous research has highlighted legal issues as main barriers to employing an international graduate or student: the interviews tended to confirm that this is still the case. All the employers and careers advisers we spoke to had negative experiences of one kind or another with work regulations for foreign students or graduates, and most cited this as the main barrier to their employment. This is the first year that the new UKBA points based system has been implemented, and many of the employers spoke about *“feeling their way”* in their current graduate recruitment round. So much of the negative views on work visas etc may well have been coloured by experience of the old work permit system. Some clearly were not yet up to speed with the details of all the changes. Most had yet to see what would happen when graduates applied under Tier 1 (PSW) once they gained their qualification. They need this before they could take them on; it was rare that any new graduate would be taken on under Tier 2. Despite employers not having to do much admin work relating to Tier 1 (as it's the responsibility of the graduate to apply, see above), employers spoke to us about spending money on advice to check they were 'legal' and were concerned with the bureaucracy involved.

At the present time, there is confusion and lack of knowledge about the new system and its impact on student and graduate recruitment. There seems a degree of misinformation among graduate recruitment staff on the detail of the new system, including some fairly large sophisticated graduate recruiters. This was felt to be off-putting, especially for many smaller employers who do not have the internal resources to handle the legal issues. The information from the UKBA website was not felt to be adequate. *“In the current recession where employers are getting more applications from home candidates, why bother with this?”* one employer said.

However, not all employers that we spoke to were experiencing difficulties and several said they found the regulations easier than previously. In a few cases, specific problems were thrown up

by the new system which they were attempting to resolve, for example: a company running an international internship scheme where foreign students spent time in their own country's office and came to the UK office also for a short period (where did they fit in new Tiers?); or law students who were normally recruited during their course to start two years on now can not apply for Tier 1 PSW till after they graduate. In only a few interviews did the employer feel that the new system would be better, as it put more responsibility on to the graduates themselves and was simpler with less schemes.

Poor English language is also a barrier, but only for some

The other main barrier was poor English language skills. This seemed more an issue for certain employers and sectors. For example, construction companies said they found international students were often strong technically but weaker on English language, both spoken and written, and also weak on experience of UK culture (and working on building sites), for example:

"...as many as 40% of applicants are overseas students, mainly masters graduates, but they fall down at each stage of selection ñ on their written English in application form, on their verbal English in telephone interview, and if they get through to assessment centre then they fail again on communication skills and how they would perform on a UK building site. They think because they have experience of working in their own country then thatís an advantage but its not (not the same here as in Dubai!)"

This company only hired three international graduates last year out of 34.

Being in the UK for only a year (on a masters) and on a course where a high proportion of students are non-English speakers (as many are) was not as helpful for improving fluency in English speakers or "culture fit" as being in a more integrated environment for longer, especially where development of business skills was important. One business also suggested that overall quality was affected by teachers having to "dumb down" their offering so as to reach the international students in their classes; they suggested this might even be affecting the quality of the non-international students who subsequently emerged.

But other businesses we spoke with had no problem with English language, perhaps because they were seeking graduates who were more likely to have a good command of English (e.g. law students) or targeting universities which required high English scores as entry requirements. A pharmaceuticals company had fewer problems with English language skills as scientists "speak a common language".

Retention a concern

A third area of concern was retention and the '2 year rule'. Some businesses were reluctant to invest in the development of graduate recruits if they were unlikely to stay for more than two years and then return home - having benefited from the training offered. Specific issues surround those being sponsored by employers on professional training programmes like accountancy where the study period for a professional qualification is three years.

What would encourage more employers to take international students or graduates?

Getting positive messages over about the longer term benefits to businesses of them taking an international graduate and emphasising the particular skills and experience such graduates can offer certain businesses was important. Employers who are looking to expand overseas or develop new markets need people with an 'international mindset'. Others need specialist language skills and country knowledge. However, several businesses spoke about the impact of the current economic climate and difficulties they expected in recruiting international graduates when vacancies were falling and a plentiful supply of home candidates was available. This, coupled with the added burden of checking visas or registering as a sponsoring organisation, suggests many would be discouraged from doing so.

Minimising the practical problems of employing international graduates, to reduce employers' fears about taking them on and 'making them go through hoops', was also seen as important.

Indeed, some employers viewed this as a more important way of encouraging their recruitment than promoting the benefits. There needs to be much better information made available from the Government on the new categories and what the process of registering involves. There need to be more awareness raising to inform employers about changes to educate employers about the process from beginning to end. There was criticism from some employers about the Government's TV advertising to date with some citing the 'hurdles' advert as not being helpful to employers like them. Although the UKBA website is informative, it needs to be simplified and speeded up.

In addition to these two key proposals, other suggestions were:

- A specific advice line for student and graduate recruitment.
- Access to external specialist help, especially needed for small employers. This could come from several sources - the UKBA advisers, their local business organisations or universities (who were generally helpful in giving them information).
- Reducing anomalies, through better alignment between the kinds of graduate internship/recruitment patterns that exist and the Government's foreign workers rules and schemes. Staff at the Home Office needed to understand better the requirements they had to fill certain jobs with graduates and postgraduates.
- Encouraging employers to think more about diversity. It is in their interests to fish in as wide a pool as they can, to get the best choice of candidates, both from the resident population and from overseas. This would strengthen the equal opportunities commitments of companies when advertising for a vacancy so as not to be seen as favouring any specific groups.

3.2. Survey Evidence

In order to augment the interview data and test out possible marketing strategies with a wide representation of employers, the specialist survey organisation, *i-graduate*, undertook a survey of employers. This was an on-line questionnaire launched to a large number of possible student or graduate recruiters identified through a number of organisations with wide and varied memberships¹⁸.

Sample

By the the survey close in early April, a total of 170 employers had participated¹⁹. It was envisaged that difficulties would be experienced with survey response relating to recruitment issues because of the current economic climate; thus, we took steps with our partners to encourage participation and through them, achieved a satisfactory level of response in a short timescale. Though the sample is not large it is drawn from a very wide range of sectors and sizes, including both large global players and small UK firms, as Appendix B Tables A-C show. Key points to note are:

- Both private and public sector employers participated, with the largest groups from the 'banking, insurance and other financial activities' (15% of sample).
- They ranged in size from very small firms, 24% with under 50 employees, to the very large, 16% with over 10,000 employees;
- and also ranged from very small graduate recruiters (one third recruited fewer than 10 graduates from the UK annually) to some of the major graduate recruiters (one in six recruited over 100 graduates annually).
- The vast majority, four out of five, had international dealings, the more common being international or overseas offices/subsidiaries (43 %) or international customers or suppliers (47%). One quarter had an international parent company.

Recruitment of international graduates or students

Around half of the employers (53%) had current experience of recruiting international students for work during study (on internships, placements, part-time work, etc); and slightly more, 61%, had current experience of recruiting international graduates from UK universities (many did

¹⁸ Milkround, AGR, ShellStep and NCWE provided a link to the questionnaire for their members and encouraged them directly to complete the questionnaire

¹⁹ though some questions have slightly smaller responses and more logged on to website but did not go past page 1 to answer questions.

both). Those most likely to recruit international graduates were the businesses with international dealings of some kind, but interestingly, almost half of the international graduate recruiters had no such international dimension to their business (and similarly 41% of those employing international students did not).

Financial services and engineering firms were the sector most likely to recruit international graduates (91% and 85% in these sectors respectively) but all sectors did so but to a varying extent. As might be expected, the larger firms were more likely to be recruiting international graduates (75% of those with 1000+ employees, compared with 55% with fewer than 50 employees). Similarly more larger firms employed international students during study than small ones (34% with fewer than 50 employees did so).

The average size of international graduate intakes was fairly small: in around half of the graduate recruiters, international graduates made up under 10% of their annual graduate intake (and a similar pattern was reported for student intakes). But in one in eight recruiters, international graduates represented over 50% of the total they recruited annually; and this was the case for international students. In just under one in ten of the recruiters over 50% of intakes were international students. These significant (sizewise) international graduate and student recruiters included some small as well as very large employers.

Reasons why international graduates were recruited included:

- Being an international organisation (e.g. International customers, need knowledge of areas we are developing in, aid expansion overseas)
- Taking 'best people for the job'
- Foreign language, technical or specific other skills
- To improve diversity of our workforce
- Their more positive attitude, work ethic, motivation
- And lack of enough suitable home candidates.

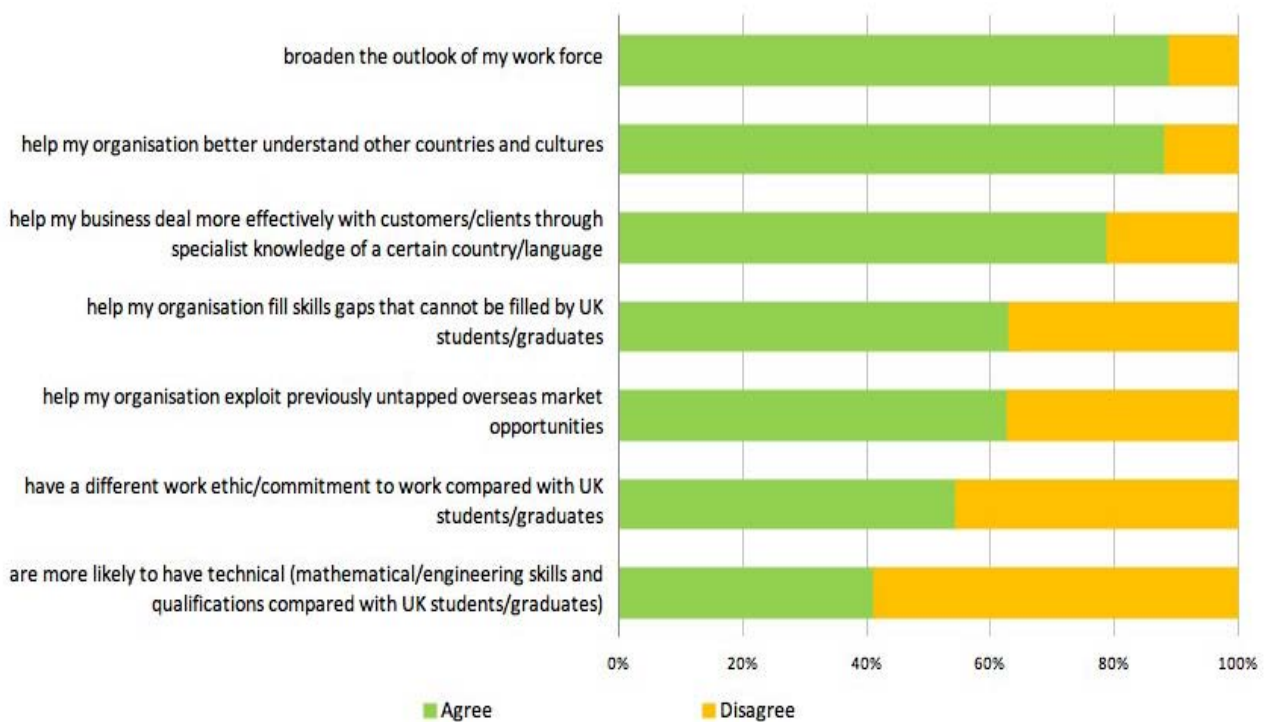
Those not recruiting them, gave reasons of:

- weaknesses in their English language, communication and business skills
- work permit issues
- lack of any requirement for them
- and can source needs from home candidates.

Main benefits of recruiting international students or graduates

When asked to rate several possible benefits, employers in the survey generally saw several benefits of recruiting international students or graduates as being important; these tended to reflect those we heard about in our interviews, and also reasons given for recruiting them (see above). They were mainly in terms of improving their workforce, both by broadening their outlook and by increasing understanding of other countries and cultures (see Chart 1). Other benefits seen as important were the specialist knowledge of a country's language or culture and the better work commitment that international graduates are seen to have. An expected benefit - of making up for deficiencies in the home supply of STEM graduates - received less support in the survey overall relative to these benefits; and even in the engineering sector it was supported by only half of the respondents.

Chart 1: Benefits to employing international students/graduates



Source: i-graduate Employer Insights Questionnaire

Those with no international dealings were more likely to rate the way international graduate recruitment helped their organisation understand other countries and cultures as an important benefit; while those with an international parent company or offices/subsidiaries overseas tended to see broadening the outlook of their workforce as being more beneficial.

Size and sector also seemed to matter. In the relative importance given to different benefits (though this would also relate to the extent of international dealings e.g. very large ones being more likely to be global players). The larger firms were more likely to focus on helping to fill skill gaps left by home student supply and exploiting previously untapped international markets; while smaller firms had a similar pattern of response to the overall results.

Regardless of whether they had current experience of taking international students or graduates or not, the two statements shown at the top of Chart 1 had the greatest support from both groups, though employers with such experience were more likely to stress them (over 85% did) than those without (around 66%). For those not currently recruiting internationally at present, the other main benefit was seen as graduates/students having specialist knowledge of a country/language (63%), though here too it had less support than among the current international graduate recruiters (71%). The pattern of response for international graduates was very similar to that when asked about international students.

Employment or Recruitment Barriers

Key concerns focused around the legal employment issues, confirming the views highlighted in our interviews and also that shown in previous research (see chapter 1). Two out of three employers in the survey felt that too many and often conflicting sources of information act as a main barrier to international student/graduate recruitment, and also there is confusion about current regulations and/or bureaucracy. These included almost one fifth who strongly felt that these were barriers. Individual comments on the questionnaires included, for example:

"There is much confusion on both sides - employers and graduates themselves. We have faced a number of issues - in particular where students/graduates are given wrong advice by their university. This then makes it difficult for employers to convey over the correct message. There is also conflicting and ever changing rules about immigration - which is very confusing".

A transport/storage company

"The cost of obtaining visas and the lengthy administration process"

A software company

"It is not just confusion about the bureaucracy, it is the actual bureaucracy particularly if they need to travel. The complexity, admin and time cannot be justified for junior recruits"

A commercial services company

A third concern was about retention - whether or not a graduate they employed would be allowed to stay (seen by 44 % as a barrier).

"IGS visa allows international students to stay in the UK for 2 years - this is useless to us as we require them to sign and stay for a 3 year training contract."

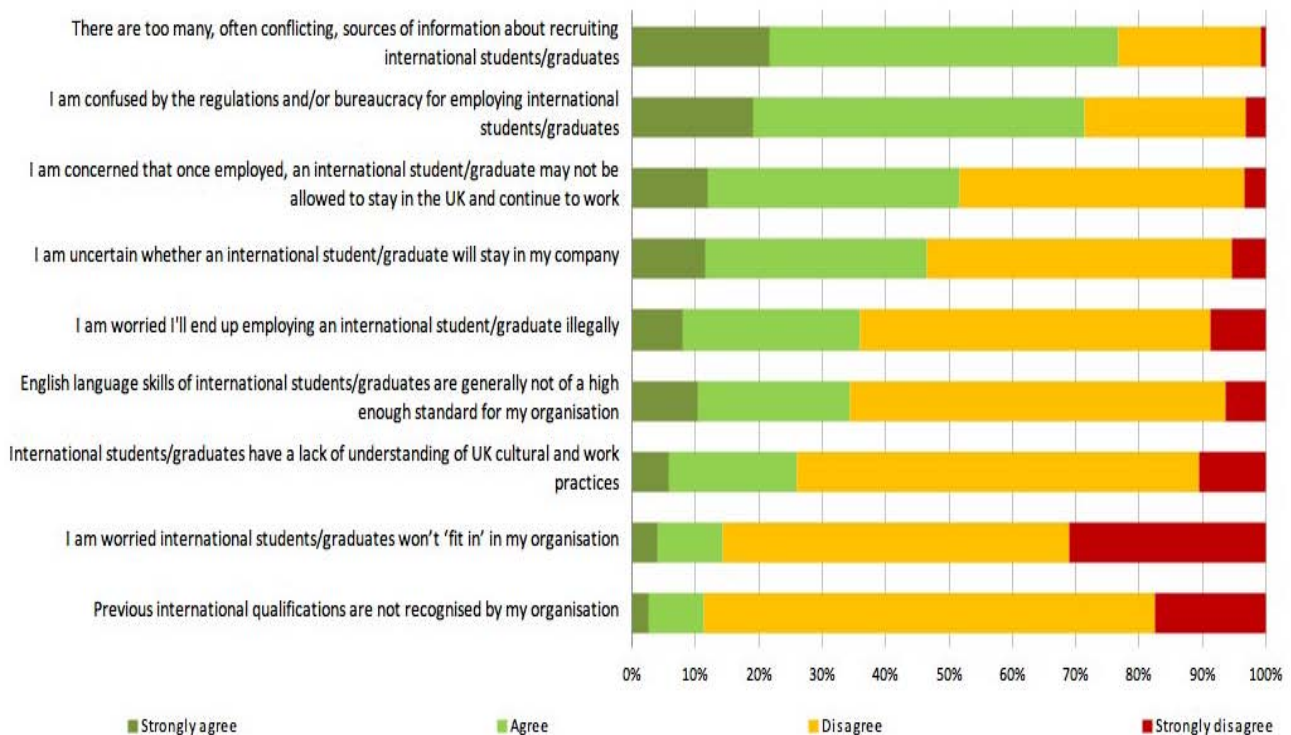
A financial company.

"Once the student has finished their studies they often want to return to their home country whereas we are looking for people to remain within our business or if not at least in London/UK."

A hotel and catering company.

The full range of responses is shown in Chart 2 .

Chart 2: Barriers to recruiting international students/graduates



Source: i-graduate Employer Insights Questionnaire

Of relative less concern overall were issues about international graduates “fitting in” to their organisation and about their previous qualifications not being recognised.

Some sectors placed greater emphasis on certain issues. For example, employers in the construction sector felt less strongly that information or confusion around working regulations were the main barriers and were more concerned about poor English language skills and international students’ understanding of UK working practices and cultures. This supports similar views expressed in our interviews. Employers in IT, hotels/catering, engineering and transport were also more likely to have concerns about English language skills, some even more so than in the construction sector.

“Some nationalities, particularly the Chinese, seem to integrate themselves into groups of other Chinese students which ultimately has a knock on effect on their level of English upon graduation. I don’t feel the UK educational system / government does enough to clue them up that they need to integrate into groups of English speakers. A common objection I come up against with the Chinese is their English/ communication skills are absolutely appalling and this creates a huge obstacle when trying to find them work”
 A comment from a software supplier.

These differing views are likely to reflect in part different requirements of different sectors for communication skills, but it also may be that some sectors have better access to information or different experiences in international recruitment and dealing with the regulations on employment of foreign workers.

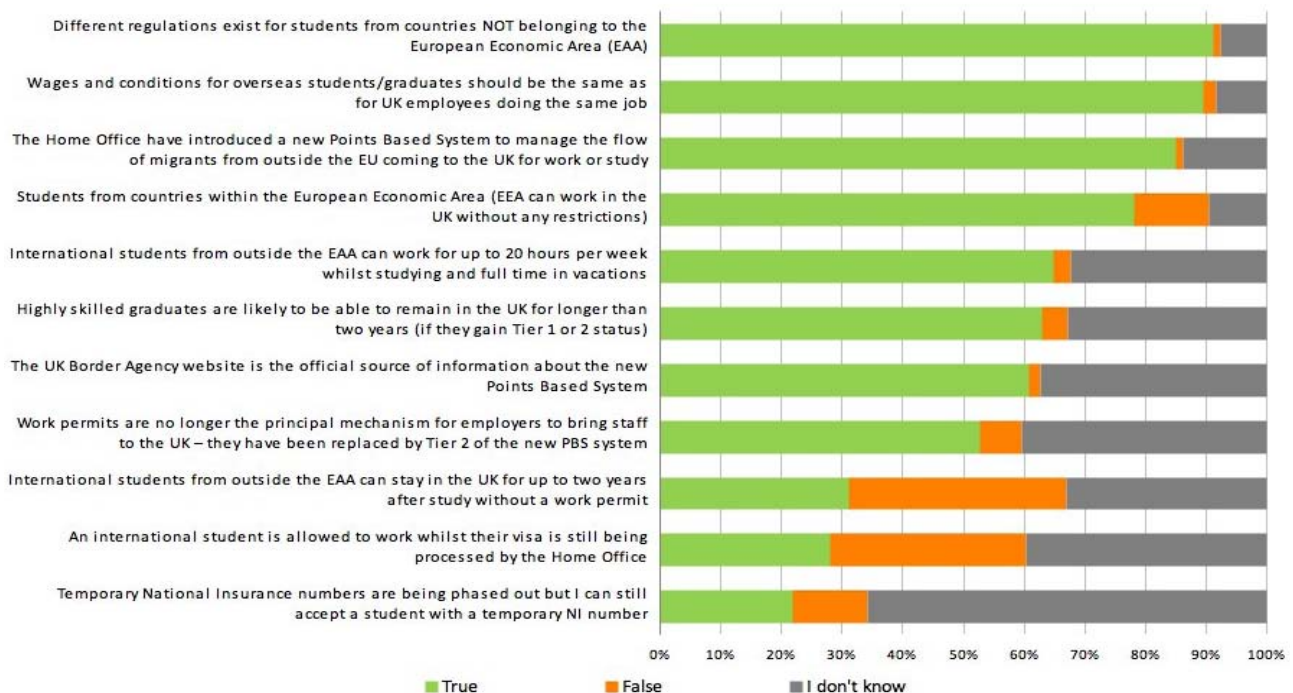
Equal proportions of current and non-current international graduate recruiters (65%) had concerns about too many or conflicting sources of information, so this view did not seem to be affected much by actual recruitment experience. But those with such experience were slightly less likely to cite a lack of understanding of UK cultures and practices, perceptions of poor English skills and worries about them “fitting in” to their organisation than those who did not currently recruit them.

Views on barriers to student recruitment were similar, but those with current experience of employing an international student were slightly more likely than those with current experience of recruiting an international graduate²⁰ to view most of the statements given as barriers, in particular the ones on confusion on work regulations and sources of information.

Knowledge of new systems/rules on employment

Because of the recent changes in the regulations on immigration and working, and the likelihood that an issue for employers might be their understanding of the changes, we included a question about their awareness of the new system that has been introduced for non-EEA students (see Introduction).

Chart 3: Knowledge of new regulations for recruiting international students/graduates



Source: i-graduate Employer Insights Questionnaire

20 But many fell into both categories

They were asked if the factual statements were broadly correct.

The responses demonstrated a level of uncertainty or lack of knowledge on many of the 'facts', as the grey area in the chart (the don't knows) shows, rather than employers being misinformed about specific regulations. Where the latter, it was in relation to rules for students being able to stay and work for two years after qualifying without a work permit (the new Tier 2 PSW) and international students being able to work while their visa is being processed. Awareness seems highest around knowing that there are different regulations for non-EEA and other students and that wages and conditions should be the same as for UK employees (both over 90%), that there is a new Points Based System introduced by Home Office (85%) and students from within EEA can work in the UK without restrictions (78%).

Employers with current experience of recruiting international students or graduates are better informed generally than those without such experience. Smaller firms seem to be much less aware than larger firms that 'work permits' are no longer the main mechanism and replaced by Tier 2 of new PBS (only a third of those with under 100 employees answered this question correctly, though most knew that the new PBS system had been introduced). Employers in different sectors varied in their awareness across a number of the 'facts' but no clear pattern was evident.

Future international student or graduate recruitment

When asked about future intentions on International student or graduate recruitment, the overall trend was likely to be stable or slightly upwards. The largest group (42%) said that the current level would stay about the same in the next 3-5 years, and slightly more said it would increase than decrease (18% v. 16%). When asked about recruiting international students, the main response was 'stay the same' (46%) with a small balance towards growth (14% increase v. 12% decrease).

Increasing trends

Reasons for increasing international recruitment were mainly due to company growth and business global market trends, such as:

"We are expanding into Asia and developing countries"
A software and computer services company.

Also, the need for specific language or cultural knowledge:

"too few UK graduates have the language skills or inter-cultural experience for foreign assignments"

And as part of their talent management pipeline, a few commented on a lack of UK talent:

Decreasing trends

Those who were likely to reduce international recruitment, blamed the current recession and downturn in graduate demand generally, plus more UK graduates seeking work for example:

"... we'll be able to recruit from within this pool without the need to recruit international students".
A large financial services company.

Some were discouraged by the legal difficulties and problems being experienced processing applications in new system, for example:

"The complexity of obtaining work permits and the new additional 'hoops' that an employer has to go through makes the process very time intensive, without guaranteed results"
Financial services employer.

"Some of the regulations are too prohibitive in their current form to allow us to continue to recruit large numbers of international graduates. Tier 1 Post-Study is not an acceptable compromise - why should we train graduates for 2 years if we will inevitably lose them at the end of their training when they are starting to become useful".

A large engineering employer

"...any hardening of current rules will inevitably result in reduction of numbers"

A large IT company.

while others were more interested in the graduates attributes than their nationality:

"The person with the best skills and mind-set will get the job. We are not interested what part of the world they come from"

A small IT company.

"We do not have targets for having international graduates, if they fit the profile of the job then they will be the person appointed"

A small engineering company

What might encourage employers to take more international students or graduates?

When asked what might encourage them to recruit more international students or graduates, the main suggestions were around overcoming the main barriers listed above, such as: clearer explanation of the process and regulation (supported by 55%) and making information available in one place (45%). For example:

"Making the actual process more transparent. It is often unclear if delays in obtaining work permits are due to home office restrictions, or due to errors. The current process is very time intensive, and does not seem very "user friendly".

A large financial services company

"Less red tape and a simpler process (try renewing your Road Tax online - it's a joy) i.e. you don't need more explanations, you need fewer simpler regulations to explain."

A medium sized engineering employer

"Remove all of the complexities for the graduate population. Offer Tier 1 Post-Study for 5-years (or 3 years followed by 2-year extension as per the other Tiers) and allow settlement via this route."

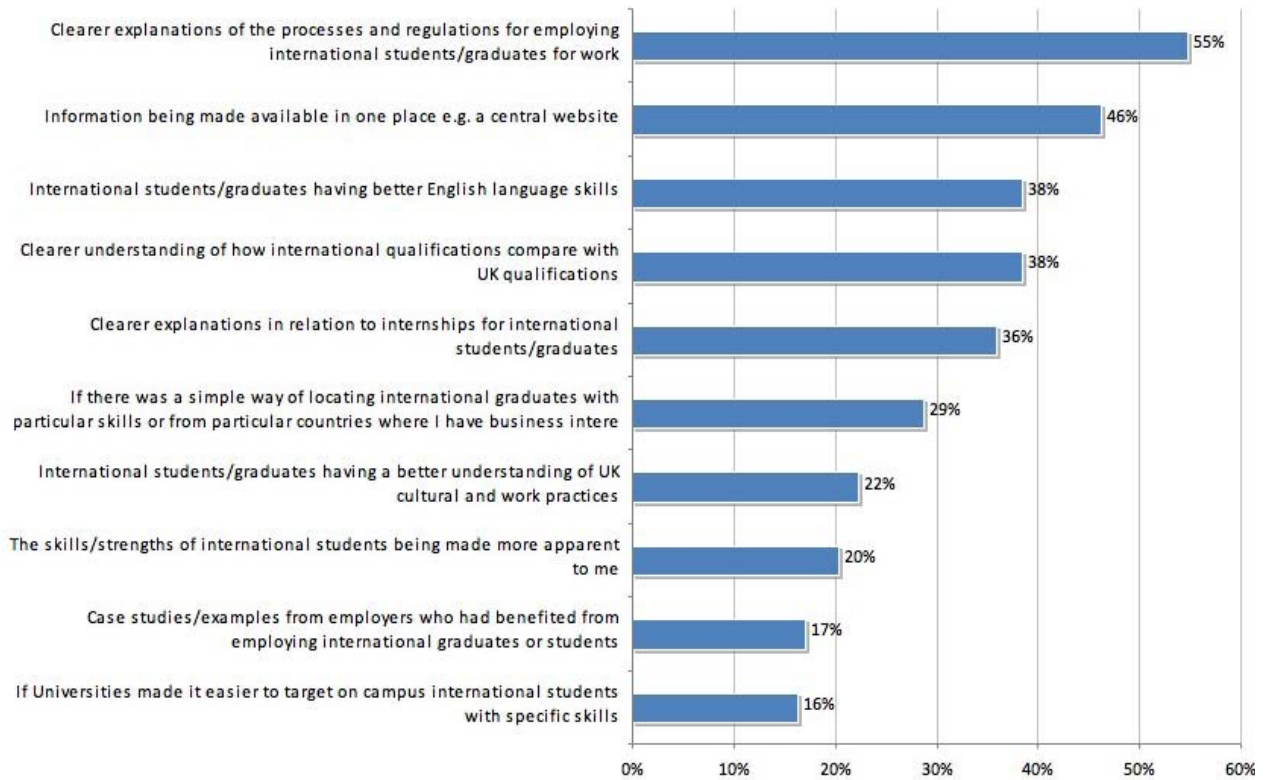
A large engineering company.

But a range of other factors were also supported, as Chart 4 shows.

Smaller firms were more likely to support factors like the "clearer explanations" and "information in one source" than any of the others.

Construction employers were more likely to support improvements to English (71% supported this, way ahead of others listed); financial, media, engineering, IT and hotels/catering wanted clearer explanations (each over 70%); engineering, IT and hotels/catering wanted better understanding of equivalences between qualifications (over 60%). There were many other differences between employers, but the sample numbers were too small to analyse clearly.

Chart 4: Factors encouraging employment of greater numbers of international students



Source: i-graduate Employer Insights Questionnaire

Other comments when asked what else might encourage employers included:

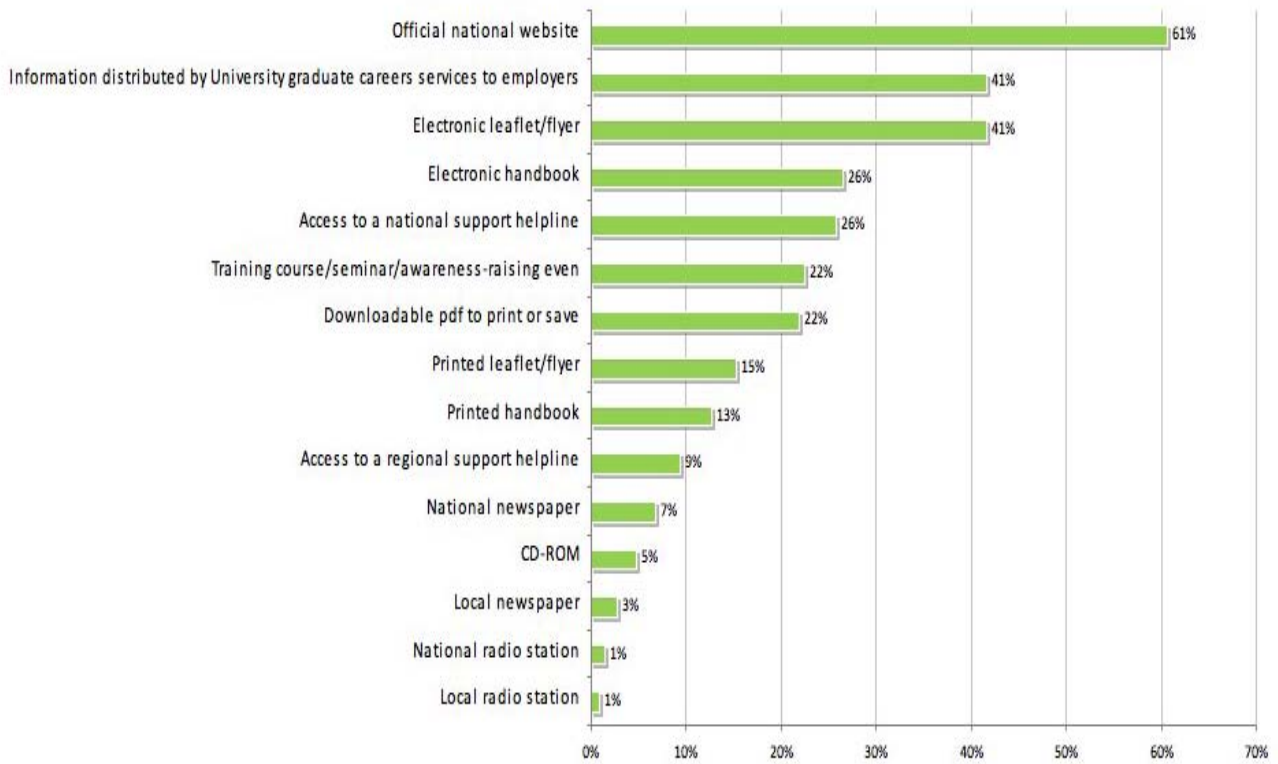
- Perhaps a central agency or website where international students can register their CVs for employers to search for skills/languages etc. (Large financial services company)
- We would take on American students with their ‘Can Do’ attitude. European students lack this ‘Can Do’ attitude especially British students. European governments create European students who lack drive, originality and creativity and the will to succeed. All the international students/graduates in the world are meaningless unless they possess an American style drive to succeed big time. (Media company)
- To encourage me to take on more international students would be to alter the time when they need to go out on their placement within their course, in my opinion they are put out for placements too early in their course, only arriving in the UK in September and on placement in February, without much knowledge of the UK, London and employers expectations. In my experience the students often need interview training and must be prepared more for their interviews, know more about the employer and know who they could potentially be working for. (Small company in hotels and restaurants sector)
- Guarantees that if we employ and build a SME business made up of international students, I don’t have to worry about their work permit/visa being taken away once they are fully trained... 2 years is not enough for a succession plan which needs to plan for a business that needs to grow for the next 10 years. (Small company)

Preferred source of information

Finally, when asked about sources of information they would like to use when seeking to recruit an international graduate or student, there was a preference for having an official website (61%) though a number of sources were likely to be used as Chart 5 indicates. Also more likely to be used were information distributed by university graduate careers service to employers and an electronic leaflet. Smaller numbers would use access to a national support helpline and training courses, seminars etc or local radio, newspapers etc.

There was some variations between firms of different sizes and sectors but no noticeable deviation from this general pattern.

Chart 5: Preferred Information sources



Source: i-graduate Employer Insights Questionnaire

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The research has given an up-to-date employer perspective on recruiting international students and graduates from UK universities and colleges, whose numbers have been growing but who often experience difficulties in working here during or after study.

Benefits need to be stressed more

There are clear benefits to businesses of employing international graduates or students. They can bring specific skills and knowledge about different countries, languages and cultures that businesses need in order to develop new markets; they help businesses understand and deal more effectively with overseas customers/suppliers; and, importantly, they broaden the outlook of a company's workforce and hence can make the business more receptive to new ideas. The extent of these benefits varies between sectors and by size of business but they are recognised increasingly by a wide range of organisations. However, many graduate employers seem unaware of these benefits. Some think too narrowly in terms of just the specific country/foreign language skills. Some perceive weaknesses in English language, communication and business skills which puts them off recruiting more international graduates.

We recommend that the value of recruiting international graduates or students needs to be given greater emphasis through an awareness raising and marketing campaign.

We suggest doing this primarily through the development of a simple set of marketing materials, including a leaflet in electronic format which sets out key messages on benefits to employers and also the key facts that graduate and student recruiters need to be aware of. Collating a set of success stories from the research in a mini case study format would help to sell the benefits. The timing of this marketing campaign needs further consideration. It may be best to delay and have greater impact when the economy has recovered somewhat. This could then be sent out via a wide range of organisations such as UKTI, CBI, Chambers of Commerce, AGR, RDAs and other graduate/student stakeholder organisations.

Information on employment needs to be clearer.

There is confusion around the new 'rules' governing the employment of international graduates and students, and also too many and often conflicting sources of information. There is a lack of awareness of the specific ways in which the Government's new Points Based System for employing foreign nationals affects graduate recruitment practices and student employment (such as internship schemes and work experience/placements). Many employers have had negative experiences of working through the details of how the new system applies to their individual needs. Our research has shown that issues on immigration and working arrangements are key concerns and continue to be seen by employers as the main barrier to their employing international graduates or students. There is a need to de-mystify how the rules apply.

We recommend a set of clearer guidelines for graduate and student recruiters through a single source of information.

We suggest one official on-line source, which can be accessed by employers in different ways. It should be the responsibility of UKBA to provide this, and also to give better guidance and to monitor how the new system is operating with employers. This can be helped by working with partners (CBI, AGR, AGCAS) which can give specialist inputs on student/graduate issues and graduate recruiters practices. It is very important that all organisations involved provide consistent, relevant and accurate information to employers, otherwise UK business will suffer by missing out on recruiting some high calibre and talented people. Work on de-mystifying the

process and regulations, especially to small enterprises, could also be undertaken through the media and regional bodies (as part of the marketing messages, see above).

Universities need to improve student employability

A weakness of some international graduates, and also the reasons why some employers do not currently recruit them, is a perception that they lack good English language skills and that they are not culturally aware enough of British workplace and business practices. The research has shown that this applies to some students and not to all depending on their choice of course and career intention, country of origin and extent to which they integrate with other students and the wider society. Many institutions have been working to ensure a better integration of international students on campus.

We recommend that efforts by universities and colleges on helping international students improve their employability and integration on campus continues to be given attention and resourced.

It needs to be made clear to those international students who wish to remain and seek work here, that employers put high priority on good communication and relevant business skills. Employers could help by working with universities to get this message across (as some do now) through joint events on campus and by providing more student work experience opportunities as a way of improving integration and developing employability skills. They can then benefit not just in improving the quality of the recruits they attract but also in savings on recruitment costs; a quality placement can be an extended and practical interview process that can add real value to the graduate and the business (especially valuable to SMEs)²¹. Universities can also encourage self-help through student mentoring schemes and by encouraging international students to improve their English both before they start or during their course of study. There are many on-line courses available as well as specialist providers.

The Government should allow a more flexible period for post study work

Although the extension to allow two years post-study work by international graduates is welcomed, some would like more certainty around whether a recruit is able to stay for longer. Others, notably from the professions that have three year programmes, want it extended to 3 years.

We recommend that the Government review the current rules around length of post-study work and see whether or not there is a need to extend this for certain professions or occupational training programmes.

Other actions

In addition to these four main recommendations, several other issues were raised by some employers where action could be taken. These include:

- helping businesses to find out where students or post-graduates from specific countries are studying specific subjects, so as to target better their student placement and graduate recruitment efforts. HESA already collect this information but often businesses are unsure how to access it.

We suggest HESA makes information on what international students are studying what and where more easily accessible in a general impersonalised form.

- Businesses can find it difficult to equate the different qualifications that international graduates present, and also some universities find the plethora of awards difficult to grasp and hence whether the applicants have suitable capabilities for the course they are applying for. It would be helpful to all parties if there was an authoritative guide on comparative qualifications.

We suggest that the British Council with others compiles a comparative authoritative list of the main qualifications that international students are likely to bring to a UK university.

²¹ See recent CBI report 'Future Fit' for examples

Appendix A

Name	Organisation
William Archer	i-graduate
Jane Artess	Prospects
Jacqueline Brabazon	Standard Chartered
Richard Brown	CIHE
Chris Cartwright	Burson Marsteller
Alison Clark	NASES
Helen Connor	CIHE
Margaret Dane	AGCAS
Jess Davison	I-graduate
Keith Dugdale	KPMG
Christina Kerr	PricewaterhouseCoopers
Pat Killingley	British Council
Mark Leach	NUS
Ed Metcalfe	SEEDA
Dr Chris Moore	Kodak
John Morewood	HSBC
Marc Reid	BG Group
Andy Russell	CBI
Dominic Scott	UKCISA
Stephanie Scott-Davies	CIHE
Navjot Singh	Shell
Vivienne Stern	UUK

Appendix B

Table A: Sector	
Engineering and Industry	26%
Financial services	15%
Public services & Education	14%
Media and other business services	14%
Charity/not-for profit	7%
Others	23%

Table B: International Relationships	
Has an international parent company	24%
Has international/overseas offices/subsidiaries	43%
Has an international network of member firms	17%
Has international representatives/partners	25%
Has international customers/suppliers	47%
No international dealings	20%

Table C: No. of employees	
1-49	28%
50-99	7%
100-499	16%
500-999	7%
1,000-4,999	17%
5,000-9,999	5%
10,000+	16%
I don't know	4%

Source: *i-graduate Employer Insights Questionnaire*

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Michael Stewart, Standard and Poor's Performance and Evaluation Services, New York, December 2008

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Philip Ternouth (£6) November 2007, ISBN 1 87422 67 X

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