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## Students, universities and the bureaucratic labyrinth of UKBA

Here we provide an update on student immigration to the UK, which continues to make the news here and abroad. As ever, there is a gulf between those who shout that our **immigration controls are too lax** and those who argue that it builds a **fortress around academia** – and then there are the **Liberal Democrats**.

First, on the student visa suspensions: Our last issue reported that the UK Border Agency (UKBA) had stopped processing Tier 4 student visa applications at its offices in northern India, Nepal and Bangladesh, and that Universities UK (UUK) had secured from UKBA an undertaking that university-level student visa applications already in the pipeline would be expedited.

This now appears to have been taken forward with an announcement last weekend by a DBIS minister, Pat McFadden, during a visit to India for, *inter alia*, a meeting of the India-UK Science & Innovation Council. **He noted** in his blog that the surge in visa applications had been for entry at levels lower than university courses and that the suspension would be lifted on 1 March for students doing 'degree courses' only. For lower-level study, the ban will remain in place until the implementation of yet more changes announced last week by the Home Secretary. This was all afforded saturation (though neutral in tone) coverage in the **Indian press**.

More generally, the latest add-ons to the eternal revolution that is the points-based system were **presented to parliament by the Home Office** on 10 February. This was in fact the outcome of the Tier 4 review which had been expected in December. The announcements included a ban on bringing dependants to the UK for students on courses of six months or less, and a ban on dependants working unless they qualify to do so in their own right. Both of these restrictions seem unproblematic.

Another constraint – to halve the number of hours international students can work during term from 20 to 10 a week – was presented as affecting the whole sector. Although we understand that this in fact will not apply to students on degree programmes, the **Home Office website** would have you believe otherwise. It is a partial reversal of a policy designed to enhance our collective offer to prospective students. (UK university staff can log in to our website to see a comparison of such regulations across Europe in our **report**.)

More serious, however, is the raising of entry requirements for English-language courses, the possibility of which **we flagged in November**. Such courses not only constitute a massive market in the UK, but about 1/3 of international students in higher education in the UK were already here on English and other preparatory programmes before moving on to university. Although the Home Office said that there would be exemptions for students on language courses that lead to full degree courses, **UUK indicated in its press release** that it would pursue the matter with UKBA nonetheless.

All of the above comes into effect on 3 March. On 6 April, a new category of 'highly trusted sponsors' (education providers) will come into existence, presumably to facilitate a fast-track visa-application process. What in fact constitutes a highly trusted institution is not yet known, so a quick consultation on the criteria will take place. We do know that publicly funded institutions will in the first instance be treated as highly trusted by default and that private institutions will have to apply to the UKBA for this status.

In order to gain a snapshot of the impacts of the points-based system on recruitment, UUK conducted a survey of its members in autumn 2009. The responses indicated a high level of difficulty for universities and dissatisfaction for new international students. There was an indication, though based on a small sample, that postgraduate research recruitment was lower than expected. 97% of universities said that recruiting international students cost them more money in 2009, and 79% said that they needed to take on more staff to meet the requirements of the new regime. Among the hundreds of comments offered, 'confusing and inconsistent information from UKBA' figured prominently; moving goalposts, mistakes by UKBA and anxiety for students were not far behind.

A new worldwide IT system for UKBA launches next week. That should settle things down.

## Markets & Intelligence

### Glasgow Caledonian to open in London

Transnational education has a slightly different meaning this week, as **Glasgow Caledonian University** (GCU) announced that it will, in September 2010, become the first Scottish institution to run courses in London.

The new base, which is very likely to be in the **Spitalfields** area of east London, will deliver a range of specialist postgraduate courses (mainly MAs and MScs), in business, finance and risk, and continuing and professional development (CPD) training programmes. In subsequent years the curriculum is expected to extend to retailing, construction, and public health. GCU London will also be a base to develop its Business Academies which offer CPD and specialist qualifications to multinational companies. The awarding of professional accreditations will be central to the project.

GCU aims for an initial intake of 100 postgraduates and the business plan is to reach an enrolment of 300 within three years. Funding for GCU London will be allocated from the university's surplus and the move will cost what looks these days like a rather modest £1m.

Professor Pamela Gillies, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of GCU, said 'GCU London will enable us to enhance our profile and allow us to compete successfully in the global educational market. We are well-placed to succeed in this venture given our strong track record with an outreach college in Oman [**Caledonian College of Engineering**] and our more recent international activities in China'.

Alison Arnot, GCU's Communications Manager, noted also that Spitalfields, as a burgeoning urban regeneration area, was consistent with the university's socially inclusive ethos and an attractive potential location for GCU London. London had been considered a potential base for GCU for some time but December 2009 was when academic opportunities and the availability of good premises coincided. She added that a London base would augment the university's reputation, international visibility, and long-term financial sustainability.

As with any TNE operation, there will be staffing issues to iron out. But GCU's move will be seen as shrewd by many: not only is the number of international and European students in the UK increasing, but the rate of this increase is currently accelerating.



### Welsh graduate opportunity Stateside

Graduates of the University of Wales who are struggling to find a job in the current economic downturn are to be given the opportunity to travel to the US on a scholarship programme with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

One graduate will spend up to two weeks at MIT, where s/he will meet with entrepreneurs, experts and academics to help develop ideas for a new business. The scholarship is being run in conjunction with the Cardiff Business Club.

MIT's entrepreneurship programmes are amongst the best in the world, resulting in 25,800 active companies that have been founded by MIT alumni. These currently employ about 3.3 million people and generate annual world sales of £1.5 trillion, producing the equivalent of the 11th-largest economy in the world.

To qualify for the scholarship, applicants must be currently unemployed and have graduated in 2009 from one of the constituent institutions of the University of Wales: Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, Glyndwr University, University of Wales Lampeter, Swansea Metropolitan University, Swansea University, Trinity College Carmarthen, University of Wales Newport and UWIC.



*MIT: A high-class nursery for entrepreneurs*

For details on how to apply, email: [innovation@wales.ac.uk](mailto:innovation@wales.ac.uk) or call 029 2037 6986

## In Focus: Hong Kong HE - reforming the curriculum

### A hub in the making?

Hong Kong should be grabbing the attention of universities around the world as it embarks on audacious education reforms of its school and university structures and rolls out policies designed to turn it into an education hub to compete with Singapore.

Measures to promote Hong Kong as an education hub include the provision of land for as many as five new higher education campuses, to operate on a self-financed basis with start-up loans available from the government. Officials have indicated that they may welcome branch campuses from overseas.

Chief Executive Donald Tsang also announced in his policy address that the government planned to attract more mainland Chinese students to Hong Kong by allowing them to enrol in non-local courses. Hong Kong is the leading market for transnational education for UK universities, with more than 21,200 students enrolled in UK courses taught in Hong Kong in 2007-08, according to HESA data. It has already attracted close to 10,000 mainland students to undergraduate and master's programmes at its own universities.

Last September, Hong Kong launched the new academic structure, with students entering Secondary Four at age 15 to 16 the first to embark on the new three-year senior secondary curriculum, following three years of junior secondary. This qualification will lead to four-year undergraduate programmes. This is the so-called 3+3+4 model which replaces the current system of students studying for the Hong Kong Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (HKCEE) at the end of Secondary Five followed by the Hong Kong A-level in Secondary Seven, and a three-year undergraduate system.



*Curriculum reform = international HE hub?*

undergraduate programmes outside Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority commissioned UCAS to conduct the tariff study, so that the HKDSE can now be found in its tariff.

The standards-referenced HKDSE is marked from Levels One (the lowest) to Five, with a norm referenced 5\* and 5\*\* for finer differentiation for university entry. The UCAS tariff concluded that for all subjects except maths, Level 5\* equivalent to between grade A and A\* in the UK A-level, Level 5 a grade A; Level 4 a C and Level 3 an E.



Reforms of Hong Kong's academic structure will transform its higher education and have deep implications for the international mobility of Hong Kong students. Preparations for students graduating from the new school system are well underway. In January, UCAS published the outcome of its tariff benchmarking for the new Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) and compared it favourably with the UK A-level. This lays the ground for admissions tutors to set their own admissions policies for Hong Kong students from 2012.

The HKDSE will be sat for the first time in 2012, the last year that Secondary Seven students complete A-levels, resulting in the challenge for Hong Kong institutions to manage a double cohort entering local universities and sub-degree programmes.

The HKDSE involves an enlightened curriculum, including four core subjects (English, Chinese, Mathematics, and enquiry-based Liberal Studies), two to three elective subjects, and 'Other Learning Experiences' covering aesthetic, physical and careers education, and community service.

Unlike the old system, in which there were A-level places for about one-third of the age group, with about 25,000 students qualifying for A-level courses not catered for, all students will be able to study for the diploma.

The Hong Kong government has taken steps to ensure that the HKDSE can be recognised for direct entry to

## In Focus: Hong Kong HE - reforming the curriculum

### A hub in the making? continued...

There are no equivalents to Grades B and D. The tariff does not cover Levels 1 and 2. Maths is dealt with separately because of its compulsory and extended components. Together it is equivalent to a UK A-level above Level 3.

UK Naric has also completed a study of the HKDSE, comparing it favourably with UK A-levels and similar qualifications.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong universities are responding to the changes by redesigning their curricula for the fourth year. Most are looking to include more liberal arts style curriculum content, language instruction and plans for overseas study and work experience. For example, undergraduates at Hong Kong Polytechnic University will study a subject major, plus at least one subject from four clusters, including Languages; Human Nature, Development, Community and Globalisation; History, Culture and World views; and Science, Technology and Environment.

The new four-year degree structure has implications for the many UK degree programmes taught in Hong Kong, mainly to top up sub-degrees. Transnational education local partners are already reviewing their sub-degrees and considering the credit requirements for a full degree.

The Hong Kong Council for the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications, set up in 2008 to spearhead reforms of quality assurance through a new Qualifications Framework, is about to promote local accreditation of non-local courses, which is likely to come with the major market incentive of allowing students access to the same government financial support as for other local courses.

Hong Kong's reforms will be explored in two plenary sessions in the Going Global 4 Conference between 24-26 March, organised by the British Council:

### **Ambitious Education Reforms: Implications for Hong Kong and Educational Strategies in the Quality Assurance of TNE.**

Senior education officials and academics will lead these sessions before running workshops for UK admissions tutors from institutions belonging to the Education UK Partnership Hong Kong country partnership.

The implications of the four-year structure and the new quality assurance regime for transnational education will be the subject of research and a workshop planned by the British Council for the autumn.

Click [HERE](#) for information about the Hong Kong sessions at Going Global 4.

Click [HERE](#) for information about the UCAS tariff for the HKDSE.

**Katherine Forestier**  
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*University of Hong Kong: A curricular renaissance*

## In Focus: Saudi Arabia's 'coming out'

### Saudi Arabia Diary

Riyadh, January 2010 – Liz Murphy, Director of UK Recruitment at Birmingham University, and I just attended Saudi Arabia's four-day **International Exhibition for Higher Education (IEHE)**. The recent changes to Saudi higher education have been breathtaking: the world's fourth-richest university is too new for the history books and too young even to appear on Google Earth.

The **King Abdullah University of Science & Technology (KAUST)** may be a baby institution but it is sucking on one hell of a silver spoon. Endowed with a reported \$10bn (implausibly denied by the Saudis) and partnered by 27 of the world's leading universities on lucrative consultancy contracts, KAUST is the Saudi Kingdom's bold initiative (as Times Higher Education put it recently) to revitalise a higher education system that turns out graduates so lacking in skills that jobs go to foreigners rather than locals.

It is a bold experiment in academic engineering and sets a clear benchmark in these early years of internationalisation in HE as to whether academic greatness can simply be purchased and a liberal ethos planted within a deeply repressive society.

The IEHE was an extraordinary event, a sort of 'coming out' party for the Saudis – an event of World Cup proportions and probably the largest international student recruitment fair ever with an estimated 250,000 visitors and 382 exhibitors from 33 countries. This is how the Saudis wanted it to be, and having hijacked the British Council's annual exhibition (by refusing the organisers a license), the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education put a three-line whip on local institutions and financed the appearance of some of the more cherished global brands (Yale, Cambridge, Oxford et al) – an extension of the no-tender-procurement of HE brands for consultancy work that is becoming a feature on the international circuit.

Eleven-hour days and the absence of beer in the evening made it a trying event. But it was worth it, as the quality of inquiries was strong and the volume of interest in PhD studies remarkably buoyant.

This event, and **last December's PhD fair in Beijing**, organised by the Association of Chinese Graduate Schools, has us thinking at Birmingham about how we handle PhD inquiries and applicants. Like most other institutions, we treat international enquiries in the traditional way: advise applicants to (a) complete a research proposal, (b) find a professor willing to supervise, and (c) apply and formally register interest. Most students are also left to their own devices in figuring out what scholarships are available to them.

We are not lagging behind others – or at least not the crowd. ETH Zurich, one of the top European institutions to exhibit in Riyadh, gave out a nice little brochure called 'Information for Doctoral Candidates'. It was far more practical to bring half way around the world than shipping boxes of the 246-page postgrad prospectus (which is what we do).

But this is what ETH Zurich advises: 'Since the doctorate is supervised by a professor, the first step in the application process is to find an ETH professor willing to act as your supervisor. Once you have reached an agreement with the supervisor, you apply to the doctoral [programme]'. This is not good enough but is essentially what we do too. It results in professors being inundated with PhD inquiries in various states of dress (and English), most of which are unsuitable, and many – let's be honest – that get deleted or remain unanswered, perhaps because they are unanswerable.

What is needed is a counselling and advisory service for international postgraduate research (PGR) applicants – a joint effort by International/Graduate School /PGR Recruitment that:

- *Provides clear practical guidance to overseas inquiries in a short publication*
- *Vets the inquiries before they write to the professor to weed out inappropriate inquiries on grounds of intelligence, language, suitability.*
- *Supports the applicant to match-make with the PGR admissions tutor or individual academics within schools.*
- *Provides clear and up-to-date information on scholarships.*

Easier said than done, but it was worth the cost of attending the Riyadh event to see that this is what is needed.

Flying back on BA, it was interesting to see some UK contingents go into first class on their all-expenses paid tickets gifted from the Saudis.

Rubbing insult into the injury, I have had to explain to my finance office why Birmingham was charged \$40 extra by the event organisers for a second consulting table at our booth. It would seem that only the little people pay taxes in Saudi Arabia.

**Dr Edward Harcourt**  
 Director, International Relations  
 University of Birmingham

## Quality, Price and Reputation

Wednesday 24 February 2010

University of Chicago Booth School of Business  
Woolgate Exchange, 25 Basinghall Street, London EC2V 5HA

The **UK Higher Education International Unit** and **i-graduate**, with the support of **Universities UK**, present the third in the series of 'Rethinking Higher Education' conferences:

## Quality, Price and Reputation



The conference will explore perceptions of excellence in an international higher education context and the relationship between pricing, quality and institutional reputations worldwide.

Key themes include the impact of price on decision-making; prestige vs. cost; the relevance of quality; and imaginative new approaches to pricing.

We will gain insight from international methods, including from the United States and Europe, and consider a business approach to pricing to assess how universities can attract the brightest and best students to their campuses.

In addition to the plenaries and a panel debate, there will be concurrent 'theory' and 'practice' workshop sessions to explore issues relating to quality, price and reputation.

### Confirmed speakers:

**Will Archer**, Director, i-graduate

**Professor Nicholas Barr**, Professor of Public Economics, London School of Economics and Political Science

**Professor Sir Drummond Bone**, Chairman, International Advisory Board, Laureate Inc, UK

**Carolyn Campbell**, Head of International Affairs, Quality Assurance Agency

**Dr David Docherty**, Chief Executive, The Council for Industry and Higher Education

**Dr Dean L. Hubbard**, President Emeritus, Northwest Missouri State University

**Dr Neil Kemp**, Visiting Fellow, Institute of Education

**Arnold Longboy**, Marketing Director, The University of Chicago Booth School of Business Europe Campus

**John Quirk**, Director of International Affairs, University of Central Lancashire

**Dr Keith Sharp**, Head of UK HE International Unit

**Professor Steve Smith**, President of Universities UK and Vice-Chancellor, University of Exeter

**Wes Streeting**, President, National Union of Students

**Elizabeth Tromer**, International Affairs Department Director, Technical University of Denmark

**David Willetts MP**, Shadow Secretary of State for Universities and Skills

Places are limited, early booking advisable.

Sponsored by:

Register **HERE**

**IELTS**<sup>TM</sup>

09:00 Registration and refreshments

### Session One Setting the scene

09:30 **Welcome and introduction**

**Arnold Longboy**  
Director, Executive Education  
and Student Recruitment - Europe  
The University of Chicago  
Booth School of Business

09:40 **Keynote address**

**Quality, Price and Reputation:  
The UK perspective**  
**Professor Steve Smith**  
President, Universities UK  
& Vice-Chancellor, University of Exeter

10:00 **Quality, Price and Reputation:**

**The European perspective**  
**Elizabeth Tromer**  
International Affairs Department Director  
Technical University of Denmark

10:20 **Quality, Price and Reputation:**

**The international perspective**  
**Dr Dean L. Hubbard**  
President Emeritus  
Northwest Missouri State University

10:40 **Questions and discussion**

11:00 Refreshments

### Session Two 'Theory' Workshops

Delegates choose to attend ONE of the  
workshops listed below

11:30 **Future Pricing Models for the UK**

**Professor Nicholas Barr**  
Professor of Public Economics  
London School of Economics  
and Political Science

AND

11:30 **Quality, Reputation  
and Internationalisation**

**Carolyn Campbell**  
Head of International Affairs  
Quality Assurance Agency

12:30 Lunch (hot buffet)

### Session Three 'Practice' Workshops

Delegates choose to attend ONE of the  
workshops listed below

13:30 **'The Price is Right': Cost Comparisons  
and Reviews of Pricing**

**UK vs. Australia vs. USA vs. Europe**

**Dr Neil Kemp**  
Visiting Fellow, Institute of Education

AND

13:30 **The Effect of Pricing on  
Decision-Making**

**Will Archer**  
Director, i-graduate

14:30 Refreshments

### Session Four Scholarships and Funding

15:00 **Panel Discussion**

**Chair: David Docherty**

Chief Executive, Council for Industry  
and Higher Education

**Wes Streeting**, President, NUS  
**John Quirk**, Director of International  
Affairs, University of Central Lancashire  
**Dr Dean L. Hubbard**, Former President,  
Northwest Missouri State University  
**Elizabeth Tromer**, International  
Department Director, Technical  
University of Denmark

16:15 **David Willetts, MP**  
**Shadow Secretary of State for  
Universities and Skills**

**Introduced by**  
**Professor Sir Drummond Bone**  
Chairman, International Advisory Board,  
Laureate Inc, UK  
(Q&A to follow)

16:45 **Closing remarks**  
**Dr Keith Sharp**  
Head of UK HE International Unit

16:50 **Wine reception**

£399+VAT / Reduced rate £299+VAT

**Register [HERE](#)**

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**Recruitment**

**UCAS: Another huge rise in overseas applicants**

Headline figures from UCAS show another record year for applicants to higher education - the fourth year running that full-time undergraduate applications have seen an increase.

As of 22 January 2010 there were 570,556 applicants, a rise of 106,389 or 22.9% over 2009.

UK domestic applicants increased by 22.1%, while overseas applicants who applied through UCAS rose by a staggering 28.7% (to 71,105). Those from China and India were up by 22.4% and 30.8% respectively. Italy and Ireland increased by 50% each, and Latvia and Lithuania both more than doubled.

Universities UK welcomed the rise in the number of international applicants.

Its President, Professor Steve Smith, said, 'Alongside the growth in the number of home applications, the increase in demand from international applicants is also good news. This underlines the UK's position as one of the leading international destinations for students looking for innovative, high-quality degree programmes'.

*Applicants by overseas (including other EU) country (> 600 applicants only)*

Country	2010	2009	% change
Ireland	7,324	4,871	+50.4%
China	4,456	3,641	+22.4%
Germany	3,303	2,670	+23.7%
Hong Kong	3,140	2,730	+15.0%
Cyprus	2,996	2,664	+12.5%
France	2,626	2,001	+31.2%
Singapore	2,423	2,018	+20.1%
US	2,263	1,926	+17.5%
Lithuania	2,146	1,061	+102.3%
Malaysia	2,083	1,858	+12.1%
Bulgaria	1,940	1,336	+45.2%
Greece	1,855	1,491	+24.4%
India	1,750	1,338	+30.8%
Italy	1,737	1,160	+49.7%
Poland	1,702	1,566	+8.7%
Pakistan	1,673	1,463	+14.4%
Sweden	1,543	1,135	+35.9%
Canada	1,434	1,201	+19.4%
Romania	1,415	818	+73.0%
Spain	1,136	897	+26.6%
Nigeria	1,018	964	+5.6%
Latvia	955	448	+113.2%
Belgium	864	768	+12.5%
Norway	845	630	+34.1%
South Korea	801	642	+24.8%
Switzerland	783	639	+22.5%
Netherlands	697	572	+21.9%
Finland	635	485	+30.9%
All overseas	71,105	55,245	+28.7%