

**Press release ~ Thursday 17 July 2008**

## **Protecting our competitive edge: Act now or lose our PhD lead**

A report published today finds that the UK is a global leader in the recruitment of international postgraduate research students. Recognising that this advantage could be under threat from competitor countries, the report calls for steps to be taken to understand the increasingly demanding expectations of prospective research students and strengthen what the UK has to offer.

### **Some of the main findings of the report include:**

- Among prospective postgraduate research students around the world, the UK and US are the most attractive destination countries, followed by Germany, France and Australia.
- The UK commands around 15% of the total global market share of international PGR students which, per capita, makes the UK the most successful recruiting country at present.
- There are now just over 50,000 international PGR students in the UK, or 42% of all UK postgraduate research students (the proportion in France is 35%; in the US it is 33%).
- The major factors influencing choice of study are departmental and institutional reputations, particularly for research and teaching quality in which the UK excels.
- There has been strong growth from the Middle East with new enrolments up 25% in 2007-08.
- Ten countries and 16 universities account for 50% of all international PGR students in the UK.
- Cost is the largest single factor likely to undermine the UK's global market share – both fees and living related. Two-thirds of international PGR students must meet their costs from sources outside the UK. The report's recommendations address this point.

- The UK's key competitor countries in North America, Europe and Australasia are developing recruitment strategies to attract the best PGR students. The competitor landscape is changing fast and there will be some decline in UK market share. With a revised recruitment strategy, however, the UK can still increase overall numbers.

Professor Rick Trainor, President of Universities UK, said, "The UK is a global leader in the provision of high quality PhD programmes. Our universities are extraordinarily successful in attracting the best research students from around the world. But we are not complacent, and recognise we may have to strengthen our offer - at both national and international levels - to prospective research students in order to stay ahead of other countries which are developing strategies to attract these students.

"In addition, the study reveals the increasingly demanding expectations of the students we need to attract to our shores. Understanding how our prospective research students perceive the UK will be central to how we promote our sector internationally."

The report concludes with **national and institutional-level recommendations** which call for the UK to develop a more coherent approach to the recruitment of international PGR students at national level and, at the institutional level, for universities to review their international strategies to ensure the specific needs of PGR students are addressed.

## Notes

1. *The UK's Competitive Advantage: The Market for International Research Students* is available to download from the UK HE International Unit website: [www.international.ac.uk](http://www.international.ac.uk). Login and password details are required.
2. The report's recommendations can be downloaded from the bold text in the press release or by clicking **HERE**.
3. For further information contact Elizabeth Sheahan, Communications Officer, UK HE International Unit: 020 7419 5609 or email [info@international.ac.uk](mailto:info@international.ac.uk)
4. The UK Higher Education International Unit has been established to coordinate, promote and undertake activities designed to support UK universities in a globally competitive world. It is funded by the four Funding Councils for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as Universities UK and GuildHE.