



Chilling out satisfaction levels are on the up for those studying in the UK from abroad but many still face problems

Overseas students happier, but still cold

Noise and lack of bedding are among the problems faced by those from abroad. John Morgan reports

Satisfaction levels among international students at UK universities have risen by 10 percentage points in the past four years, according to research for the government.

However, a new report details the trials they can still face, including shivering without a duvet on their first night and suffering the "mental torture" of noisy British neighbours.

According to data supplied to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills by the research firm i-graduate, the proportion of overseas students who were satisfied with their UK university experience rose from 71 per cent in 2005-06 to 81 per cent in 2008-09.

Will Archer, the firm's director, said this improvement "reflects the extent to which the sector has engaged with these students", adding that it had been achieved by "winning hearts and minds rather than through millions of pounds of investment".

To maintain this trend, a new guide for universities, published by the UK Higher Education International Unit this week, advises them to focus on providing an excellent student experience to counter a re-

strictive visa system and buoyant competitor countries.

Written by i-graduate, it is based on data from the International Student Barometer, an annual online survey of international students.

Recommendations for universities include linking international students with mentors prior to arrival, making sure students know how to set up a bank account and developing campus-wide systems for performance feedback.

The *Guide to Enhancing the International Student Experience* says the new points-based immigration system creates "a danger that the UK will be seen as a destination which does not welcome students".

Raise the game

"It is crucial that universities understand how best to work with international students and to 'raise the game' of UK higher education in the face of greater competition from other countries, including those from outside the English-speaking world that can compete more effectively on price alone," the guide argues.

On fees and funding, it says: "It seems clear that international stu-

dents value those universities which have a broader view of internationalisation and see students not only as economic units."

Overall, the universities that deliver the best student satisfaction rates are not necessarily those that are the best resourced, but "those which have a coherent and integrated service for international students".

In one of the features examined, 81 per cent of international students were satisfied with being able to get accommodation on their first night. This is above the international index of 73 per cent.

But one Chinese student complained of learning only on arrival that duvets and pillows were not provided. "This is not helpful to those arriving after 9pm," the student says.

Noisy accommodation is another frequently cited problem.

"Unfortunately, this often originates with UK domestic students, who are not always as focused on pure academic achievement as their international counterparts," the guide notes.

A postgraduate from Kenya says: "They scream and yell from 9pm to 1am on a daily basis for reasons I am yet to understand...It is mental torture."

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