

East Asia Education

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**Education Futures:  
Recruitment  
Reconnaissance – what  
next for East Asia?  
Webinar series report**

July 2021



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## Background

The below report is compiled from the British Council's 2021 Education Futures webinar series - Recruitment Reconnaissance – what next for East Asia?

This series built on the success of the 2020 Recruitment Reality series which convened agents and international offices to discuss and explore the immediate implications for international student recruitment brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recruitment Reconnaissance was forward looking. Understanding the latest thinking of students, key decision-makers, and study influencers is crucial for UK education institutions' strategic planning for both the short and longer term.

In a series of seven short webinars we heard from key decision-makers and study influencers as well as students directly, in the key markets of China, Malaysia, and Singapore, to learn how sentiment has changed, expectations have evolved, and mindsets have shifted over the past 18 months.

We hope that the series and this report will support UK institutions to understand what marketing, communications and support they will need to employ to be successful in these markets over the course of the next few years.

## Summary

### Decision-making

Both undergraduate and postgraduate students' decision to study overseas (as opposed to locally) is primarily based on the desire to receive a high-quality education that will benefit their future careers.

Employability was noted as a key concern for PG students, who were keen to expand their networks and make themselves more attractive to potential employers.

Undergraduate students felt the UK's lower fees and course structure (e.g. all modules relevant to the specific degree programme) made the UK more attractive than the US and other destinations.

Undergraduate students commented that TNE programmes were an interesting concept worth exploring, whereas postgraduate students felt going overseas for the duration of the course was a key part of the experience.

In terms of selecting a specific institution, agents backed-up the view that employability is becoming an increasingly important decision-making factor. They also emphasised ranking and reputation, with overall ranking remaining very important, adding that students would also look at subject level ranking.

Parents echoed that ranking remained an important decision-making factor, along with safety and employability.

### Influences and information sources

Undergraduate students first point of consultation is generally their school counsellor who are a good source of information with connections to overseas universities. Undergraduate and postgraduate students both said that university websites are the most important source for

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gathering the basic information they need on course structures, fees etc. Students commented that agents were useful for providing comparisons between universities.

For an honest opinion of university life, students turn to friends who have studied abroad as well as online forums and social media accounts of current students studying overseas – vlogs produced by current students were highlighted as a good source of information to get a feel for the campus, facilities, student life etc.

All students commented that since Covid-19 they have sought out information from prospective universities on health and safety policies and student well-being support.

Parents use university websites, school counsellors and family connections to learn more about different universities.

### Future marketing and communication

Undergraduate students said that there was some information they found more difficult to find and felt universities could highlight in future, including:

- Specific requirements and eligibility criteria for scholarships
- Entry requirements for qualifications other than A Levels/IB
- Information on internship opportunities, particularly tailored towards international students

Counsellors felt virtual open days had been a positive outcome of the pandemic and would like to see more of these, along with subject specific webinars and online taster lectures.

Counsellors did mention that universities working together on these (e.g. three or four speakers on a single webinar) were more appealing as it saved them time. They also suggested that making virtual events more interactive would make them more appealing to students.

UK alumni commented that social media would likely become a more important tool for Generation Z in their decision-making process. They were often asked about their experiences as alumni and felt universities could leverage alumni experience more e.g. Q&A with alumni on social media channels.

Media and PR companies suggested that for wider awareness raising it was important for universities to focus on Education specific publications and not just mainstream media. They noted that channels for targeting parents and students would often be different and institutions should ensure content differed accordingly too.

The agencies recommended that the following types of topics may attract audiences through education channels and sometimes mainstream media:

- Policy changes (e.g. immigration policies, visa changes etc.)
- Cross-border co-operation such as the development of branch campuses
- Individual human interest stories especially about international students
- Thought leadership, information beyond the standard press release (e.g. an article about a new award or new ranking should explicitly explain why this is relevant or beneficial for international students)

Media highlighted that video content was becoming more and more popular and suggested that universities should invest more in creating engaging video content to attract audiences, such as

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videos introducing each faculty/programme, campus tours, students sharing a 'day in the life', etc.

## Key takeaways from the series

- Overall attitudes towards studying abroad remain positive despite the pandemic and the UK is still considered a highly reputable and attractive destination for overseas study.
- Health and safety and student well-being have become more important as decision-making factors than pre-pandemic.
- Employability is an increasingly important decision-making factor for overseas study. Students, parents, agents, and counsellors all want information on placement and internship opportunities, career opportunities, current alumni careers etc. and with specific focus on international students.
- UK university websites are effective at providing the basic information that students need. School counsellors and agents help to provide additional information such as support in comparing across universities.
- Content that highlights the 'real-life' experience at universities generated by current students and alumni is sought-after and seen as more genuine than university developed content. Universities should look to work to develop more of this content or further highlight organic content that students and alumni create.
- Universities should continue to engage with market specific social media channels and education specific media outlets and ensure content reflects the channels and target audience.

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## Appendix

This report is based on examples and best practise cited by panellists on the British Council's Education Futures Recruitment Reconnaissance – what next for East Asia? webinar series.

The British Council wishes to thank the following speakers and panellists for their invaluable contributions to this series:

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