

Post-event report for
Study UK: Northern Ireland Counsellor Tour
9 – 13 March 2019

Introduction

In March 2019, the British Council, Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University and Invest Northern Ireland offered a four-day tour to showcase Northern Ireland's world-class higher education opportunities for 15 counsellors and independent education consultants with a focus on full-degree undergraduate programmes. The tour also offered participants the chance to experience a taste of what Northern Ireland has to offer as an attractive destination for international students.

Participants received a thorough introduction to academic programmes and student life at both Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University with full-day visits to the universities' campuses. The tour also included dinners hosted by both universities, a full day of exploring iconic sites in Northern Ireland, such as the Causeway Coast, Bushmill's Distillery, and a visit to the Titanic Museum.

Prior to the tour, counsellors were invited to participate in a series of webinars which introduced them to UK higher education, the UCAS and admission processes and pre-departure information.

Based on the feedback survey, participants confirmed that they would be more likely to recommend universities in Northern Ireland as a result of the tour.

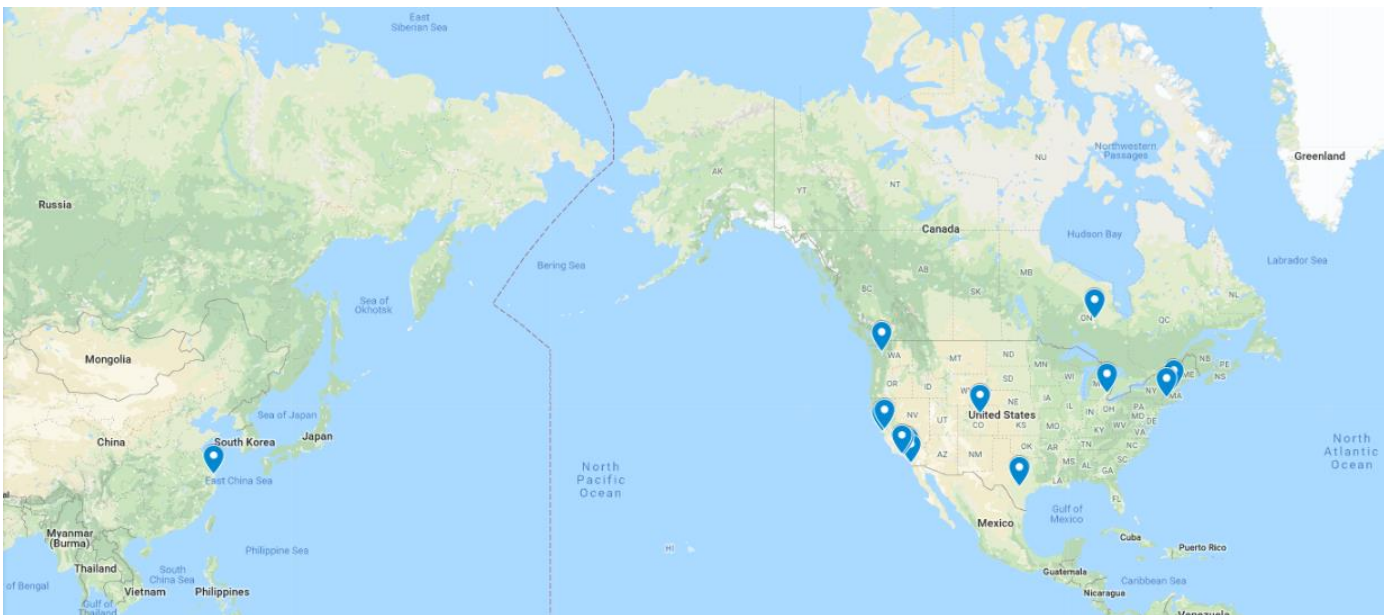
The British Council greatly appreciates your support, whether partnering on tours which showcase the diversity of the UK HE offer or other targeted activities during the year. We look forward to more opportunities to partner on our international education services in the near future!

Jenna Hartsell | Education Manager, USA

Participants' profile

We promoted the tour to counsellors and independent consultants, who work with student populations interested in studying in the UK, through our professional counseling networks. The majority of participants were independent consultants from the US with two additional participants (from Canada and China). The independent consultants who participated work with between 20 to 75 students each year. The school-based counsellors were from one public school with approximately 150 students, one private school with a similar population, and one private boarding day school with over 500 students.

40% of participants came from the state of California.



Google map of participants' locations.

Of the total participants, 80% were independent education consultants, 20% were school-based counsellors.

Prior to the tour, each participant ranked their student population's interest in the UK as follows: 33% very high, 40% high, 13% rising and 13% not very high yet.

Marketing

The tour was promoted to the British Council's counsellor e-mail list in three e-mail shots, from November to January 2019, and through counsellor and independent consultant networks such as NACAC and IECA. The final number of participants for the tour was lower than we had expected. Feedback from participants suggests that they considered the tour fee to be comparatively high for two university visits, and that a longer advanced notice of the tour was needed.

Looking ahead, we will explore how we can lower the participant fee to make it more affordable. For example, we might combine a Northern Irish tour with a group of universities in another location (such as Scotland, northern England or the Midlands). We will ensure that, in future, the tour is promoted earlier to give participants time to find more economical flights.

British Council could also more specifically target regions in the US where there is a strong Irish diaspora community, such as the Boston area. Several counsellors mentioned that their Irish heritage was an additional motivation in selecting this tour.

We sent a feedback survey to capture quantitative and qualitative data to the participants two weeks after the tour. We received 14 responses to the survey.

Participants' Feedback

When participants were asked:

“As a result of this tour, I have increased confidence in advising students on applying to universities in Northern Ireland.” 100% agreed or strongly agreed.

“As a result of this tour, I am more likely to recommend universities in Northern Ireland to my students.” 8 strongly agreed, 4 agreed and 1 somewhat agreed.

“How likely is it that you would recommend a British Council tour to a friend or colleague?” 100% replied “very likely.”

“What did you most like about the tour?”:

- “I would never have thought to recommend Northern Ireland but after seeing Queen's and Ulster, I think there are students who would greatly benefit from these universities.”
- “I learned a lot about Northern Ireland and would be able to address student or parental concerns over political unrest and safety. I enjoyed meeting all the admission reps and Gren [Invest NI rep].”
- “I very much enjoyed talking with the NI staff who came with us on the tour and the extra touring experiences were very valuable because if I recommend an American student to attend a UK school they need to know what the environment is like”
- “I enjoyed every aspect of this program. You covered so much including the cultural aspect by taking us to various points of interest and discussing the history of Northern Ireland, as it related to economics and politics. I appreciate a discussion about affordability and safety that are always issues of concern for our parents, especially the ones who have no ties to the UK or knowledge of the history of the area”

Participants also shared their suggestions for future tours. In their responses, they emphasised the value of having time to visit cultural and historical sites in the surrounding area and suggested that we continue to incorporate a day of sight-seeing in the programme. The participants also responded that they would have liked to visit more university departments at each university even though that would give them less time at each department. Participants also requested more time with students during the university visits.

We also asked participants what they thought were the most attractive aspects of the Northern Ireland higher education offer. Their responses are represented in the word cloud below.



Future steps

There are several areas that both the British Council and the UK institutions can work on to improve the overall arrangement and outcomes of a future tour. The main findings and recommended next steps are outlined below:

British Council

- Aim to announce the dates and open the tour for recruitment six months before the tour.
- Consider ways of lowering the participant fee to make the tour more accessible to school-based counsellors.
- Build in a more formal welcome and closure into the programme and establish standards of behaviour for the tour, to promote more cohesion among the participants.

UK Institutions

- Build in more time for counsellors to meet with students so that they can share stories of their life in the UK and answer questions.
- Counsellors would appreciate visiting more departments for a shorter amount of time at each and meeting with students to learn more about their experiences.
- Some counsellors suggested that offering a form of financial aid, like a scholarship, would be welcomed by the counseling community and could result in more diverse group.

Overall, participants commended the British Council, Invest NI and the host institutions on a successful and enjoyable tour which has raised the profile, and increased understanding, of Northern Ireland and its HE sector.

Appendix

Itinerary**Study UK: Northern Ireland tour**Saturday 9th March to Wednesday 13th March

Saturday 9th March	
1:00 – 2:00pm	Meet and greet at Europa Hotel 1-2:30pm (Tea / Coffee available)
2:30pm	Bus to Derry City Hotel departs (approx. 2 hours)
6:30pm	Dinner at hotel (included in tour fee)

Sunday 10th March	
9:00am	Bus departs from City Hotel for Cultural Activity: Causeway, Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge and Bushmill's Distillery
1:00pm	Stop for lunch (not included in tour fee)
5:00pm	Bus returns to Derry City Hotel
6:30pm	Bus from Derry City Hotel to Ulster University Magee Campus
7:00pm	Dinner at Ulster University Magee Campus hosted by the University
9:00pm	Return to Derry City Hotel on foot

Monday 11th March	
9:00am	Ulster University Magee Campus Welcome
09.30 – 10:50am	Faculty Introductions
11:00am	Sports workshop
12 noon	Lunch + admissions Q&A

1:00pm	Introduction to Robotics
2:00pm	Performing Arts workshop
3:00pm	Student Panel Q&A + UUSU
4:00 – 6:00pm	Bus to Grand Central Hotel, Belfast
	Evening free in Belfast – dinner on your own. We will provide recommendations☺

Tuesday 12th March

8:30am	Walk / bus (weather dependent) Grand Central Hotel to Queen’s University Belfast
9:00 – 10:30am	Welcome and Introduction to Queen’s Key information briefing to include fee information, scholarship opportunities, application procedures, qualification matching
10:30am	Campus Tour
11:30am	Introduction to Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
12:30pm	Welcome Lunch
2:00pm	Introduction to Engineering and Physical Sciences
3:00pm	Accommodation Tour and Residential Life
4:00 - 5:00pm	Introduction to Medicine, Health, and Life Sciences
7:00pm	Dinner hosted by Queen’s University Belfast
9:00pm	Walk / bus (weather dependent) Queen’s to Grand Central Hotel

Wednesday 13th March

8:45am	Bus from Grand Central Hotel to Ulster University Belfast Campus
9:00am	Ulster University Belfast Campus Welcome
9:30am	Tour of the School of Art
10:15am	Tour of the School of Architecture
11:00am	Tour of The Roost Accommodation

<https://education-services.britishcouncil.org>

11:45am	Depart Belfast Campus
12 noon	Lunch at UU
1:00pm	Bus to Titanic Belfast
1:15pm	Visit to Titanic Belfast
2:45pm	Bus from Titanic Belfast to Grand Central Hotel. End of tour ☺ Participants make their own arrangements for transfer to the airport / hotel

Photos



Ulster University Magee campus visit



Lunch at the Academy Restaurant on Ulster's Belfast campus, where locally sourced food is created and served by students



Left: Queen's University Belfast student-led campus tour; Below: Welcome presentation at Queen's University Belfast





Despite the chilly weather, the participants appreciated the opportunity to visit some of Northern Ireland's popular tourist destinations on the Causeway Coast.