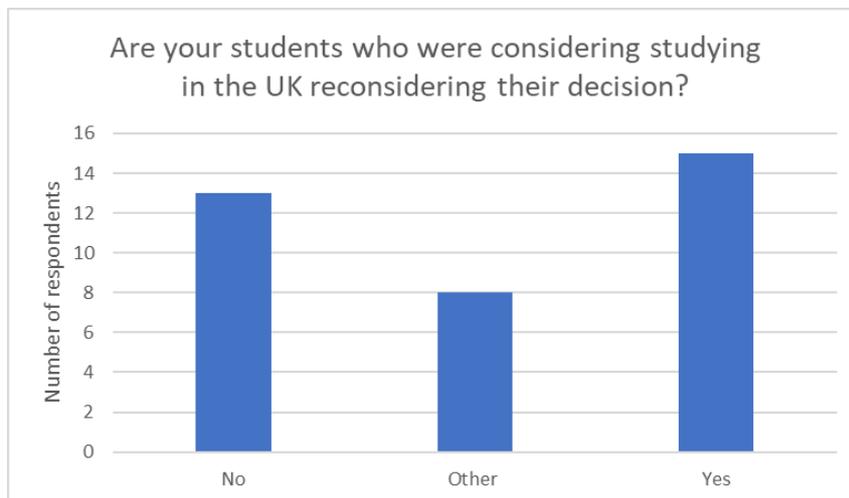


Summary of responses to Covid-19 update survey to US counsellors

On 8th April 2020, the British Council USA sent a short survey to our counsellor e-mail list and to the NACAC Exchange listserv. This short survey accompanied the announcement of the [Covid-19 UK response online tool](#). We received 38 responses to the survey. We have summarised the responses to each of the survey questions below, paraphrasing responses and aggregating topics to give a reflection of the current concerns and topics which are top of mind for US counsellors at this moment.

Q: Are your students who were considering studying in the UK reconsidering their decision?



A: Out of 38 responses, 15 responded 'yes,' 13 responded 'no,' and 8 responded 'other.' Comments from those who responded 'other,' included "Waiting to see what UK universities do first," "Some yes, some no," and "They are proceeding with caution, and they have questions." Two counsellors did not answer this question.

Q: What are the challenges that you are experiencing with students who were considering studying in the UK?

A: Counsellors expressed that the overarching challenge is the uncertainty of the current situation and that we do not know what fall 2020 will look like yet. Concerns broadly fell into the below categories -

- **Qualifications** – Many counsellors indicated that their seniors are concerned about meeting the terms of their conditional offers. Students are concerned about lower AP scores because of the change in format and then not being accepted due to their AP scores. Counsellors expressed some frustration that they have not received communication from universities or UCAS yet about what they will do about conditional offers that will not be able to be met due to Covid-19. There is also uncertainty regarding IB scores since there will not be a final exam and there has not been clarity on how a final grade will be generated. Another counsellor at a French international school

mentioned that the French bac has been cancelled, leaving many students unsure about how they will meet their conditional offer.

Counsellors also expressed that their juniors are concerned about being able to fulfill their testing requirements and gain the qualifications needed to apply, including SAT or ACT, SAT Subject Tests and AP tests. Several counsellors mentioned that their students rely on SAT Subject Tests for UK university applications since their schools don't offer the AP curriculum and students are worried about being able to take the SAT Subject Tests they need due to test date cancellations.

One counsellor also mentioned the challenge of students not being able to visit over spring break.

- **Visas and travel restrictions** – Some students have concerns about being able to obtain a visa and that travel restrictions will still be in place for the fall semester. One counsellor mentioned that her students think the fall semester will be online and they do not want to pay the same tuition for online classes.
- **Fear of travel and being far from home** – Several counsellors mentioned that their students are afraid to be far away from family if something like this were to happen again and they are nervous right now to get on a plane and travel. One counsellor mentioned that many students are starting to think more highly of schools much closer to home.

Q: How do you think the Covid-19 pandemic will impact your students' decisions to go abroad for university?

A: Counsellors responses revealed a mixed picture –some students are still eager to go abroad, while others will want to stay closer to home. Some counsellors reported that fewer students will go abroad for university this year and choose universities closer to home due to fear and uncertainty about the future. Others observed that they think that students who have committed to go abroad for this year will go since they have already made their decision but it could be a harder sell for those just beginning the college search process. Some counsellors mentioned that their students would consider delayed (spring 2021) entry.

One counsellor summed it up as “It will depend on the student. Some will be more wary. Others will be more determined to connect with people from other cultures and other parts of the world.”

Several counsellors noted that their students are not as daunted about going abroad, but the parents are the harder sell. Parents are feeling more protective and may encourage their children to delay entry to university for fall or to attend a university closer to home. One counsellor noted that this sentiment did not just apply to her students who were considering international schools, but also to students who were considering schools that were further away from home within the US.

Some counsellors also mentioned that financial concerns could impact their students' decisions to go abroad and that cost will become a more important factor for some students who themselves and/or their parents have experienced job loss due to Covid-19.

“Until a vaccine is developed, tested, and administered on a vast scale how can students enrol anywhere with the confidence that they will be safe? As a parent, I know that I would not have allowed my children to begin university in any country this fall.”

“Going abroad is definitely in question now, but people are hopeful that we'll get back to a place where it's possible. Junior (11th grade) families who were looking at it are more hesitant, but it hasn't been going on for too long for them to write it off completely.”

Q: From your point of view, what can UK universities be doing to support prospective international students in their current decision-making?

A: The respondents to this question almost all said that the best thing UK universities can be doing to support prospective international students is proving clear, consistent, and proactive communication with students, parents and counsellors. If information is not yet available, counsellors said they would appreciate an acknowledgement of the decisions that need to wait so they can see what develops. The topics of communication that counsellors indicated would be helpful include:

- Most responses were about students needing clarity about conditional offers and how seniors with conditional offers can proceed if their test dates have been cancelled. Also, students are seeking clarity on how UK universities will review American transcripts that have had to shift to Pass/Fail. Several respondents asked if UK universities could make all conditional offers unconditional or if they can go test optional – we know these options aren't feasible for UK universities but clear communication from UK universities about how they will handle conditional offers for US students for this admission cycle will help to resolve some of these questions.
- Updates about campuses opening or not in the fall as those updates become available including assurances for students of remote online learning options in case students need to shelter in place instead of attending classes.
- Information about campus safety and support for international students, particularly with the concern that there will be resurgences of Covid-19 in the fall/winter. This information should clearly map out any plans for the on-campus safety of any International students who cannot return to their homes.
- Opportunities for students to engage virtually – virtual tours, 1-on-1 Q&A's, virtual fairs, etc.
- Information about housing and building provisions into housing contracts so families will be able to apply for a refund in the event that campuses must be closed again.
- Visa application support
- Financial support if possible

One counsellor suggested that universities have a newsletter for their prospective students about what is happening on campus/online learning, and virtual events. Another counsellor suggested that universities should widely share their response to Covid-19 (how did they treat their students, faculty, staff, during this time etc?).

Several counsellors who responded encouraged universities to keep the British Council's online resource up-to-date because they are using that tool to advise students.

Having clear and public information on university websites was brought up in multiple responses. One counsellor replied "At one school, my student and I had to hunt down the name of a contact we could ask questions of. Take a look at your websites and test them out: imagine that you have heard nothing, that you have unfinished business (earning qualifications), and need to ask some basic questions of your school; does your website pass the test? In some cases, we simply get a link to the College Board's Coronavirus statement. Understandably, there are no clear answers yet, but a simple communication directly to the applicants goes a long way."

Other counsellors emphasized the importance of personal connection with prospective students during this time:

“Remaining human, communicating when things aren't decided, keeping optimism alive--students and families are taking their lead from you guys.”

“Continue to keep in contact with them [students]. Any extra assurance or info/plans, I think you need to be very encouraging, make sure students are connecting with other students, professors, etc regularly- help them feel a part of the university so they will continue to want to come now rather than defer.”

Summary

Counsellors acknowledged in their responses that we are all in this uncertain situation together and they understand that the universities cannot predict the future. The overwhelming request from counsellors for clear and consistent communication illustrates how important it is to be in touch with students, parents and counsellors with the information that is available, even if there are still more questions than answers about the fall 2020 semester. From the counsellors' point of view, the most immediate concern to be addressed are the seniors with conditional offers. This counsellor's sentiment illustrates their commitment to continuing their relationship with the UK, despite this global crisis -

“We have a long history of sending students to the UK, and we want to make sure that chain remains unbroken. I look forward to hearing from you again.”

At the British Council, we hope we can continue to support your institutions during this time, and if there's any specific support you need, please get in touch. Meanwhile, you can find local updates on Covid-19 from around the world on the [IES website](#), provided by my colleagues around the world. And for students, the [Study UK website](#) has information on current UK government guidelines and how it applies to them.

Please do keep in touch with us and we will continue to send updates as the situation develops.

Sincerely,

Jenna Hartsell
Education Manager
British Council USA