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International Student Officers, Student Activities Officers, Presidents, Advice Centre Staff, General Managers

Action

For information

Executive Summary

Briefing on international student fees

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International Student Perceptions on Employability



Welcome to the NUS Global Future Bulletin. These bulletins will be produced monthly as a resource for those campaigning on international students' issues and global experience for UK students. We will aim to give you the latest facts and information on key areas of the international student experience and the global experience for UK students. This bulletin focuses on international student employability.

This summary briefing aims to highlight some of the main findings of the NUS International Students' Employability survey. The survey was open from 19 January 2012 until 21 March 2012. It was promoted via various email lists of NUS, UKCISA, AGCAS, NASES, Employability-Development, Facebook and Twitter. We received more than 1,200 responses. There were 909 valid responses to the survey. The survey aimed to look into international student experiences and views about working in the UK during and after study in the run up to the introduction of new visa regulations on 6 April 2012.

Overall, it can be seen that the main reasons for international students choosing to come to study and work in the UK is to increase global job prospects. Generally, international students do not see UK study as a route to permanent residence, but a route to increasing employability due to the high quality of education and the (now closed) option to work in the UK post study.

There has been a significant amount of outrage and disappointment at the closure of the post study work visa, especially for those who are already studying in the UK and came here on the promise of such an option. This anger is reflected in some of the survey results, with 62 per cent of South Asian respondents saying that they would not recommend UK study to a friend, 63 per cent of all respondents saying they would like an opportunity for a short term paid internship upon graduation and a number of free text comments outlining a feeling that international students are not welcome or valued in the UK.

The survey also looks at international student intentions and perceptions of work and volunteering during study. It is a matter of concern that 14 per cent of respondents who are currently working, or wish to work during study do not feel confident that they are aware of and understand the visa regulations.

Overall, this survey outlines a range of views that international students currently have about work and study in the UK and some indications about how both institutions and the government could work to improve this experience. We hope that you find this an interesting and useful document.

Basic information

There were 909 valid responses to the survey. The gender split for respondents was 47 per cent male to 53 per cent female. The largest group of respondents was aged between 22 and 25 years old (48 per cent), with 20 per cent being 21 & under, 27 per cent aged 26 to 35 and 5 per cent aged 36 and over.¹

With regards to nationality, the four regions with the highest number of respondents were South Asia (27 per cent), East Asia (26 per cent), Africa (18 per cent) and North America (10 per cent)

93 per cent of respondents were studying at a higher education institution, with the further 7 per cent studying at a further education college.

33 per cent of respondents were studying at a Russell Group institution, 7 per cent were from a Million+ institutions, 14 per cent were from the 1994 Group and 24 per cent studying at a University Alliance institution. The remaining respondents (22 per cent) were from non-aligned institutions and further education colleges.

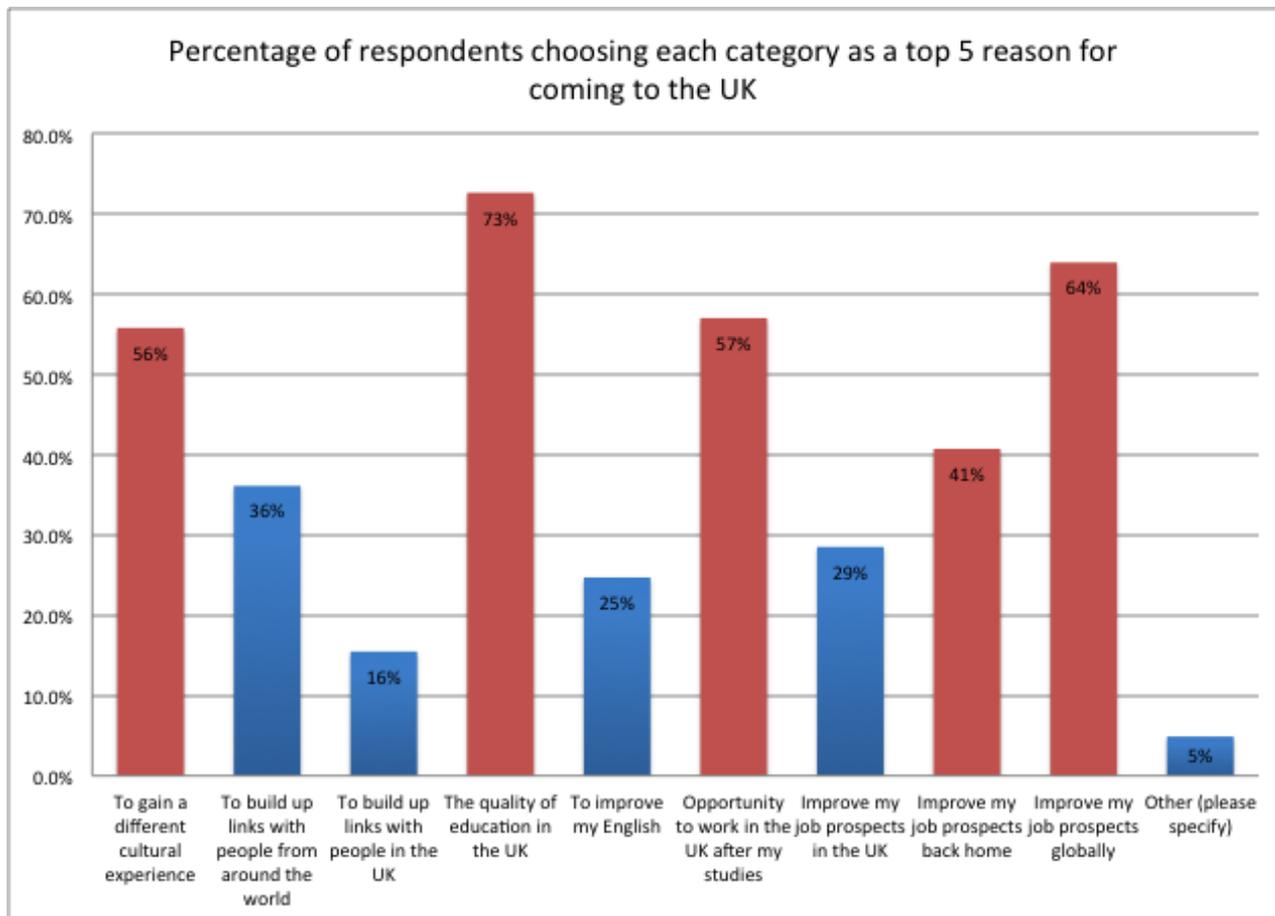
The most common areas of study were business and administrative studies (33 per cent), followed by humanities (19 per cent) and then engineering and technologies (15 per cent). 53 per cent of respondents were studying for a postgraduate taught qualification. 37 per cent were studying for a foundation or undergraduate level qualification, 9 per cent for a postgraduate research qualification, 0.1 per cent were studying for a Level 3 qualification and 1 per cent cited "other". Unfortunately, due to the low response rate for Level three qualifications analysis was unable to be done specifically on these responses.

Reasons for choosing UK study

Respondents were asked to select the top five reasons for why they chose to study in the UK. The five most popular statements were: "*the quality of education in the UK*", "*to improve my job prospects globally*", "*the opportunity to work in the UK after my studies*", "*to gain a different cultural experience*" and "*to improve my job prospects back home*".

Interestingly, whilst having the opportunity to work in the UK after studies was the third highest reason for respondents, improving their job prospects in the UK more generally was not a high factor in choosing to study here.

¹ Please note: all percentage numbers in this briefing have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



The most common reason respondents chose, at all levels of study, when deciding to study in the UK was the quality of education. For undergraduates and foundation degree students, the next most common factor was the chance to gain a different cultural experience, whereas, for both types of postgraduate study the second most common factor was to improve job prospects globally.

It is interesting to see that respondents from East Asia were the only group to have "to improve my English" as one of the top three most common responses. Students from Africa also appear to feel much more strongly that the quality of education was a factor in their decision making, with 84 per cent of African respondents selecting this, compared to 73 per cent overall. Respondents from all regions had "improve my job prospects globally" as a top three most common response.

Volunteering and working during studies

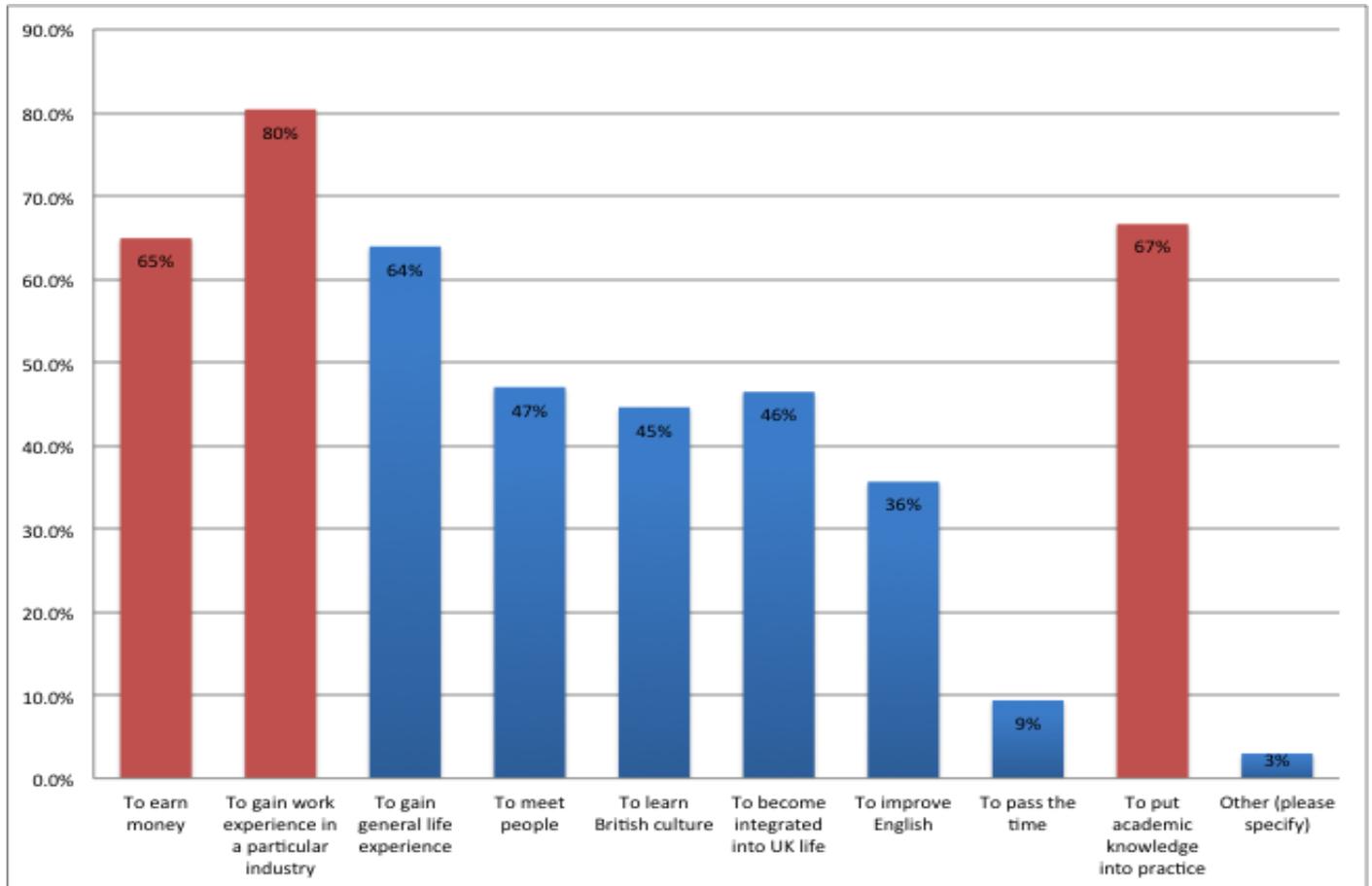
37 per cent of respondents said that they have volunteered or currently volunteer whilst studying. When divided by area of study, the responses show that the areas where respondents are least likely to have participated in volunteering activities are business and administrative studies and engineering and technologies. In all areas of discipline, it is more likely that respondents have not participated in volunteering activity.

78 per cent of all respondents said that they had, or they intended to work whilst studying in the UK. Respondents from Africa were the most likely to be working or want to work in the UK whilst studying, whilst respondents from the Middle East were the least. The Middle East was the only region where it is more likely that respondents were not working and not intending to work whilst studying.

14 per cent of respondents who answered that they currently worked or intended to work do not feel confident that they are aware of and understand all the regulations around their right to work during my studies in the UK. In particular, 16 per cent of undergraduate and foundation degree respondents that said they worked or intended to work and 30 per cent of East Asian respondents who worked or intended to work said they did not feel confident that they knew about their rights to work in the UK during study.

95 per cent of respondents who worked or intended to work felt that gaining work experience during studies was important to them. However, only 40 per cent felt that gaining work that is relevant to their chosen career is easy to achieve.

Respondents were asked to select all the reasons that applied for why they wanted to work during their studies.



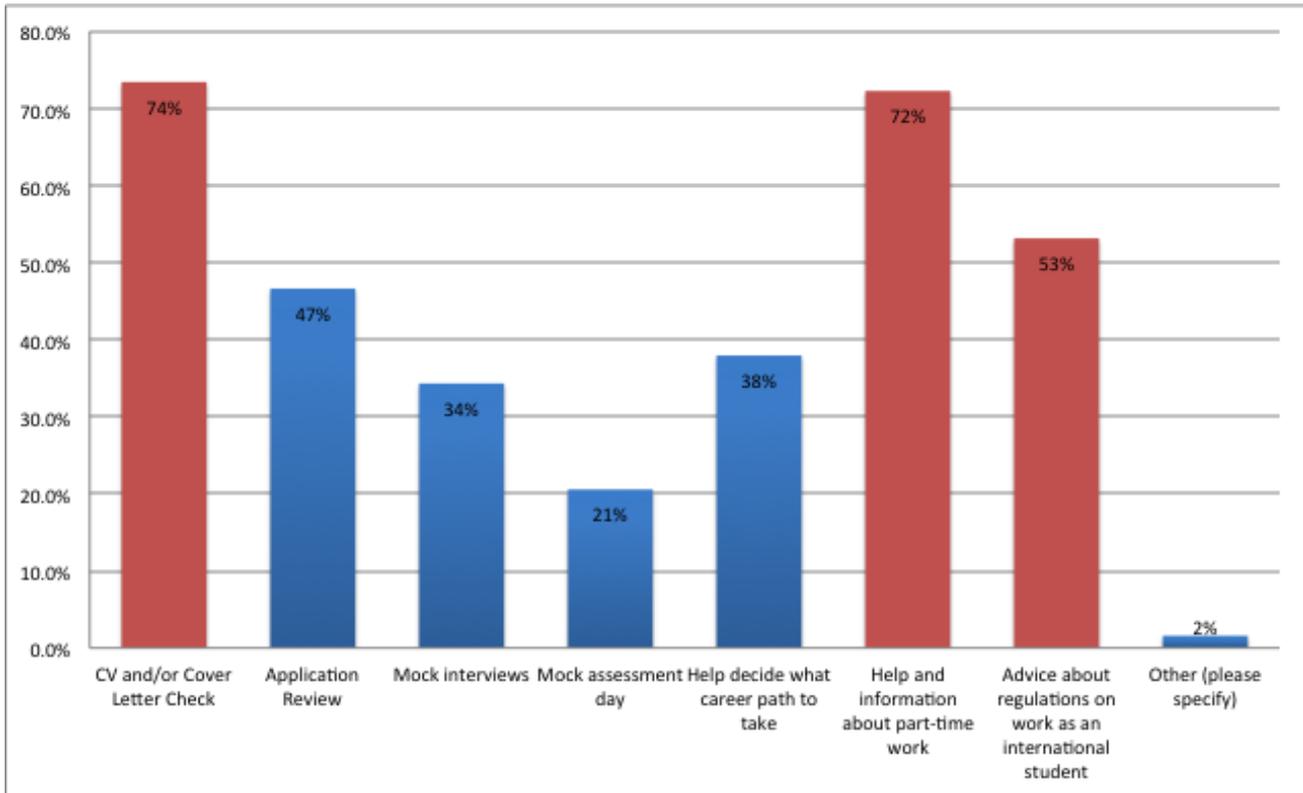
The top two reasons for wanting to study are about finding relevant experience, which 40 per cent of respondents have said is not easy to achieve.

When looking at the top three responses by level of study, whilst gaining experience in a particular industry is the most common response for all levels, the second most common response for undergraduate and foundation level is to gain general life experience, and for postgraduate researchers, the second most common reason is to gain money. Gaining money is also the third most common reason for postgraduate taught students, but does not feature in the top three for undergraduates and foundation level respondents.

Only respondents from North America and Australasia² had earning money as the most common reason for wanting to work. For all other regions, gaining relevant work experience was the most common response.

² There were only seven responses.

Respondents were asked what support they wanted from careers services.

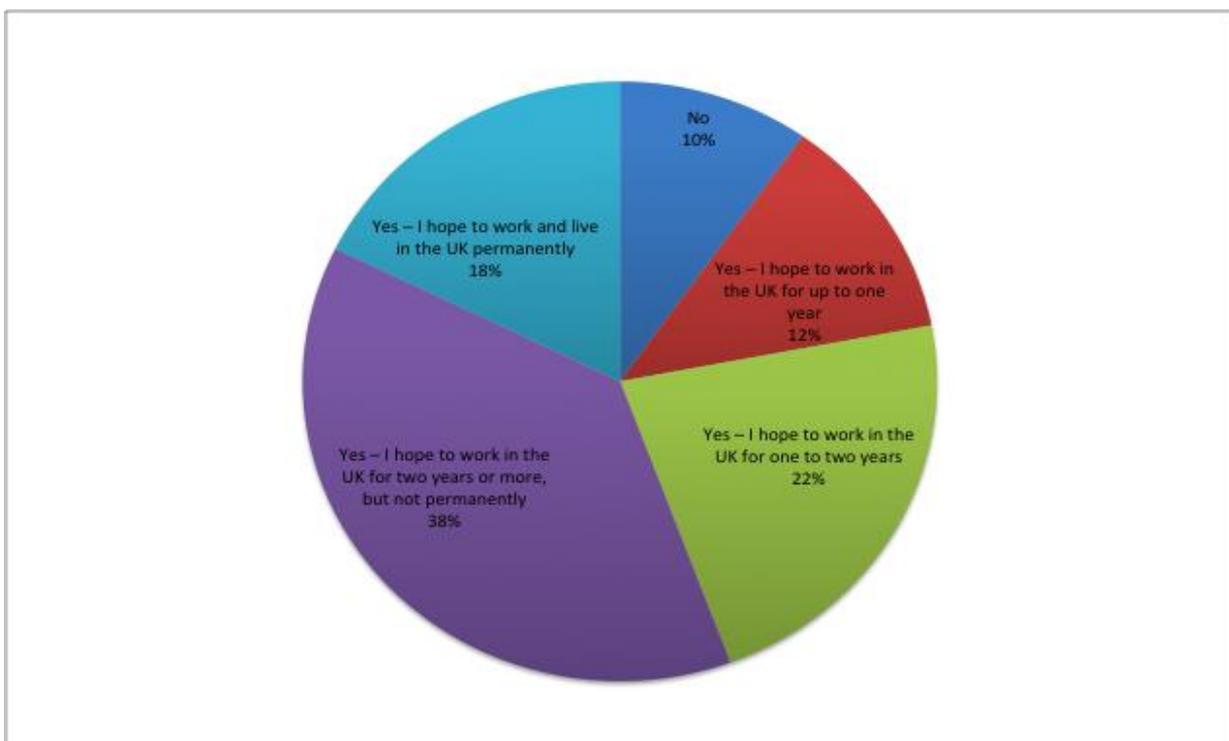


Placement opportunities

88 per cent of respondents said that they would be interested in completing a work placement during their studies, be that for less than one term (29 per cent), one or two terms (20 per cent) or for a period of up to a year (40 per cent). The highest response across all levels of study was “Yes, for a period of up to one year”.

Working in the UK after studies

Respondents were asked if they intended to seek employment in the UK after their studies.



Respondents studying humanities are the least likely to want to stay in the UK after their studies (15 per cent of humanities respondents, whilst those studying creative arts and design are the most likely to want to stay in the UK permanently (33 per cent of creative arts and design respondents). Respondents from the two largest study areas (business and administrative studies and engineering and technologies) were most likely to want to stay in the UK for two years or more, but not permanently.

Of the four regions with the highest response rates to the survey, the most likely to say they wished to stay in the UK permanently were respondents from North America (37 per cent of respondents from North America), interestingly, they were also the most likely to not want to stay in the UK at all after completion of their studies (18 per cent of respondents from North America). Respondents from South Asia, East Asia and Africa were all most likely to want stay in the UK for two years or more, but not permanently.

Respondents who said they did not wish to stay in the UK were asked to fill in a free text response explaining why.

Responses mostly fell into a four main themes: That they already had a job/further study opportunity at home/in another country; they wanted to return home for other reasons (i.e. family); that the job market in the UK was not strong or that the UK was not welcoming to international employees and they found the environment hostile. Examples of responses include:

"I want to go back my home country and will use what I've got from here especially in educational sector."

"I am on a scholarship with my country's Ministry of Education and hence have to return to serve my bond"

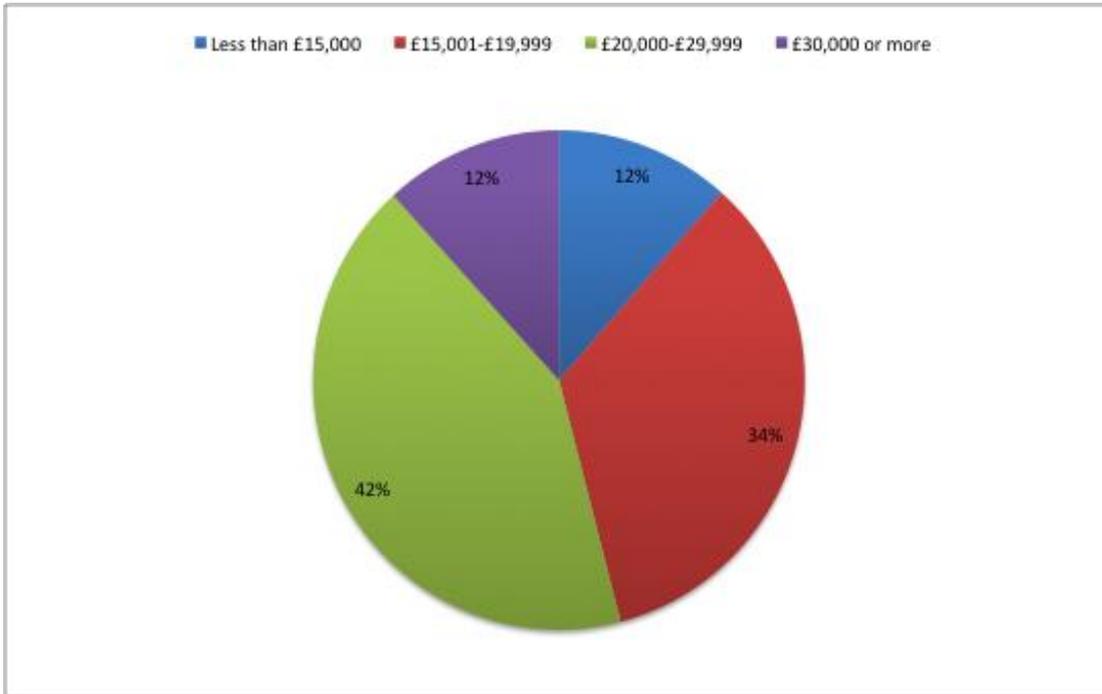
"Since my life is based in another country, I would not want to live so far away from that."

"I do not plan to work in the UK after my studies is because there are better job oppurtunities [sic] back home."

"UK academic insitutions [sic] do not seem to be employment-friendly to foreigners, particularly Africans (I want to pursue a career in academia), so even if I got a job I'm not sure my career would advance at the same pace as it would elsewhere in the world"

"Hostile environment and attitude of the locals to foreigners. I would love to work will [sic] some companies related to my field, in England, but I would be afraid to. The locals do not like people of foreign origins in the work-place. I would not want to live where I am not welcome."

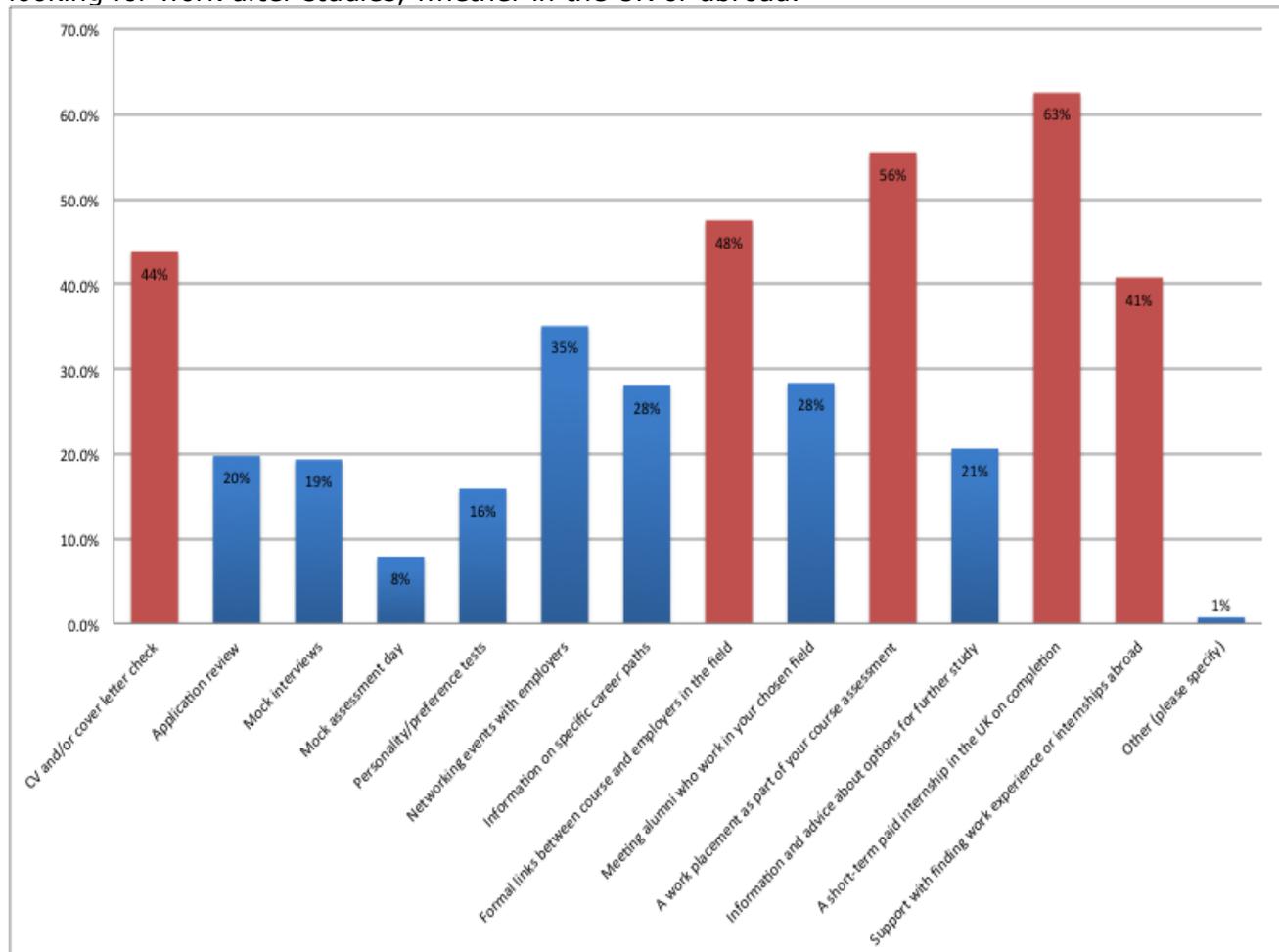
Those intending to work in the UK after studies were asked: Considering the region and industry you wish to work in, what would you expect your starting salary to be for a graduate level job?



46 per cent of respondents do not expect to be able to find a graduate level job that pays a salary of £20,000 or over.

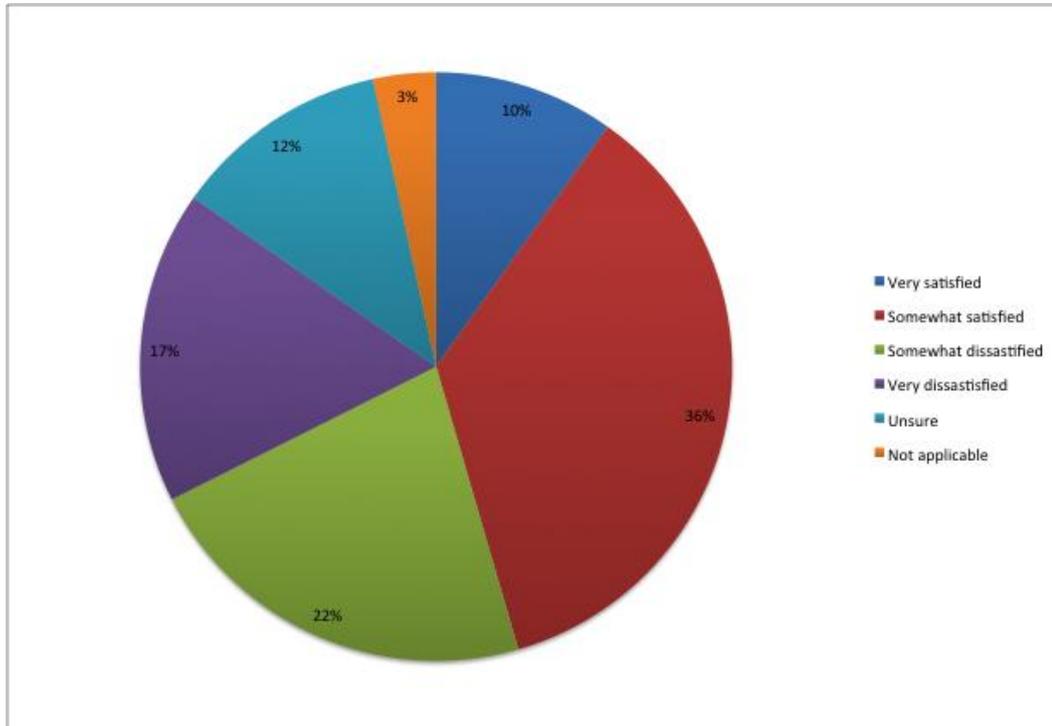
Careers support

Respondents were asked to select the top five forms of support they would find most useful when looking for work after studies, whether in the UK or abroad.



These preferences are reflected across all levels of study, across the two highest areas of study and the top four regions.

Respondents were then asked how satisfied they were with the level of careers support offered by their institutions.



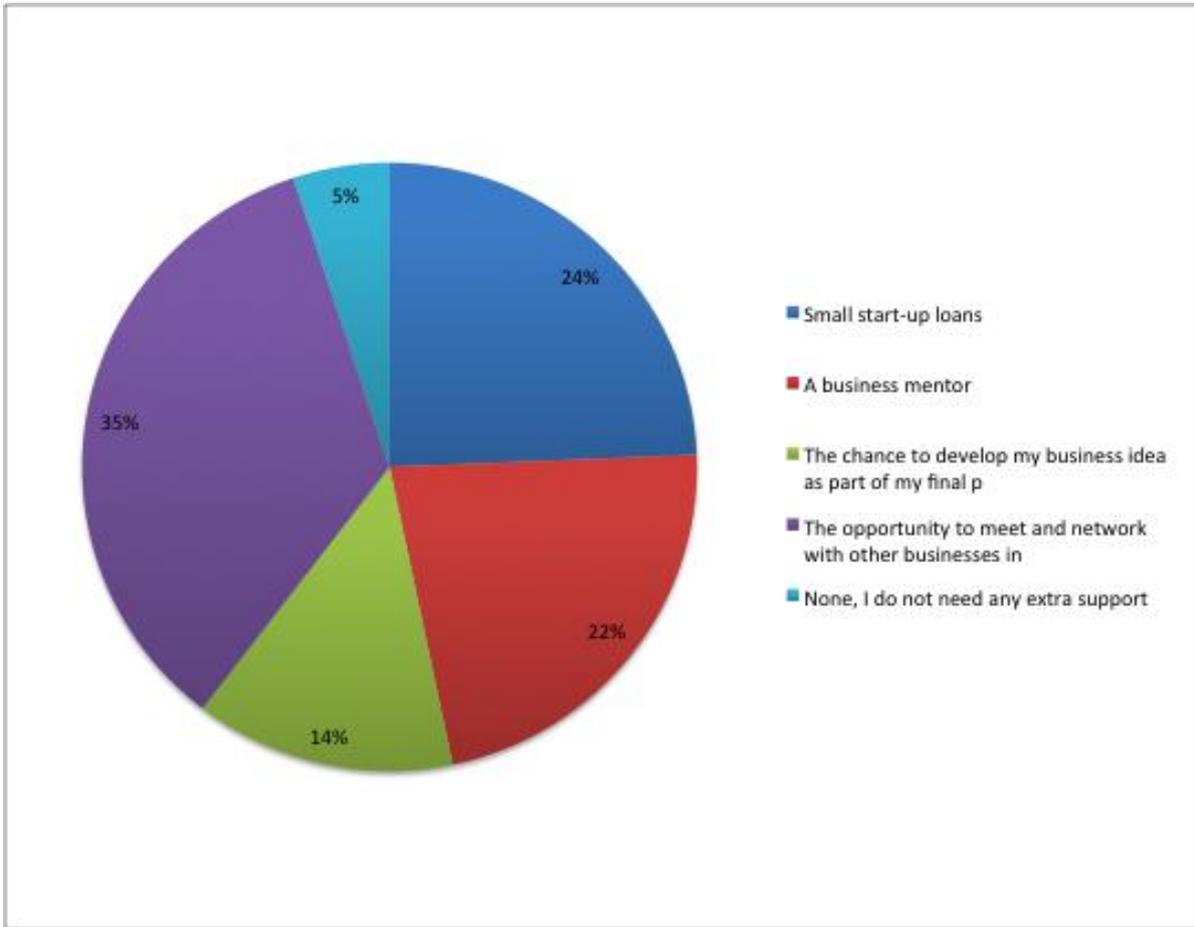
15 per cent of respondents were unsure or felt that the question was not applicable to them. This could indicate a significant number of respondents not knowing about or not having used these services.

The most satisfied respondents were students studying for an undergraduate or foundation degree (46 per cent of undergraduate and foundation respondents were somewhat or very satisfied) and respondents from East Asia (52 per cent of respondents from East Asia were somewhat or very satisfied). The most dissatisfied were postgraduate taught respondents (42 per cent somewhat or very dissatisfied) and respondents from South Asia (50 per cent somewhat or very dissatisfied). South Asia was the only subgroup where the level of dissatisfaction is greater than the level of satisfaction.

Entrepreneurship

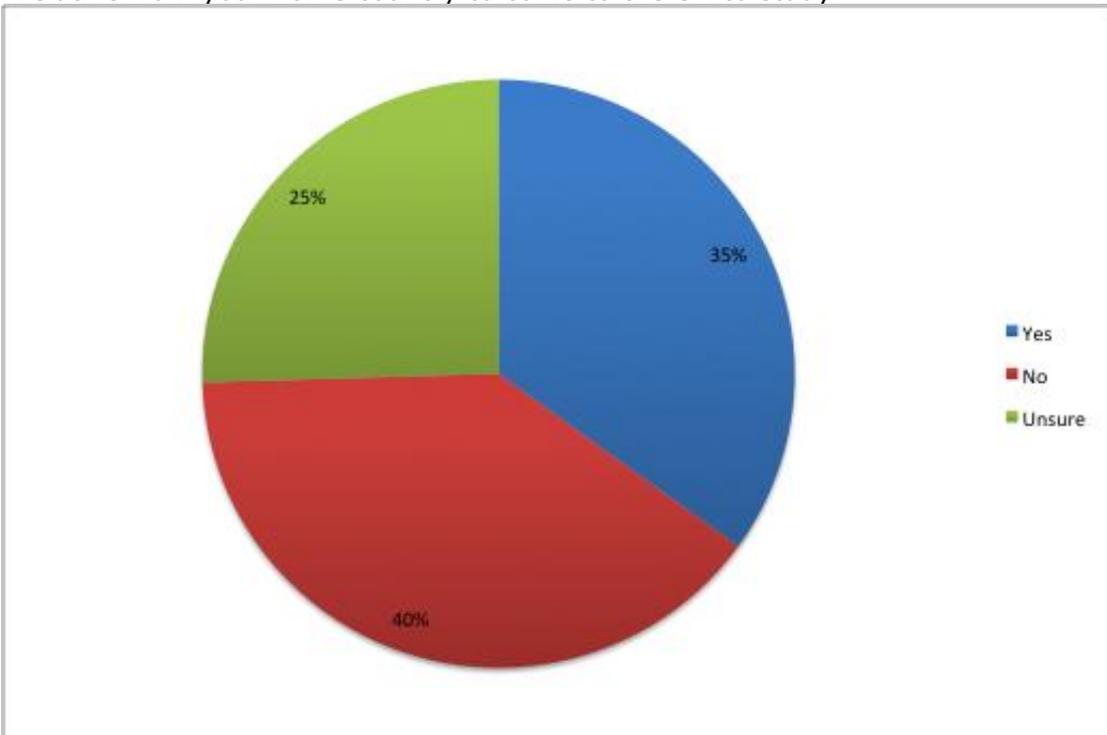
22 per cent of respondents had plans to set up their own business in the UK after their studies. The three areas of study respondents were most likely to have plans are creative arts and design (32 per cent of creative arts and design respondents); mathematical and computer sciences (29 per cent) and business and administrative studies (26 per cent).

62 per cent of respondents felt that they would need two years or more to set up their business in the UK and 14 per cent were unsure how long it would take them. Respondents felt that the one most useful form of support for them in setting up their own business would be the opportunity to meet and network with other businesses in their industry (35 per cent).

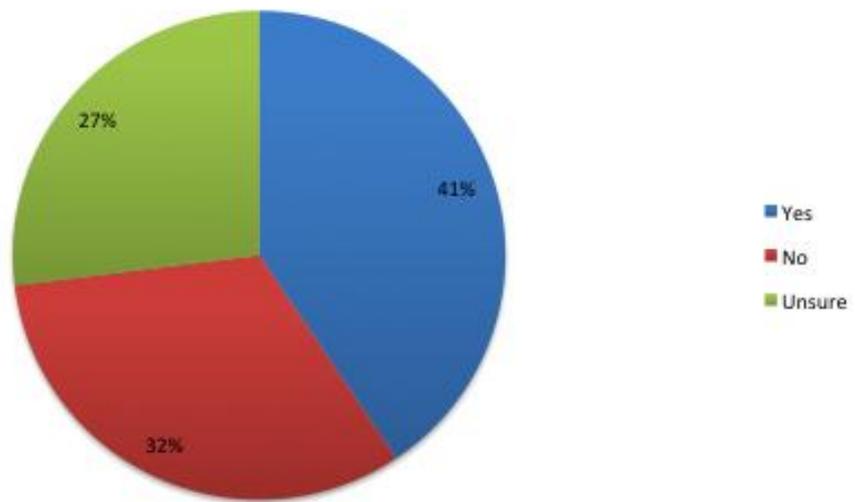


Recommending UK study

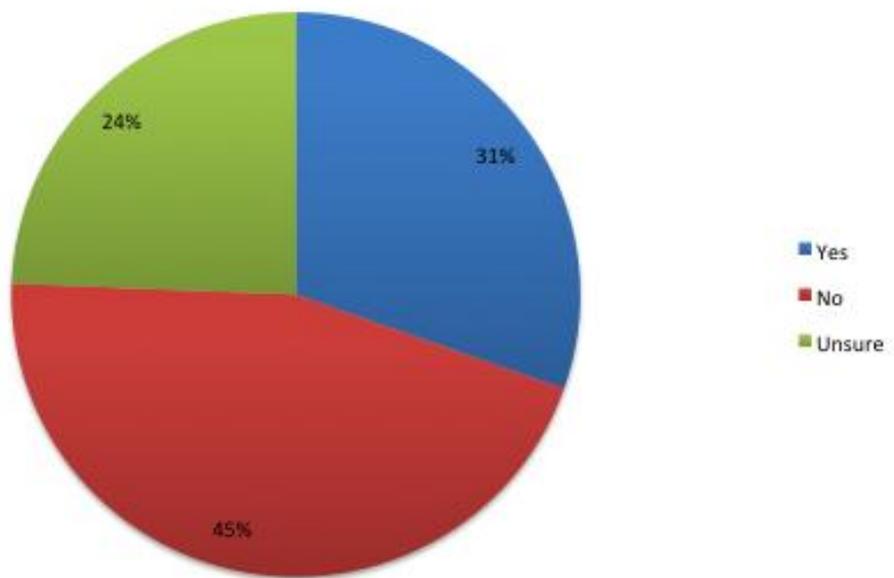
Respondents were asked: Thinking about your time as an international student in the UK, and about the work experience and employment opportunities available to you, would you advise a friend or relative from your home country to come to the UK to study?



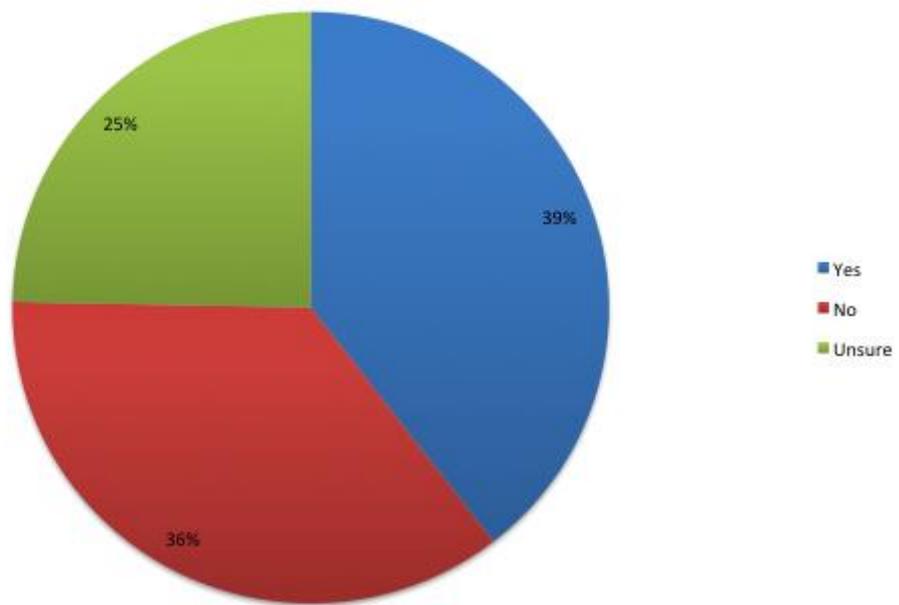
Foundation and undergraduate



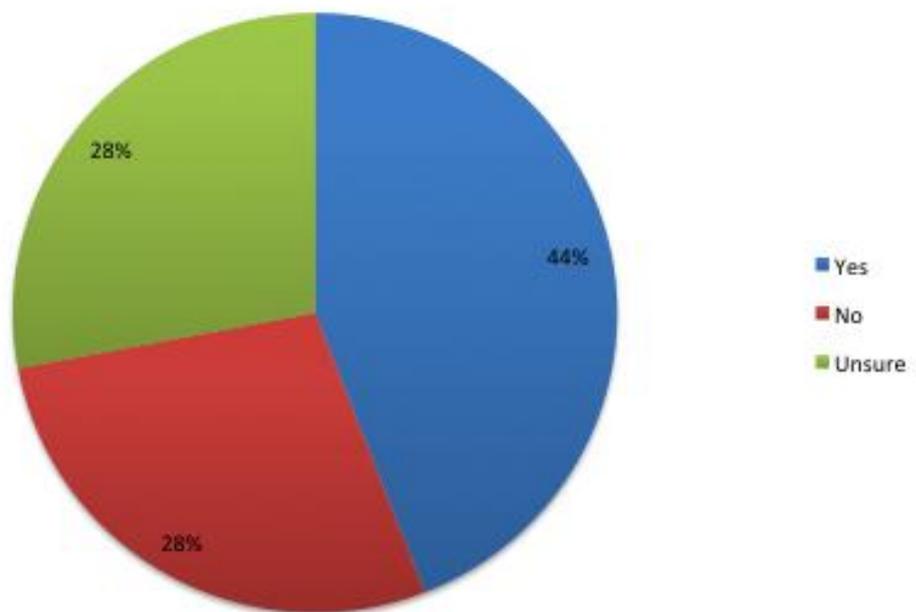
Postgraduate Taught



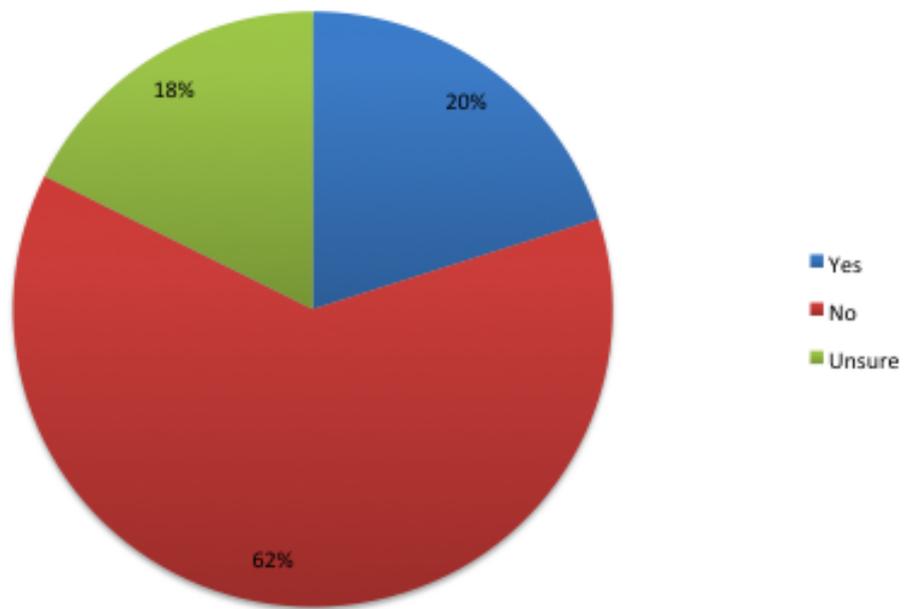
Postgraduate Research



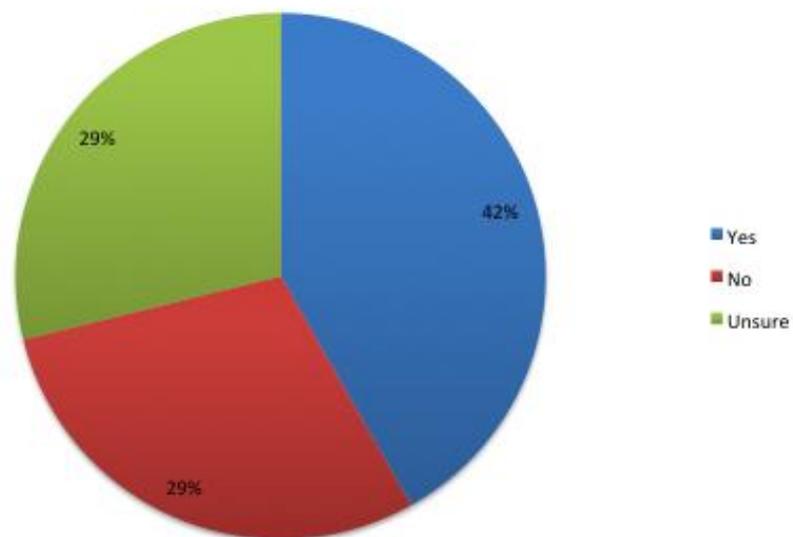
North America

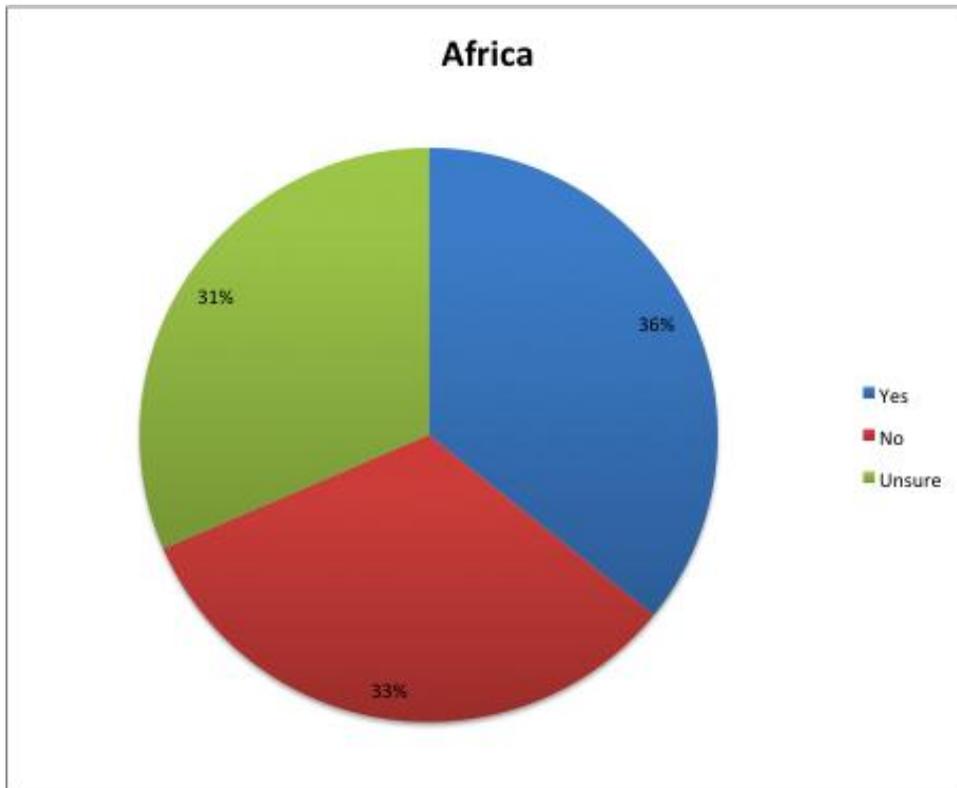


South Asia



East Asia





The most likely subgroups to say they would recommend UK study to a friend are undergraduates and foundation level respondents (41 per cent) and North Americans (44 per cent). Those most likely subgroups to say that they would not recommend UK study to a friend are postgraduate taught respondents (45 per cent) and South Asian respondents (62 per cent).

Conclusion

These survey results have highlighted some key issues facing UK education in an increasingly competitive global education market. It is clear that the transition to new visa regulations has been handled and communicated badly, but it is positive to see that the quality of UK education is still seen as a driving factor in the decision for international students to choose to study in the UK.

In the current context of tightened visa regulations there are a number of actions institutions could take to try and minimise the potential negative impact this could have on the international student experience.

Such as:

- Increase careers support capacity to explain student working and volunteering regulations for international students.
- Develop curricula which includes opportunities to gain work experience directly related to the course.
- Develop summer/graduate internship programs with businesses to ensure students have some opportunity to gain experience.
- Provide increased global networking opportunities for students (i.e. careers fairs beyond UK based employers, webinars, and online networking spaces).

A more comprehensive research report will follow this initial summary briefing.

NUS Global Future Bulletin is designed to keep officers up to date on national developments. Information is correct at time of writing and offered in good faith.