

Supporting students for university success

Diane Glass shares the latest ISC Research report into international student choices

The new *Pathways from International Schools to University* report recently published by ISC Research identifies the higher education choices that are being made by international school students, and explores the professional relationships between schools and universities that facilitate selection success. The study, conducted in September 2018 and involving interviews with international school college counsellors as well as quantitative research with over 180 counsellors, raises awareness of the challenges that students and guidance professionals face as the higher education market expands and becomes increasingly competitive.

The report demonstrates the significant value that relationships between international school college counsellors and university officers can have on pathway outcomes. However, it also suggests that, for some international schools, the guidance of students at this pivotal stage of their life may be lacking as a result of the increasingly complex nature of university selection.

International school students are no longer selecting only traditional destinations for degree study. In addition to the US, UK, Canada and Australia, universities offering English-medium degree courses in the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Japan, South Korea and the UAE were all cited in the research as significant destinations for students this academic year. The report lists various factors motivating country choice by students including cost, visa benefits, safety, and active promotion by universities in the country, as well as location desire and the perceived quality of education provision.

Almost 50% of the college counsellors who participated in the study said that universities from more countries were now promoting degrees to their school and its students. Universities from Switzerland, Hong Kong, the Netherlands,

Germany, Spain and Japan were listed in the top ten countries that engaged with college counsellors, most successfully through school visits, university fairs in school locations, and direct liaison with the counsellor. The report suggests that, for college counsellors, these routes to engagement are preferable to mass marketing of the university and its courses, or to working with agents.

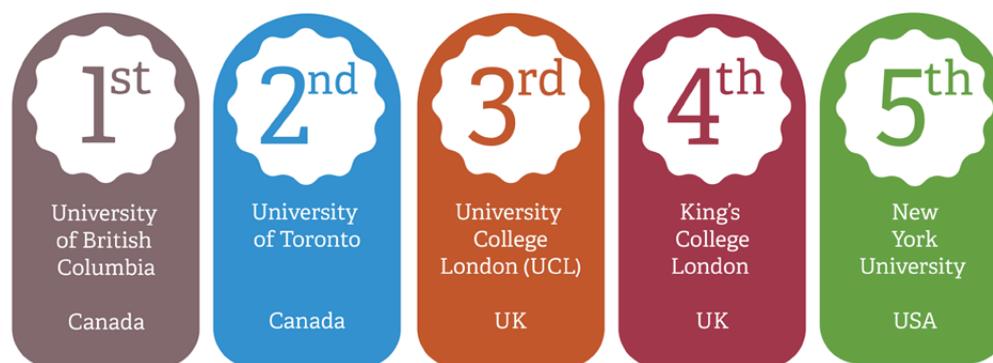
Two aspects of the college counselling role became particularly evident during the research; managing aspirations of students and their parents, and being an informed point of contact between school and university.

Balancing aspiration and best fit

Helping to balance student desires and parental aspirations with the reality of student academic ability can be a time-intensive task for the college counsellor. Many counsellors who participated in the research reported how parents often have unrealistic views on what and where their child should study, which may conflict with the actual desires of the student. Jeremy Handcock, College Counsellor from Vienna International School who was interviewed during the research, said: 'It does happen quite often that parents have decided that their son or daughter will be a doctor or engineer ... and sometimes they even decided which university their son or daughter will go to, irrespective of the fact that Oxford or Cambridge are on 40+ points and their kid's got 30; they kind of breeze over things like that'.

A significant investment of time and skill by college counsellors is required to manage expectations. The research identified that some counsellors start engaging with parents when students are in early secondary grades to build realistic expectations ahead of the crucial period of decision-making.

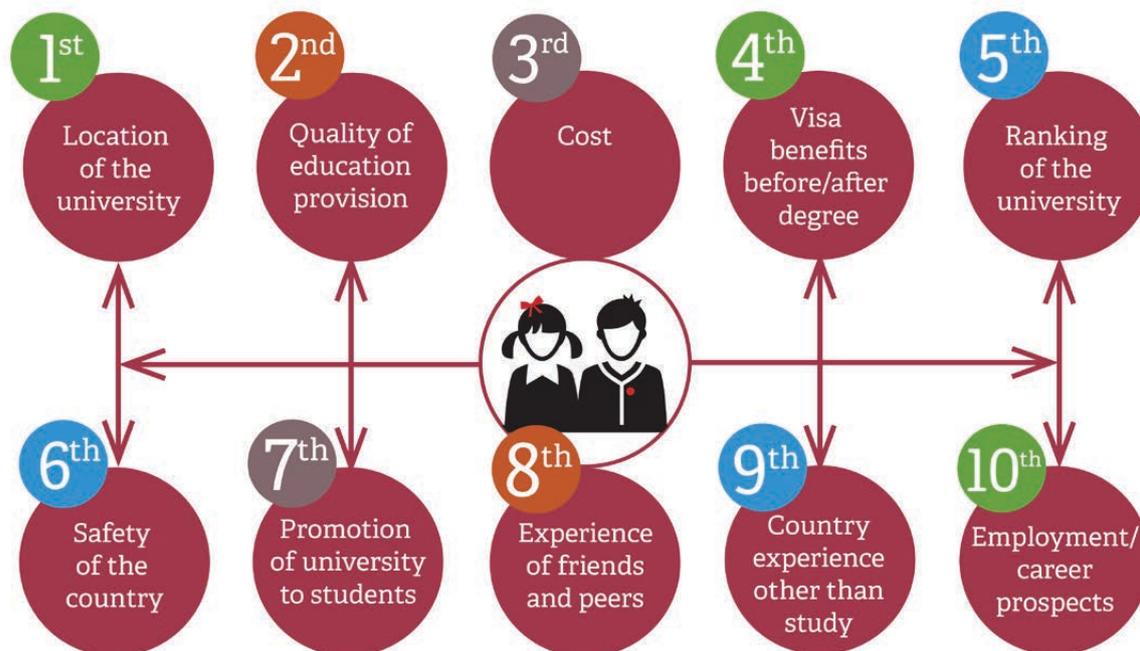
The top 5 university destinations for international school leavers in 2018



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Data from ISC Research Pathway to University Report 2018

What motivates students about university choice?



Data from ISC Research Pathway to University Report 2018

Others enlist the help of university representatives to provide a realistic perspective for parents.

Relationships matter

Another key message that emerged from the research is the need for trusted, collaborative relationships between international schools and universities. 'The development of these relationships, through close engagement, allows college counsellors to enhance their body of knowledge on the most suitable and relevant options for students' specific circumstances', says the report. 'This means that students can get help in a range of ways; with up-to-date information on admission-relevant topics, [and] with advice about universities that might best suit their personal and academic needs, as well as about course options of which they may be unaware'.

College counsellors indicated that relationships with university officers could be fostered in a range of ways. 71% said visits to the school by more clusters of universities would be helpful, while 71% would value familiarity visits to groups of universities, and 58% wanted more university officers to communicate directly with them. The counsellors who had good relationships with university officers all emphasised their value. Jacqui Brelsford from the British International School Phuket said: 'We work hard on these relationships and they are important. We draw on them when it comes to application time and I can send someone a quick email asking a question, so it's something we really try to foster'. Chris Wilcox from Western International School of Shanghai agreed: 'We have to understand those institutions ... to hear from them what priorities they might have in terms of looking at classes for admissions'.

That these relationships are essential for both parties is underlined by the report. 'International school college counsellors are the crucial point of contact for university admission officers, allowing them to understand a school and the skills and qualifications of its students', says the report. 'For the school community', it adds, 'they also inform the student and parent body, cohort after cohort, of university campus qualities and course selection, for guiding "right fit" selection and ultimately increasing the potential of degree retention and success'.

Increasingly complex responsibility

The report highlights areas where improvements could be made by international schools, and also by universities, if college counsellors are to offer best possible guidance, resulting in successful higher education progression for students. In particular, it emphasises the fact that college counsellors can only be highly effective at meeting students' higher education needs if they have a manageable number of caseloads. As degree options, selection criteria, and student and parent aspirations expand, international schools must acknowledge and recognise the increasingly complex nature of college counselling.

Diane Glass is Commercial Director at ISC Research. The ISC Research Higher Education Report: Pathways from International Schools to University 2018 is available now for schools, universities and professionals supporting student pathways. Email: Diane.Glass@iscresearch.com