

THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PATHWAY: THOUGHTS ON ITS REIMAGINING



Providers must provide pathways that are flexible, value-for-money and showcase the UK as a great place to study, says Rachel Soundy, partner at Bevan Brittan LLP

The traditional on-campus international student pathway is transforming. Following on from our recent webinar, The International Student Pathway Reimagined, Rachel Soundy, higher education partner from law firm Bevan Brittan LLP, discusses three points for international teams at higher education institutions to consider as they plan for the future international student pathway.

FLEXIBILITY

As lockdown and travel restrictions begin to ease, higher education providers that offer flexible pathways will be best placed to prosper in the post-recovery era. Although recent events have proved that higher education providers can react quickly to deliver a blended pathway, in order to attract international students, going forward the flexible pathway must be intentionally designed to enable students to easily move between online and on-campus modules.

For universities the construction of a flexible pathway with a high quality online learning platform is likely to require significant investment in technology, additional outsourcing and the recruitment of extra administrative and international student recruitment teams. Higher education institutions without existing overseas campuses may look to partner with local education providers to establish regional study hubs overseas. Institutions looking to increase source country diversity in their international student body could look to establish new market specific pathways and/or enhance the role of local agents. The investment and effort involved is significant but the end result is likely to be a more resilient and agile pathway structure that is attractive to a wider range of international students.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Even before Covid-19, international students were increasingly looking for value for money from their pathway experience beyond English language skills. The pandemic and the resulting growth of the online pathway has sharpened this focus and raised fundamental questions about what the



goal of international study is: is it a degree with a UK higher education institution or living in the UK? International students and their families are increasingly looking to higher education institutions to provide appropriate and accessible student support and for reassurances as to how students will be looked after on-campus.

International students' study locations also appear to be strongly influenced by the careers support and student placement and employment opportunities offered by higher education institutions. Universities that can capitalise on the recent introduction of the Graduate route visa – by partnering with local employers and alumni to offer international students the opportunity to develop employability skills and undertake post-study work opportunities – will set themselves apart in the international student recruitment market.

THE GLOBAL MARKET

The UK's share of the global international student market remains under threat from other established English-speaking destinations, such as Australia and Canada, and the accelerated growth of regional student mobility in emerging study destinations such as Malaysia. In the post-recovery world the global

international student market will become super-competitive and more aggressive.

For the UK to retain, and even increase, its market share of the global market, the UK higher education sector will need to operate as one to promote the benefits of studying with (not necessarily physically in) a British university in key target markets. The challenges of operating in this ever-changing landscape, where local lockdowns and travel restrictions may well continue to disrupt access to on-campus UK higher education, are considerable. Yet, the UK higher education sector has demonstrated over the last 18 months that, at its core, it is resilient and agile – attributes that will serve it well in the global battle for international students.

For more on this topic, please view the recording of the webinar The International Student Pathway Reimagined featuring a panel discussion hosted by Anna Britten with Victoria O'Donnell from Arden University, partner Rachel Soundy from law firm Bevan Brittan LLP and Julie Mercer from the Nous Group.

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