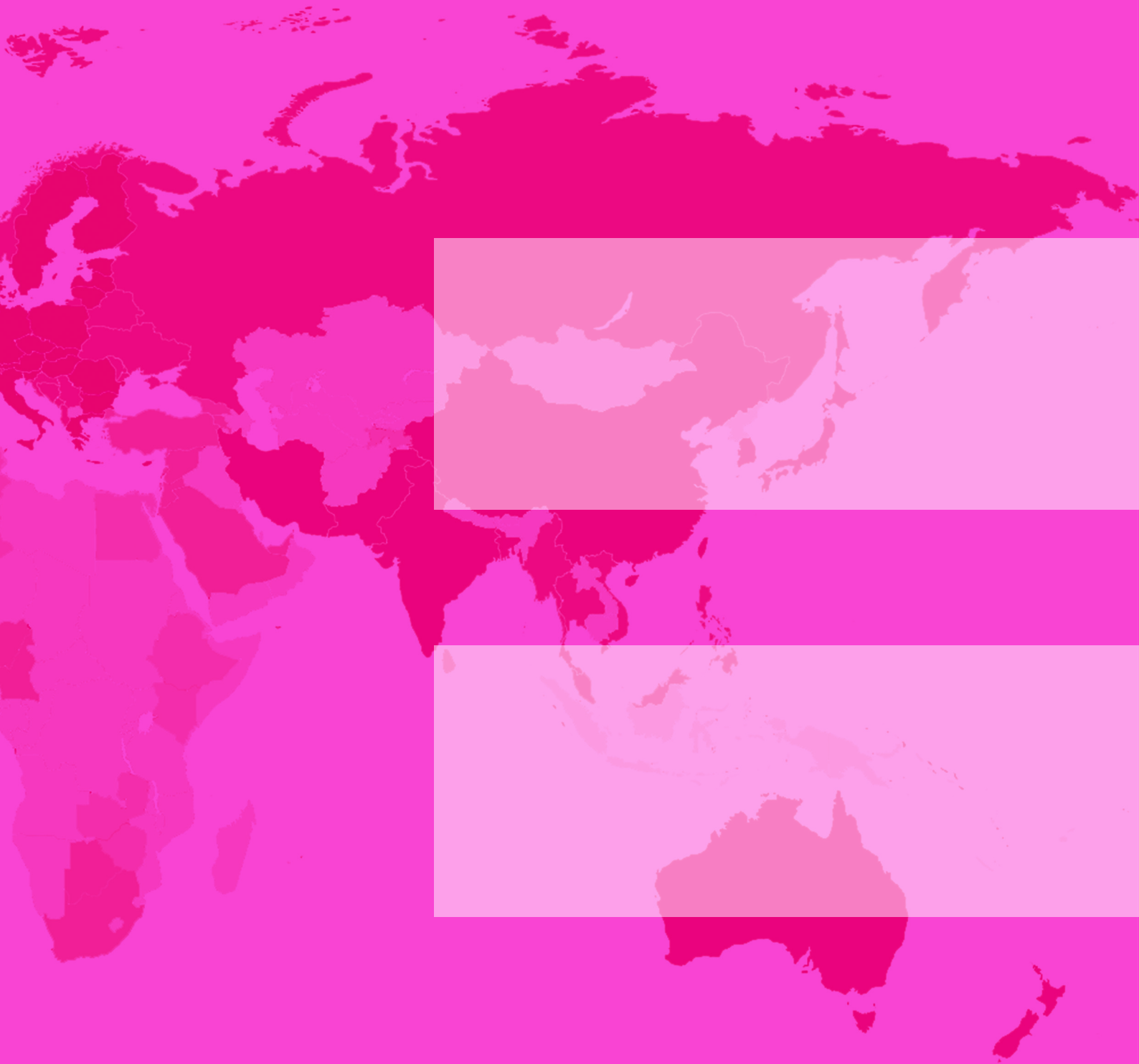
Improving the experiences of international staff in UK higher education

Research report



Equality Challenge Unit

Acknowledgments

ECU would like to thank everyone who took part in this project, particularly survey respondents and:

- **Heather Timm**, **Seija Frears** and **Cecil White**, University of Leeds
- **Paul Mark-Jones**, University of Manchester
- **Peter McCracken**, University of Nottingham
- **Ri'Anna Stueber**, University of Bristol
- **Marjana Johansson**, University of Essex

A summary of these findings and recommendations of this research are available at **www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/improving-experiences-international-staff**.

Further information

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Introduction

Higher education is an increasingly globalised sector creating exciting opportunities for international collaboration and shared learning.

However with increased collaboration also comes increased competition; higher education institutions (HEIs) need to ensure they represent the best research, teaching and learning not just within a particular region or country but at an international level.

In order to stay relevant and competitive it seems increasingly prudent for UK staff to have knowledge and experience of overseas higher education sectors and for HEIs to ensure their workforce includes international staff who are able to offer a wide range of experiences, skills and knowledge which can complement and enrich UK styles and methods.

There are approximately 61,175 (full-time equivalent) international staff members currently working in the UK higher education sector. For some time, anecdotal evidence from the higher education sector suggested that international staff face specific challenges and barriers to success that may be different to those faced by their UK colleagues. Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) set out to explore what these differences might be, and what HEIs can do about them. This report is the result of that research.

In this publication we use the term British to refer to people from the UK. While we acknowledge that not everyone in the UK identifies with this term, many survey respondents used the term British to refer to their UK colleagues.

Aim of this report

Many of the survey respondents had enjoyed their experience in the UK and were complimentary of their institution and their team.

'Overall, I have thoroughly enjoyed working and living in the UK. Despite my complaints, I have been very impressed by the dedication and professionalism of most of my colleagues.'

However many respondents also cited examples where they had difficulties living and/or working in the UK and where they would have appreciated more support. This report outlines the results of ECU's research and suggests areas where institutions may want to provide that support and improve the experiences of their international staff.

Ensuring that international staff are well supported:

= **helps to promote the reputation of UK higher education internationally**
International staff communicate their experiences to friends, relatives and colleagues in other countries.

= **helps to ensure a good staff experience for everyone**
A lot of the good practice and recommendations are of benefit to all staff, not just international staff.

= **helps to ensure that the best staff apply to work within UK higher education**
If UK higher education has a reputation as an exemplary employer the sector could be seen as an employer of choice internationally.

= **helps staff to feel able to share their international experiences, knowledge and skills**
UK higher education operates in an increasingly globalised society, the workforce needs to represent international identities and international methods for teaching, learning and research, which may differ to the UK norm.

Who are 'international staff'?

International staff are not a homogeneous group of people; each member of staff is an individual with their own identities and personal characteristics.

For the purposes of the survey, ECU asked respondents to self-identify as international, but provided the following guidance:

'This survey is for international staff who work in any role in a higher education institution (HEI) in the UK. Please complete the survey if you moved to the UK for your current role, or if you moved to the UK for other reasons. We are looking to hear from people whose 'domicile' of origin is not the UK. In other words, if you grew up outside of the UK and moved here at some point (regardless of your current nationality or domicile status) we would like to hear from you.'

As with all members of a workforce, international staff are going to face specific issues connected to their own identities and background. For example female international staff are likely to have a different experience to male international staff, international staff who are from a visible minority ethnic group are likely to have a different experience to those who are white. We asked respondents about their personal characteristics as part of the survey and analysed the results accordingly. Unfortunately, the numbers get very small once broken down in this way, and while we have included some references to these areas, there are very few of them. This does not mean that they do not exist, but that this survey did not manage to capture them in a reliable way.

As a consequence many of the findings and recommendations do refer to 'international staff' as a group, but we ask readers to interpret that within the context outlined above.

How to use this report

The report is split into four main sections:

- practical issues with moving to the UK, such as accommodation and finances
- support upon arrival, such as inductions and line management
- perceptions and good relations, including language and cultural barriers
- academic-specific issues such as research and teaching methods

Potential policy implications are noted throughout this publication, with conclusions and high-level recommendations at the end.

Methodology

Online survey

Questions included in the ECU online survey were developed according to the anecdotal evidence from individual institutions, and the information provided on the University of Leeds international staff website (which itself had been developed following research and involvement with their international staff). The survey used a combination of quantitative questions and open-text follow-up boxes.

The survey was piloted by international staff members, edited in light of their comments and then disseminated through UK HEIs. The link to the survey was sent to equality and diversity and human resources (HR) practitioners in HEIs across the UK who were asked to forward it to all relevant staff members. Additionally, all staff who received the survey were asked to forward the link to any other relevant people.

As a qualifying question to access the survey, respondents were asked to affirm that they currently work in an HEI and consider themselves to be an international member of staff.

Respondents

A total of 1426 valid responses to the survey were received. Partial responses were accepted and, as a result, percentages given throughout the report refer to the base for that question, which differs depending on the question. The demographic profile of survey participants and base rates for each question are given throughout.

Respondents covered institutions across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. While some of the quotes used refer to specific regions and countries, no discernible differences were found in the responses.

Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using the statistical analysis tool SPSS. The answers to specific questions on living and working in the UK were analysed using the personal data that respondents had also provided to look for any trends. As noted in the introduction, this analysis led to numbers becoming quite small, and so areas where no trends were found may be due to the size of the sample, rather than no trend existing. We are keen to emphasise the different experiences of different international staff members, but not to the detriment of data reliability.

The qualitative data was analysed through Atlas.ti. The survey data was input into Atlas.ti and qualitative responses to questions were coded so that themes and trends could be identified. This report uses quotes from the survey extensively in order to provide evidence for the points being raised, but also to present the first-hand experiences of international staff.

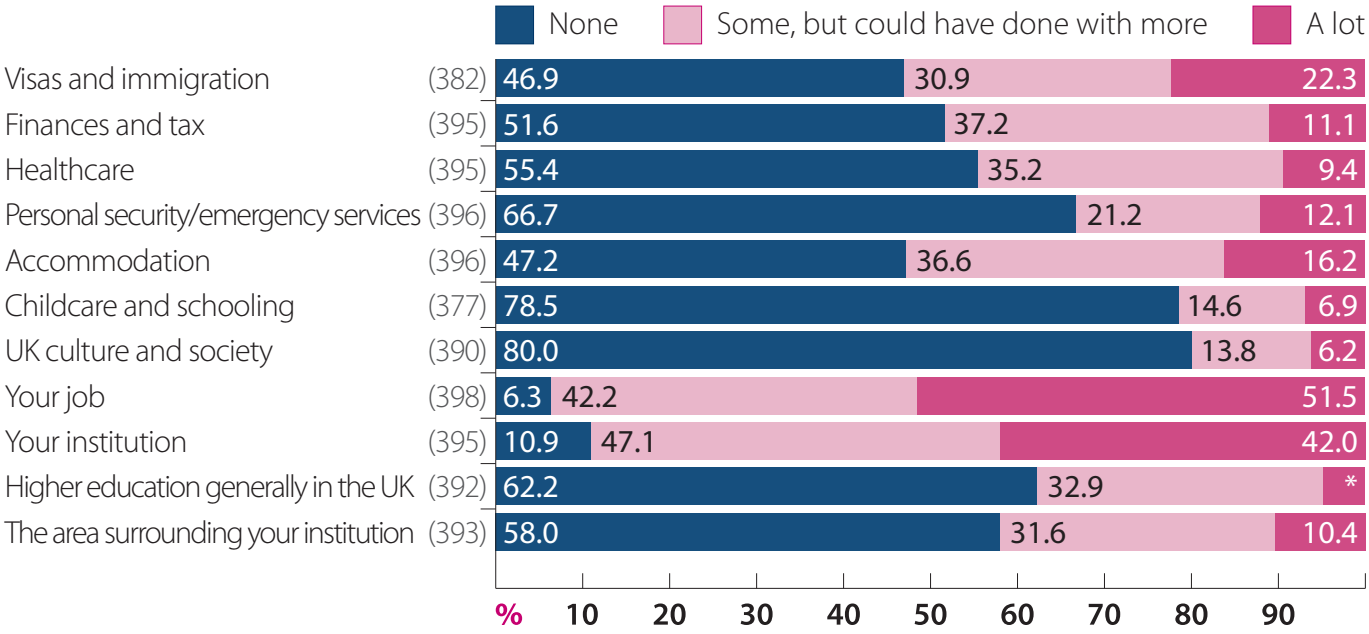
In addition to the online survey, ECU requested examples of good practice that currently exist within the sector. We are very grateful to those institutions who responded and their input is included throughout the report.

Practical issues on moving to the UK

Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

Survey respondents who had not previously studied in the UK, or who preferred not to say, and had immigrated to the UK for a specific higher education job offered prior to moving were asked a series of questions regarding the IAG they received before they arrived in the UK and their preparedness for the move. This constituted 36% of the total sample (515 out of 1426). People who had studied in the UK previously were not asked these questions as they were already familiar with the UK.

What level of IAG and support did you receive from your institution on the following areas before you arrived in the UK?



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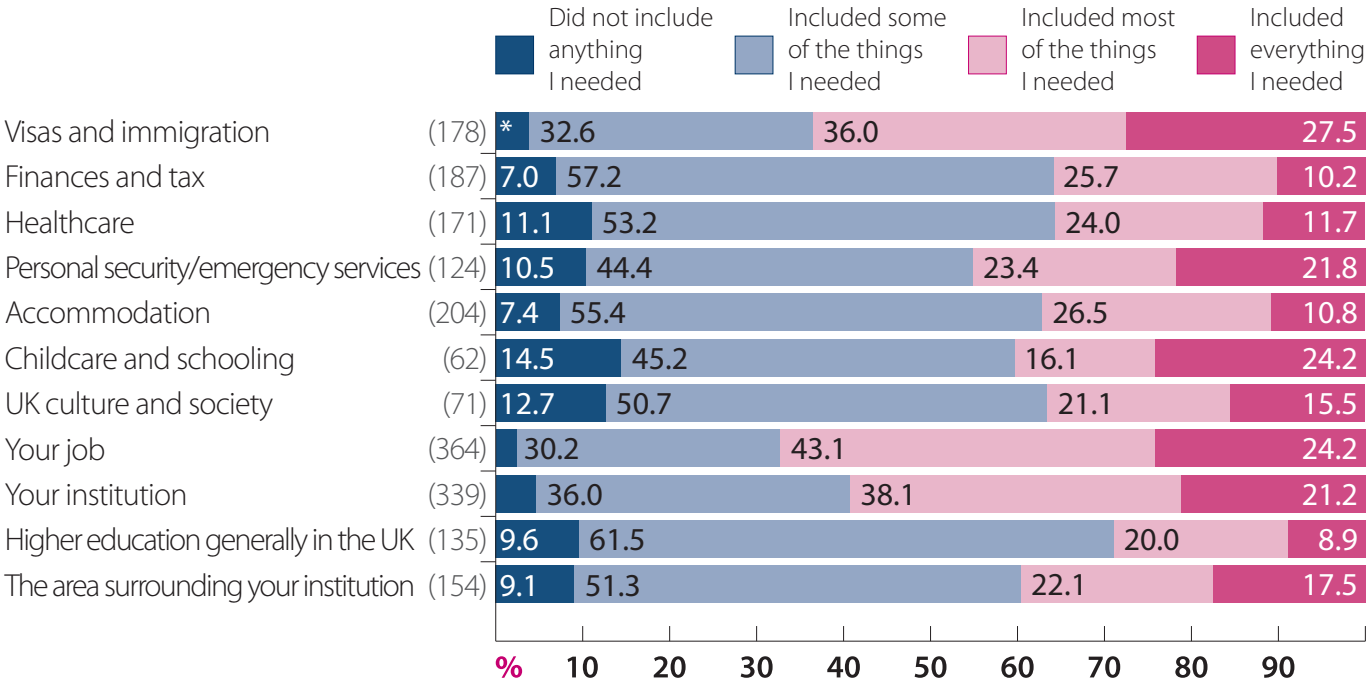
This highlights an emphasis on IAG about the specific job and institution rather than on areas such as UK culture, society, childcare and schooling.

Those who indicated that they received IAG on a particular topic were then asked to rate the usefulness of the information received and how prepared they felt for the move.

How useful was the information you received on the following topics?



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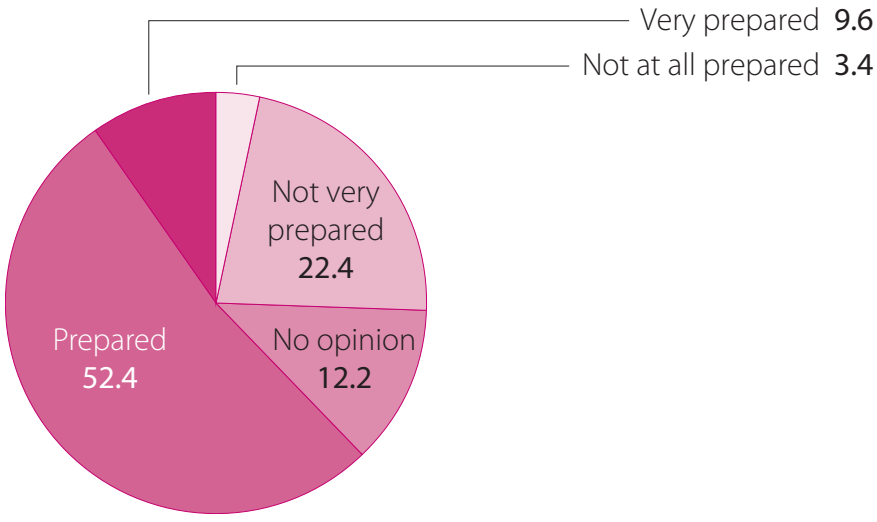
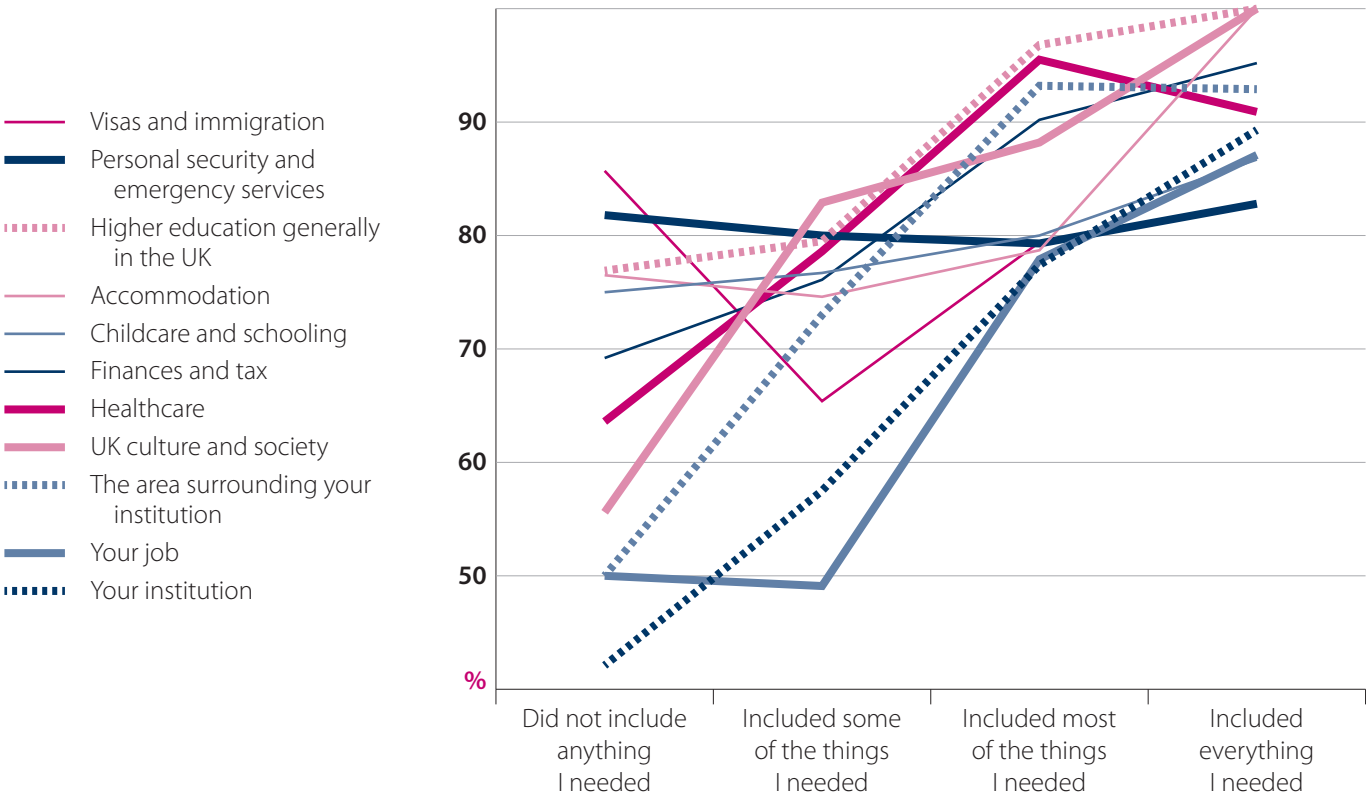
How prepared do you feel you were for the move to the UK? (500)



Respondents' perceptions of preparedness were closely correlated to the usefulness of the IAG they received. In general, the better the IAG was in covering the necessary information on a particular topic, the better prepared the respondent felt about their move to the UK.

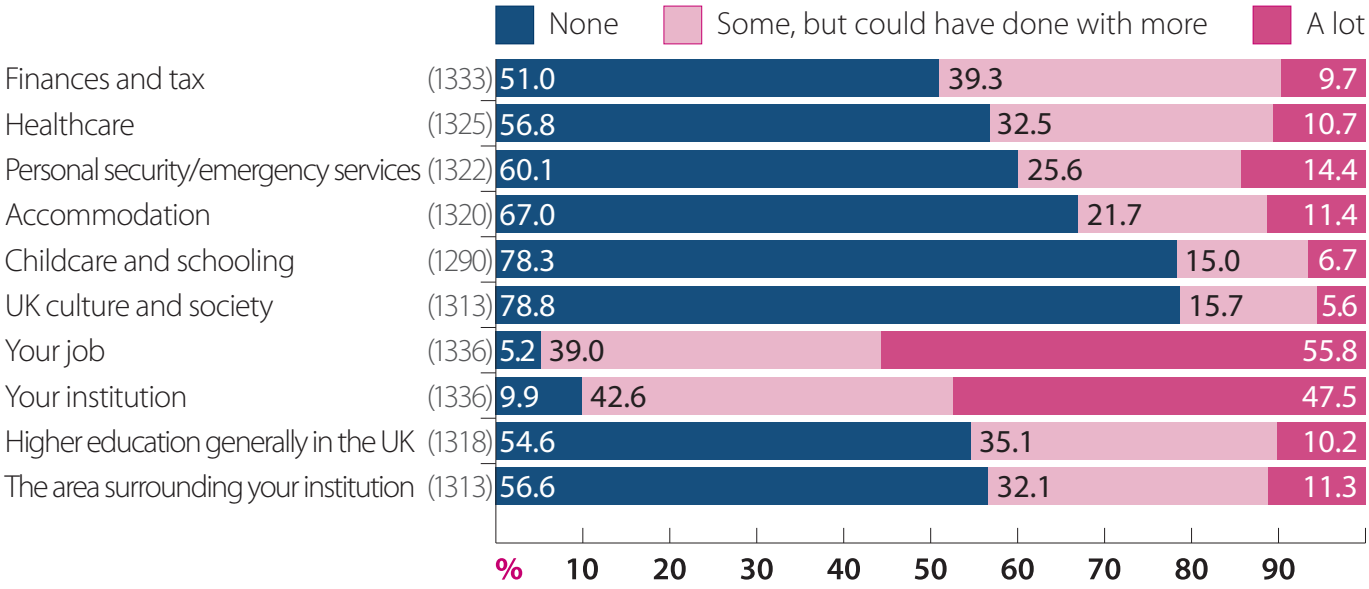
Proportion of respondents reporting they felt 'prepared' or 'very prepared' for the move to the UK, by reported levels of usefulness related to IAG received



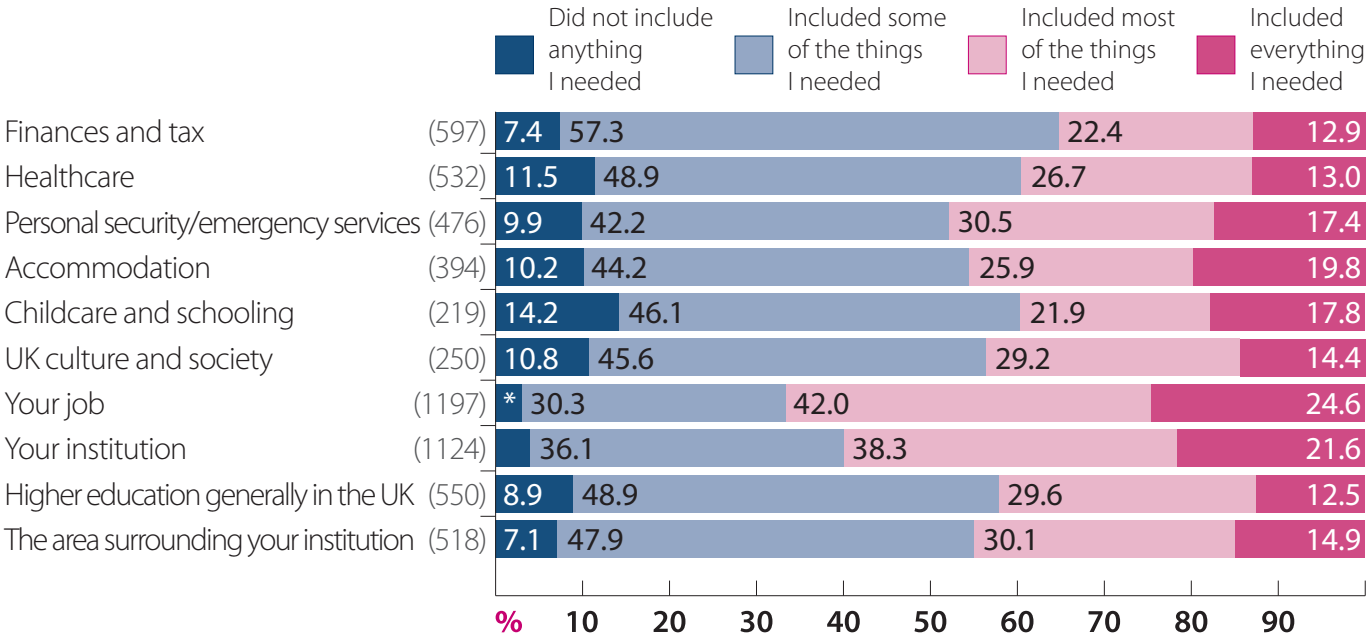
Information and support on arrival

All international staff who participated in the survey were asked about the information and support they received upon starting their job in the UK. While at least some IAG on their job and institution was common, the majority of respondents stated that they did not receive any IAG on other areas, such as finances and tax, healthcare, personal security and emergency services, accommodation, childcare and schooling, higher education in the UK, the surrounding areas of their institution, and UK culture and society generally.

When you started working at your institution, were you given any IAG or support on any of the following?



How useful was the information you received from your institution on the following topics?



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Policy implications

Good IAG is imperative for international staff. People need to feel prepared for moving to the UK and once they are in post they need to be able to concentrate on their new job, rather than being distracted by logistics. This will ensure they settle in well and want to stay.

Many respondents commented on the need for IAG to be well-organised and comprehensive, but not overwhelming, and to be easily accessible in one place. General IAG for international staff already exists and two key resources that may be helpful are:

= the international staff website (**www.internationalstaff.ac.uk**)

= British Council

More details of these are provided in the annex.

The **University of Nottingham** wished to respond to feedback that suggested that international staff would like more support. The university acknowledged that while there were mechanisms in place to support UK staff going to work on their campus in China, there was less support provided for international staff moving to the UK.

Representatives from HR, professional development and the international office met to discuss next steps and agreed to hold a focus group with international staff to explore what support would be most beneficial. They deliberately targeted international staff who had recently started at the university as the experience would be fresh in their minds. The staff participants brainstormed different ideas and consistent themes began to emerge.

Following on from the ideas that were generated at the focus group, the university decided to develop a dedicated area of the website for international staff covering information on key topics such as banking, immigration and accommodation. They included details of services and contacts specific to Nottingham and tried to make it engaging through the use of multimedia resources.

The website was developed internally by a graduate trainee and an HR adviser. An IT programmer was commissioned to work on the technical aspects.
www.nottingham.ac.uk/jobs/applyingfromoverseas/index2.aspx

The **University of Bristol** also has a dedicated website for their international staff which includes information on living and working in the UK.
www.bristol.ac.uk/international-office/staff-support

Practical issues with relocating

The results from the survey highlighted specific areas of difficulties faced when relocating to the UK. HEIs will have limited ability to influence or assist with some issues (eg visas and healthcare), but often HEIs can provide significant support by ensuring international staff have access to good IAG, and are aware of the processes they need to follow and where to find out more.

Visas

41.7% of survey respondents required a work visa to come and work in the UK higher education sector (587 respondents, base number: 1407). Of these respondents, 61.2% found the process of obtaining the appropriate visa fairly to very easy, while 27.8% found it to be quite or very difficult. The remaining 11.1% had no opinion.

The process for applying and criteria for issuing visas are outside the control of HEIs which limits the level of support and guarantee possible. However, the following findings from the survey may be of interest to HEIs.

Advice and support

Respondents who had not previously studied in the UK (or preferred not to say) and who immigrated to the UK for a specific HEI job offered prior to moving were asked a series of questions regarding the IAG they received before they arrived in the UK. This constituted 36% of the total sample (515 out of 1426). Of those, 22.3% stated that they had received a lot of information from their institution regarding visas and immigration and a further 30.9% stated that they had received at least some IAG from their institution. The remaining 46.9% stated that they had not received any visa information from their HEI prior to moving to the UK.

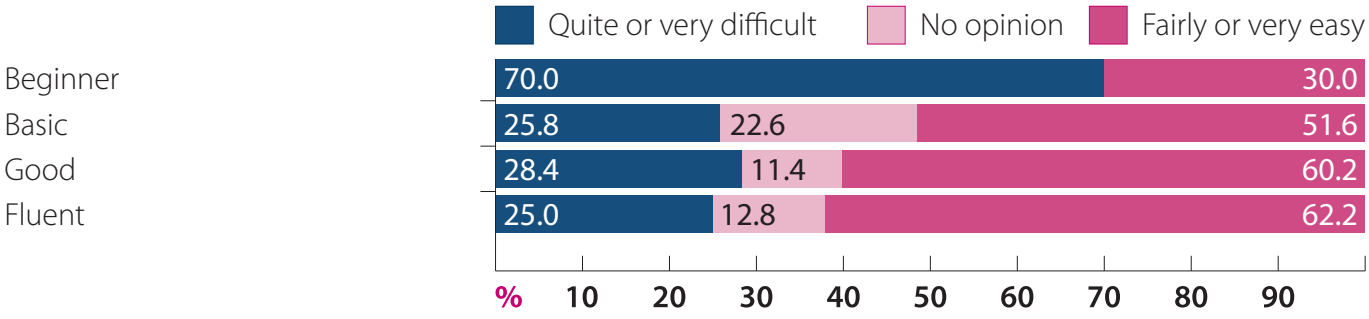
The usefulness and quality of IAG received also varied. Of those who had received IAG on visas and immigration, well over half (63.5%) reported that the information they received included 'most or everything' that they needed. However, 32.6% stated that it only included 'some of the things needed' and 3.9% felt that the IAG did not include anything they needed.

Nationality and English proficiency

The ease with which people of different nationalities obtained visas varied. For example, 35.5% of respondents from Asian countries rated the process as quite or very difficult, as did 34.2% of respondents from non-EU European countries. In comparison, 22.4% of respondents from Oceania countries such as New Zealand or Australia rated the process as quite or very difficult.

Respondents who spoke English as a second language were asked to indicate their level of fluency in English prior to their move to the UK. Those more fluent in English found the visa process easier than those less fluent in English; 70% of respondents who described their English language skills as 'beginner' before arrival into the UK stated they found the visa process quite/very difficult compared with just 1 in 4 of those who considered themselves fluent in English prior to moving to the UK.

Difficulty rating in obtaining the appropriate visa to work in the UK higher education sector, by self-reported level of English fluency before arrival in the UK



Contract type

Reported difficulty ratings of the visa process also appeared to differ by role and contract type with 35.2% of respondents on fixed-term contracts reporting the process as quite/very difficult, compared with 21.6% of those on open-ended or permanent contracts.

Role

Respondents in a non-professorial role found it more difficult than those in professorial roles, with 29.7% reporting the process to be quite/very difficult, compared with 16.9% of professors. This may be partly due to visa requirements; highly skilled roles and annual salaries are linked to visa types, and so it is likely that the more specialist and higher paid the role, the easier the visa process will be.

One respondent highlighted that:

'My university does not sponsor Tier 2 visas (religious worker) and thus obtaining a visa was nearly impossible as my stipend is not high enough to qualify for Tier 1 and I don't fit into any Tier 4 criteria.'

It is important to note here that the rules on sponsorship of visas are outside HEIs' control.

Postgraduate and postdoctoral applicants

It was apparent from the survey that younger staff found it more difficult to apply for a visa, with difficulty ratings decreasing as age increased: 37.7% of respondents aged 30 and under found the visa process quite or very difficult, compared with 17.5% of those over 50. This may be partly due to respondents under 30 having less work experience and holding more junior positions, but this is not confirmed by the results.

Additionally, 36.7% of respondents who had studied in the UK before working in the UK reported the visa process to be quite/very difficult, compared with only 19.5% of those who had not previously studied in the UK.

Changes to visa arrangement, including the discontinuation in April 2012 of the Tier 1 post-study work visa means that it is now more difficult for individuals who are coming to the end of their courses to apply for jobs without the guarantee of an employee sponsor.

One respondent commented that:

'I did not need a visa in the beginning because I was under a postgraduate studies visa, but now I assume it would be difficult due to the changes in immigration policy.'

Another respondent commented that:

'Many universities do not seem to want to sponsor work visas for early career academics'.

This suggests a perception that work visas present limitations to international early career academics.

Cost

A recurring comment about the visa process was the significant cost involved. Apart from the initial fee for the application, other costs highlighted by respondents were:

- legal costs where further advice is required
- cost of visas for dependants
- burden of providing evidence of personal savings as a requirement of the visa (ie having to have an often substantial amount of money in a bank account for a period of time)
- cost of renewing visa and/or applying for indefinite leave to remain
- cost for re-submitting where an administrative or human error has occurred (either by the HEI or by the individual applicant)

Where an individual is relocating from outside the UK for a position, these costs are in addition to the actual move (which is discussed further below).

One respondent commented that:

'The application process was cumbersome, but much more difficult is the fee, which was not reimbursed by my employer in spite of the fact that the visa was a requirement to remain working in my permanent position. Interactions with HR on this front were quite negative. I am now running up interest on a credit card with the leave to remain fee. Due to this negative experience with my employer, I am now considering adverts for other positions in the UK.'

Several respondents spoke of the particular cost and difficulty associated in getting indefinite leave to remain.

'There were no issues getting a five-year work visa [originally], however I had a number of hassles when I converted this to 'indefinite leave to remain' at the end of the five-year term. My employer refused to pay the costs of the conversion and would only cover the costs of another five-year renewal.'

Administrative burden and timing

In addition to the cost of applying for visas, respondents highlighted the administrative burden involved. It can take considerable time and effort to complete the visa application process, and the time involved increases significantly when applying for indefinite leave to remain which involves a test on life in the UK.

One respondent commented that:

'I had to figure out the process by myself and for my family (spouse and two children). I had expected that HR would provide some logistical support but they provided conflicting advice and I ended up having to sort things out myself.'

Another respondent highlighted the difficulties of relocating while waiting for the visa application process to be completed:

'The only difficulty I had was caused by the fact that the visa application process cannot begin until three months before the start date of the position… The process went smoothly and relatively quickly for me, in part because I paid for expedited processing, but I did not know until the end of June that I would actually be able to accept the position. It was stressful to have to prepare an international move in only two months.'

Working abroad for part of the year

Some respondents commented that they do not necessarily spend the whole year teaching in the UK; some lecturers teach for a term, or for a specific module and then teach another term in a different country. This can have visa implications and/or make it difficult to apply for indefinite leave to remain.

Inability to travel during application

Respondents commented on the length of time that the visa application can take, and that the UK Border Agency (UKBA) holds the applicant's passport for that time. This has implications for all applicants, especially if they are planning a holiday or need to visit family, but it is especially difficult for academics who may need to travel abroad for their job. While international staff are applying for visas/visa renewals they are unable to undertake overseas research or attend overseas conferences.

Visiting lecturers

One respondent highlighted that:

'We teach Middle Eastern languages but we can't get visas for anyone who is a native speaker not already with work rights in the UK'.

The relative ease of obtaining visas may limit an HEI's ability to invite visiting lecturers to their institution.

Policy implications

As highlighted above, HEIs are limited in how far they are able to support employees with the visa system. Institutions may want to consider the following areas.

IAG

The **University of Bristol** has dedicated international student and staff advisers who can advise on any welfare and immigration queries via email, telephone or face-to-face. Having these dedicated advisers ensures that staff know who to go to for advice before they arrive in the UK, as well as once they are in the country.

It is useful to provide staff with as much IAG as possible, even if this is directing them to the appropriate government documents and local contacts. While individual members of staff will not be able to provide legal advice or formal visa advice, they can at least provide staff with someone to go to who can assist with the process and where to start, even if they cannot comment on the particular case.

Often visa applications need to begin early so that they may be processed within the appropriate timeframes. Ensuring that staff are aware of this is important, as well as ensuring that applications that the institution is sponsoring are completed as early as possible.

Good IAG is also important for postgraduate students. Providing good IAG about visas and living and working in the UK to international postgraduate students will help them make well-informed choices about their careers.

Resources

The cost of visa and indefinite leave to remain applications came up consistently. HEIs could consider whether they can cover visa application costs or perhaps an interest-free loan to cover the costs to save international staff additional fees linked to credit cards and loans.

Institutions could consider flexible working (where they do not already) or special leave arrangements where people need to attend appointments linked to their visa. Even if this only equates to a small amount of time, the member of staff is likely to feel more supported.

Additionally, institutions could consider providing copies of the Life in the UK test materials in their library or within HR so that individuals are able to borrow them without having to buy them.

Another issue that institutions may want to consider is visas for partners and families. Again, HEIs have no control over the regulations, but may be able to provide good IAG, signpost people to the best place for further support and provide time off for visa-related appointments.

Existing staff

Changes to visa requirements also impact those already in post. HEIs may want to ensure that changes are communicated to staff and to highlight where they can go for more information, and who they can speak to if they are concerned. Being proactive in considering the ramifications of changes will make staff feel valued, even if the changes are outside the HEIs' control.

Finances, tax, pensions and benefits

Respondents identified this as a confusing and frustrating area. A number of respondents described a catch-22 situation where people need a pay cheque to pay for a deposit for accommodation, a bank account in order to be paid, and a permanent address to open the bank account.

Of those asked, the majority (51.6%) of respondents reported that their institution had not provided them with any IAG regarding finances and taxes prior to moving to the UK. 37.2% stated that they had received some, but could have done with more IAG on this topic. Only 11.1% felt they had received a lot of information on finances and taxes. Respondents who had not studied in the UK before working in the UK (or preferred not to say) and who immigrated to the UK for a specific higher education job offered prior to moving were asked a series of questions regarding the IAG they received before they arrived in the UK.

Opening a bank account and financial products

'Getting a UK bank account was nearly impossible. As a non-student this was very difficult. I went from bank to bank and got stuck on the ability to have UK-based confirmation of my previous address. The bank rules were from the stone age.'

Opening a bank account seemed to be one of the most frustrating hurdles for some international staff. The requirement for a permanent address in particular made it difficult to open an account.

'You are treated as a criminal when opening a UK bank account without a UK credit history.'

Many respondents commented on the difficulty they faced in getting credit and loans ranging from overdraft facilities and credit cards up to mortgages. Individuals with good credit ratings in their home countries were unable to buy their own home and fully settle in the UK.

'I had an awful time getting a mortgage though I had been a perfect financial citizen in [their home country] for 25 years.'

Another issue which affected international staff was the often extensive length of probationary periods in higher education. This is the same for UK staff and affects the ability to get a mortgage/credit.

Policy implications

Being unable to open a bank account impacts on access to pay. While cheques can be issued to people until direct bank transfers can be set up, they require a bank account to cash the cheque.

'I was paid cheques and could not deposit them anywhere, so had quite a bit of an economic problem in the first two months.'

Having good IAG on opening a bank account will allow people to plan as much as possible in advance and arrange contingencies in case they are unable to open a bank account immediately. HEIs may also want to consider what alternative payment methods they are able to offer if an employee does not yet have a bank account.

Alerting people to international banks and bank accounts

Some larger, international banks allow potential customers to apply for their account in advance of moving and in some instances they may have a branch in the applicant's home country.

This is an example with HSBC.
www.hsbc.co.uk/1/2/overseas-account-opening

In addition to the logistical help such accounts provide, they also allow people to transfer their credit history, which would be of benefit to people wanting a mortgage.

Some banks offer international accounts specifically for people who have recently arrived in the UK which may be of use. For example, for a monthly fee HSBC offers a passport account which does not require a permanent address to open.
www.hsbc.co.uk/1/2/current-accounts/uk-bank-account

Letter confirming employment

One survey respondent mentioned that they went to a bank to open an account, only to be told they needed a letter of introduction from their employer. They had to go back to their institution to get the letter and then return to the bank. Proactively offering a confirmation letter as standard when staff have recently moved to the UK, may help them acquire a bank account more quickly and easily.

One bank informed us that:

Letters of introduction/address confirmation letters can only be accepted where the customer is unable to provide any other document that can verify their address. A letter of introduction must be used in conjunction with a passport (and visa if required) or an EU ID card. The letters must:

- be on headed paper
- be addressed to the bank
- contain the customer's name
- contain the customer's residential address

It would also be helpful to specify their employment start date and salary.

National insurance and tax codes

Some respondents commented on not being aware of what national insurance numbers are and were not always sure exactly how to go about getting one.

'HR should provide information on how to obtain national insurance number.'

Respondents often knew very little about the tax system, which tax code they should be on and how much tax they should be paying.

'I didn't (and still don't) really understand the tax system in this country. I can't work out what my tax code should be. I find it all very strange.'

Policy implications

While institutions are not responsible for issuing a national insurance number, and are not qualified (and should not be expected to provide) bespoke tax advice to each employee, institutions may want to consider the IAG they provide. The International Staff website has information on how to do this, and staff can look directly at the HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) website. **www.hmrc.gov.uk/ni/intro/number.htm**

Providing basic information on tax codes and national insurance would be of benefit to new international staff. HEIs may also want to provide information on P45 and P60 forms. The HMRC website is useful, but having someone to speak to within the institution may also be reassuring.

Pensions and institutional benefits

Pensions and other internal benefits were highlighted by some respondents as there was often an element of assumed knowledge. Some benefits that many people see as standard, may not be standard in other countries. For example, season ticket loans, annual leave provision, public holiday dates, hours to work and pension entitlement may all vary. Furthermore, certain benefits like pensions become complicated for people who may not be planning to retire in the UK.

For example, one respondent found it frustrating that they were unable to claim back their pension contributions when they moved, and another commented:

'I was quite confused about the pension system, but I didn't know who to ask about it. I was sent papers in the mail from my institution which stated if I didn't sign them straight away there was no guarantee I could join the pension scheme later. Workplace pensions are extremely rare where I come from so I would have liked to discuss how they work with someone.'

Policy implications

HEIs will not be able to provide specific advice on pension schemes that covers all eventualities for all staff. It will be helpful to provide IAG on:

- the need to consider the impact of moving away from the UK on their pensions and advising them to seek formal advice
- the need to take responsibility for considering how their personal circumstances will impact on their pensions

It is important that people are aware of the different benefits available and understand how to apply for them. Having internal policies accessible in a central place may be useful, and institutions may want to impact assess their policies to consider how they affect different members of staff.

Accommodation

Accommodation posed significant problems for some respondents, particularly those who were moving to the UK close to the start date of a specific job.

'For my previous job, I had moved to [a country other than the UK] from [their home country] and I got short-term accommodation from the university. This had two advantages: first it meant I didn't have to worry about finding an accommodation before moving, secondly, it allowed me to know the area better before finding my own accommodation.'

This is a theme that resonates throughout the responses. Having accommodation on arrival was, understandably, a major concern for people.

In addition to the initial stress and expense of having somewhere to stay on arrival, knowing the accommodation provided easy access to their new job was important, as well as having time to look for more permanent accommodation. One respondent commented:

'I arrived here with a young family just before the New Year, had to stay some two hours away from the city I work in, commute everyday to work and also to look for suitable accommodation.'

Longer term accommodation posed further complications for respondents. Knowing which areas to live in, having the money for a deposit, understanding how letting agents and landlords operated and getting a credit check (potentially without a bank account having yet been set up, or without having yet been paid into it) all added to the stress of settling in and starting a new job.

Policy implications

Short-term university accommodation

It can be expensive to pay for a hotel while looking for long-term accommodation. Where possible, institutions should consider offering university accommodation to international staff when they first arrive, or help them find temporary accommodation, until they have the opportunity to find something more long-term in an area that suits them. This helps provide security in terms of the legitimacy of landlords/letting agents.

The **University of Nottingham** provides an airport collection service for their international staff who are arriving in the UK for a job at the university. Such a service can help to reduce the anxiety of arriving in a new country, and make the individual feel welcomed by the institution.

Long-term accommodation

Long-term accommodation can be complicated, even when people are aware of the options available. As well as being in an unfamiliar place, it can be expensive arranging a deposit and the first month's rent.

Institutions could alert individuals to the cost of accommodation before they arrive so they can prepare financially, for example, by ensuring individuals are aware of the average deposit, rent and fees required for local accommodation.

Most institutions will have a lot of relevant information already compiled for the international students which they can also provide to staff. For example, information on:

- council tax
- the different areas in which they could live
- the different types of accommodation that exist and how to view and rent them
- any known scams
- advice on what to check and what to ask any letting agents and landlords (eg gas safety certificates)

The information may need to be tailored for international staff as they may have different priorities and needs, for example, they may be more likely to have a family relocating with them.

Good local guidance will also be beneficial to other staff who may be new to the area.

The **University of Bristol** has a dedicated staff accommodation officer handling many international queries. Having a specific person whose job it is to advise on accommodation allows international staff to access accurate, comprehensive advice without worrying about being a burden, or asking too many questions.

Staff with families

Some respondents with children commented on the lack of information about childcare and the difficulty in knowing how the school system operated.

'Information and guidance about accommodation, health and welfare, children's schooling and which areas to settle down and send children to school in would have been very useful.'

Of those respondents asked about IAG before and on arrival, 78.5% received none on childcare and schooling before arrival and 78.3% received none on arrival. Even of those who had received IAG on childcare and schooling, only 37.3% stated that the IAG received before arrival contained most or everything that they needed, as did 39.7% in regards to the IAG received after arrival.

Additionally support for partners was mentioned by some respondents as they may need to look for employment and settle into a new environment. Being able to socialise with their partner through work-related social activities was also mentioned (see p46, social interactions).

Policy implications

Individuals need to take responsibility for themselves and their families, but institutions should consider what help they can provide. Institutions should consider what IAG is available and signpost staff to that before and after they arrive. Individuals would be able to make some contact with local authorities and schools in advance of their arrival to at least ensure they have some knowledge about available provisions, if not to actually enquire about school and nursery places.

Schools and nurseries

Schools and nursery places are often allocated based on proximity to accommodation, and HEIs should alert staff to that when they are advising them on areas in which to live. If institutions provide childcare facilities, including information about that would also be helpful (if not already included in any induction materials).

Employment

Being unemployed can be a stressful situation for anyone, and for people living in a new country it may be even more difficult. Institutions could consider signposting partners of international staff to:

- local employment agencies and careers services
- the institution's own careers service
- websites and mailing lists for job opportunities within the institution

Healthcare

55.4% of relevant survey respondents did not receive any IAG on healthcare before they arrived in the UK and 56.8% received none on arrival. Of those who did receive IAG on healthcare before arrival, only 35.7% indicated it contained most or everything needed. Similarly, of those who received healthcare IAG on arrival, only 39.7% thought it contained most or everything needed.

'[it would have been helpful to have] some basic information on health service (eg what is covered, how to find a GP, what it means by selecting a GP, when you have to go to see GP/when to go to the hospital)'.

Respondents often commented on the difficulties they had in navigating the healthcare system. Many did not know how to find and register with a doctor, or the difference between a GP and emergency services. Dental advice was the same, with respondents unsure of how to find a dentist and how the system worked.

Additionally, one respondent highlighted that it would be good to have:

'Information about what to do when sick (in [country of origin] you are expected to bring a doctor's certificate after two days), I am still not sure of what is required here… Information about how much time I can take out of my day to go to the doctor or dentist, or whether I need to take leave for these.'

Policy implications

Healthcare information is available from many sources, including the NHS website, but institutions may want to signpost new staff to it so that they have the basics readily available and know where to go for more information.

Where institutions have a GP practice on campus, alert new staff to this so they are able to register there. Ensuring staff are aware of internal policies on sickness absence and time off for medical appointments may be useful.

Other considerations

Driving licence, road tax and MOTs

Some survey respondents commented on the need to change their driving licence, and with that came questions about driving tests, hiring and buying cars, where to buy second-hand cars, potential car scams, road tax and MOTs.

Insurance

At the end of the survey respondents were asked to list any resources they found particularly useful as an international member of staff and several recommended insurance websites. New staff will potentially need contents insurance, car insurance and travel insurance.

Policy implications

Institutions may want to include IAG on these areas within any website pages or induction pack that they develop. Resources such as this one to determine if you are eligible to drive in the UK may be useful.
www.gov.uk/driving-in-great-britain-on-non-gb-licence

Local area

Over half of the respondents asked about IAG received no information about the local area before or after they moved to the UK. There are aspects of moving that are localised and cannot be found through national bodies and organisations. While it would be impossible for an institution to cover everything that a person would need, there are some basics that are valuable.

- Safety: all HEIs will have knowledge of their local area, for example areas that have a higher reported number of crimes. It is useful to share information of personal safety with staff.
- Shopping: it can be useful to have information on the main supermarkets and department stores. If people are staying in the centre of a city or town before finding long-term accommodation they may not know where they can find bigger, better value supermarkets and shops.
- Transport: many institutions provide travel information for new students. Providing this to new international staff will be useful. Information about local bus and train services and whether you can pay on board or whether you need tickets in advance may also be helpful. It is also useful to provide numbers for reputable taxi firms, with estimates for how much average journeys cost.

- Sport and leisure: institutions will not be able to provide exhaustive details of local leisure activities, but it may be useful to signpost staff to local sports centres and clubs, in addition to institutional sports facilities, along with local authority-run adult education classes, libraries and parks.
- Places of worship and religious organisations: again, institutions are likely to have already compiled this information for new students, but information about the various places of worship, including the institutional chaplaincy, may also be useful.

Support upon arrival at an HEI

It was clear from respondents that they wanted some IAG and support about moving, working and living in the UK but there were differing views on how they wanted these provided. This section outlines ways of providing information and support to staff which HEIs might want to consider. Where inductions and induction packs are mentioned, the content could cover those areas and issues outlined in the four main sections of this report.

All institutions are different and characteristics such as size, location and specialism will impact on the culture and how the institution operates; institutions are encouraged to involve their staff (both international and UK) in anything that is developed to ensure it is as helpful and targeted as possible.

Inductions and induction packs

Respondents commented that IAG and any induction pack needs to be received as early as possible. Individuals will want to start planning for their move and having the information only when they arrive may be too late.

'The information pack I received contained quite useful information. It would have helped me if I had received it earlier.'

The comprehensiveness of any induction pack can be difficult to gauge. Respondents felt that they wanted it to cover key areas, but without being overloaded with information.

A suggestion from several respondents was for a named contact to be provided to go to with questions. Rather than this being a general HR contact, it would be useful for the person to be a dedicated international staff adviser who could answer specific questions and ensure people have the information they need (in the same way that many institutions have an international office specifically for international students).

Of those who had received an induction, 15.0% of respondents felt the content was very relevant as an international staff member; a further 31.6% felt it to be somewhat relevant. However, a significant minority of respondents reported their induction to be less relevant, with 17.4% stating it was somewhat irrelevant and 14.2% feeling it was completely irrelevant. The remaining 21.8% of respondents indicated a neutral opinion on their induction process.

There were mixed views about inductions. While some wanted a bespoke induction for international staff, others did not want to be singled out and felt that it would be patronising to have a specific induction. At the same time a lot of respondents commented on not having had any information or support at all.

'There was no induction. I arrived, was shown my office and that was that. Anything would have helped at the start. I began to meet colleagues but the institution did nothing to help.'

Policy implications

At the point of job offer, send those who are overseas an induction pack, or direct them to any bespoke information on institutional websites. Offer the pack to those already in the UK.

It can be difficult to achieve the right balance in an induction pack without being overwhelming. In developing a pack, provide targeted information along with links to other resources that include a mix of national and local information. A dedicated section of the institution's website for international staff may be useful.

Institutions may want to consider having an international staff support contact (this will depend on the size and structure of an institution).

Formal inductions

As the responses show, not all staff will want the same level of support. Making staff aware of the available support will enable them to decide whether or not to access it.

Institutions may want to consult with their current staff when deciding how to operate their induction programme. It may be useful to have one induction for all new staff covering institution-specific issues and having optional extras for international staff covering some of the areas covered above.

Timing

Some respondents commented that their induction did not happen until they had already been in their job for several months, rendering it almost irrelevant. However, at the same time it can be difficult to run inductions for very small groups where there is a need for minimum numbers.

The **University of Nottingham** wanted to introduce a specific induction for international staff and tried a number of approaches, making adjustments after each event to improve the format or the timing.

Starting in 2011 they ran an annual international induction session in October for staff and postgraduate students and found this worked well.

Getting inductions right may take time and require adjustment based on feedback from staff and monitoring of take up. Where possible consider having one-to-one or small group sessions to allow staff to access them at a convenient time.

Academic-specific inductions

Many respondents considered that it would be useful to have an academic-specific induction to cover issues such as student and staff expectations and the UK education system (see p70).

Ongoing support

Many respondents commented on how helpful individual members of their team had been and how welcome they had been made to feel. Such support was considered invaluable and had made a big difference to their experiences. However, many respondents would value further support.

Talking to another international staff member

'The only thing that really would have helped is talking to another international member of staff working at a UK university. Even getting info from UK natives working at a UK university is of limited help, since they cannot assume the outside perspective.'

Many respondents felt that having another international staff member to talk to would have been the most helpful thing when they started at their institution. No matter how comprehensive an induction pack is, it can never cover everything, and nor should it attempt to. Different people will have different questions, experiences and barriers; having someone who has been through it themselves enables them to ask 'stupid questions' that they may feel uncomfortable asking a UK member of staff.

Policy implications

Institutions may want to think about how they can facilitate communication between international staff for support purposes.

Informal feedback at the **University of Leeds** suggested that there was a lack of meeting places for international staff to come together to share experiences and for mutual support. They also found that they had many UK staff who had either lived abroad or had close contacts with people overseas and wanted more opportunities to meet with international staff at the university.

Building on the format of a successful international students club, an informal discussion group was set up. After consultation, this group was called the 'international staff and friends coffee hour' which seemed suitably informal and welcoming for all staff. It initially met every other month, but

evolved to meeting monthly at lunchtimes at the chaplaincy, with refreshments provided. The chaplaincy administrator designs posters to advertise the meetings and the chaplaincy provides the refreshments. In total the meetings cost around £5–10 per month.

Following a suggestion from a member of the group, presentations to the rest of the group are now welcome at the meetings to open up discussion. Recent topics of discussion include: work and rest balance, international folksong and new year resolutions. Other presentations have covered individual's cultures and research such as the Netherlands and Chinese female student experiences in the UK.

Sometimes, there have been a small number of participants, but this enables very deep and open discussions about life experiences.

Attendees also have the chance to practise their spoken English and to interact with native English speakers. This increases vocabulary and builds confidence speaking in an informal and supportive setting.

The meetings have been running for four years and have had positive feedback. It took about two years to establish the meetings. The meetings are also a useful way of promoting events that international staff may find beneficial.

Those attending get to meet staff from other departments, so widening their personal network. Feedback also indicates that it is reassuring to discuss problems that other international staff encounter and how these have been overcome. The meetings now welcome international PhD students as they did not have their own community.

In 2010, the **University of Manchester** conducted focus groups, the results of which suggested that more support was required for international staff. The institution decided to set up an international staff network group to explore the topic in more detail with a wider group. They established an action plan, aiming to meet with initial interested parties and work with HR and other relevant departments to set out the role and aims of the group within six months, before launching it fully and advertising the group to increase the membership within a year.

The university launched the group by organising a whole day of free related events to spark interest, including a film screening, a walking tour of Manchester and its international links and influences, language taster courses, and a cultural awareness session. After the launch day the international staff network group was established, advertised to all staff at the university and a confidential mailing list was set up.

The university estimates that the planning and execution of events constituted around 30 hours of staff time in total and the events had a budget of £500.

Buddy system

'Though my English was not bad, I did not know simple words like stapler, staples, what's a folder and what's a file etc… It's also good to have someone friendly in the team who explains "coffee-time customs".'

Many respondents suggested that a buddy or a mentor would be useful, but there seemed to be different requirements of them. The survey responses suggested that a buddy could act as someone to talk about practical 'life in the UK' issues, who can help with the areas highlighted above. A mentor could provide someone with whom to talk through work-related issues, who understands academia and can advise on career development and progression (see p76).

Some respondents felt that buddies should also be international members of staff as they may be more likely to empathise and offer more assistance and advice having gone through it themselves. A buddy would be able to answer day-to-day practical questions about where to buy lunch, how the coffee room works and nuanced things that would not be in an induction pack. This may include questions about 'Britishness' which some people may find uncomfortable asking a British person.

Policy implications

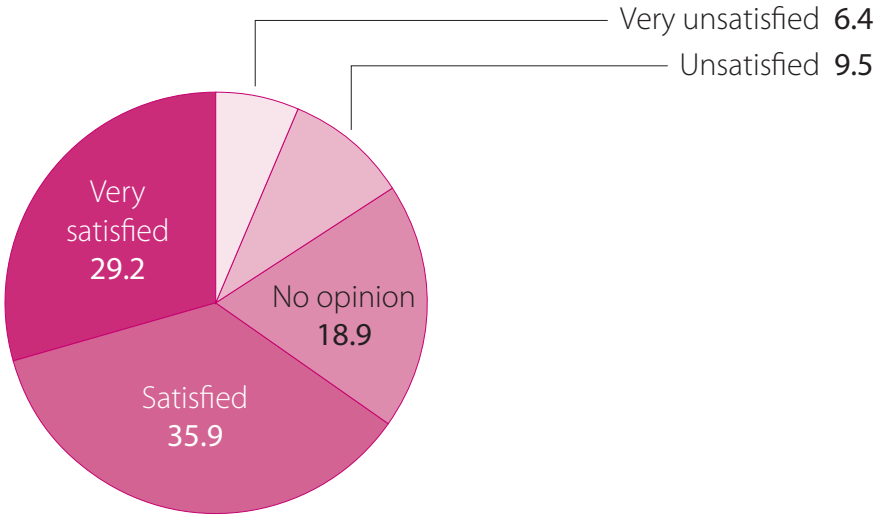
Ultimately institutions will be constrained to an extent by the staff they have and their willingness to volunteer as a buddy to a new member of staff. If it is only possible to link people with UK staff then it is important that the person is keen to take on the role and can empathise with some of the issues that international staff face. Providing buddies with an induction or directing them to the induction pack/IAG for international staff may help.

The **University of Bristol** has an international staff support system. Incoming and current staff can ask to be put in touch with a member of staff of the same nationality who has volunteered their email address.

Line managers and HR

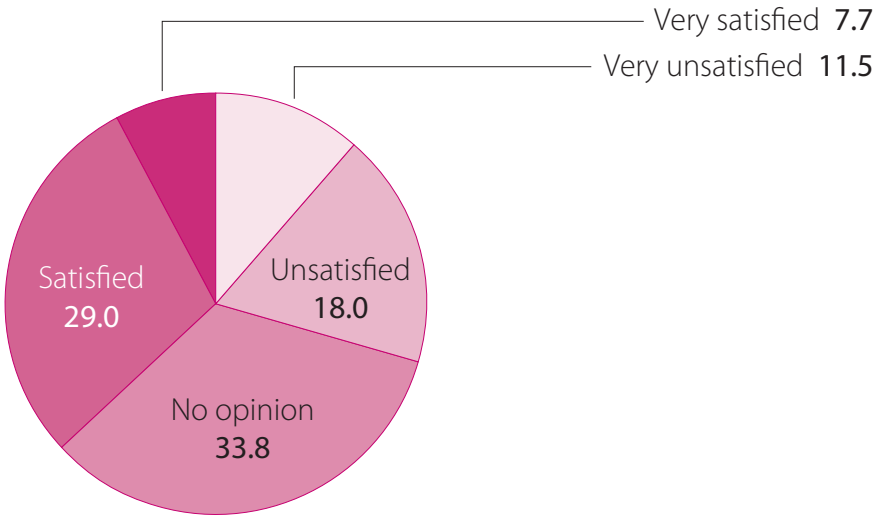
Around two thirds of respondents positively rated their line manager's support in helping them to settle into their new role, with 65.1% stating they were satisfied or very satisfied. The remaining third either had no opinion about their line manager (18.9%) or reported being unsatisfied or very unsatisfied (15.9%).

How satisfied were you with your line manager in supporting you to settle into your new job? (1383)



36.7% of respondents reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the institution's HR in supporting them to settle into their new role. 29.5% stated they were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied and the remaining 33.8% indicated they had no opinion.

How satisfied were you with the HR team at your institution in supporting you to settle into your new job? (1387)



'My previous line managers have not looked into the requirements for career progression, advised me on anything or supported me in any respect. Whatever little in-house training I have done has purely been on my own incentive.'

Some respondents highlighted several issues with their line manager, such as having very rare interactions or even not being informed as to who their line manager was. One respondent, for example, described how their line manager had been on long-term sick leave when they arrived and no one was covering that responsibility. Another stated that they were physically 'blocked at the door' by their line manager's secretary whenever they tried to see them.

One respondent highlighted:

'I didn't receive any local induction and institutional induction only took place 6 months after I started in post, because I heard on the grapevine myself that this was available to new staff… Basically my line manager just left me to get on with things after I arrived and this has continued until the present (four years on). I didn't even have a meeting with him for nearly two weeks after my arrival… Academic managers (professors, centre directors, etc) need compulsory training in how to induct and manage staff, and I would suggest these processes need to be formally instituted across the university to prevent situations like my own.'

While this is a general management issue, the impact on international staff who have recently moved to the UK may be more acute.

'I think academic supervisors (ie principal investigators) should be given the opportunity (or made to) to gain managerial skills. I find that your manager might be a brilliant academic, but hasn't got a clue about performance management and getting the best out of you (helping you develop).'

Policy implications

Good line management will benefit all staff. Having a line manager who takes an interest and wants to help an individual settle into their role and develop in their career can make a significant difference.

HR teams are only able to support staff to an extent, and may want to consider how to improve management skills across the institution.

Perceptions and good relations

The survey explored issues international staff face once living and working in the UK. Interactions with colleagues and managers are key to a healthy work life, and having a good social network and opportunities are important for wellbeing.

International staff bring diversity and this needs to be well managed to promote good relations, which HEIs have a statutory duty to promote. Addressing issues such as perception of unfair treatment will help improve working relations.

'The most important thing for a foreigner is being treated with respect and a bit of patience.'

The majority of this section highlights areas where respondents have not always been accorded adequate respect and patience.

Language

Many of the issues raised are consequences people face of living and working in a country whose language is not their native tongue and/or has developed in a different cultural context. However there are many areas where UK staff and managers could be more empathetic and understanding of language differences and acknowledge the skill and confidence it takes to live and work in a second language.

English was an additional language for over two thirds of our survey respondents (68.4%). 30.9% reported it as their first language and the remaining 0.6% preferred not to say. Of those who reported English to be an additional language, 56.6% considered themselves to be fluent prior to moving to the UK. 30.3% rated their English skills as good, 10.6% as basic, and 2.6% as beginner level.

22.4% (178 out of 617) of English as an additional language respondents reported having encountered language barriers that impacted their work and/or social life in the UK. Interestingly, 9.0% (33 out of 334) of respondents who stated that English was their first language reported the same.

As well as the language skills of the individual, respondents highlighted examples of where colleagues had discriminated against them because of English being an additional language:

'I feel there is a communication conflict. Sometimes, it feels degrading how an individual can be treated in this society. I have colleagues who don't want me to do the work because my English wasn't good enough and I have colleagues making fun of my accent/grammar.'

Policy implications

Institutions could consider offering language classes to new staff and their families. If an institution has a language department, or a relationship with an external language school then it may be possible to provide these free of charge, or at a subsidised rate.

The **University of Nottingham** proactively offers English language classes for accompanying partners. In addition to helping them communicate, they may also meet other people in the classes, helping them to feel less alienated and providing people with whom to network.

Dialects, accents, colloquialisms and cultural references

An interesting finding from the survey was that language differences were cited as an issue by respondents whose first language was English.

'Even though I am a native English speaker (American English), I encounter many local phrases and references scattered throughout local speech (and even accents that I struggle with) that affect my social interactions.'

This is also an issue for people whose first language is not English.

'Local slang and expressions are not learnt when you study a language formally. Understanding these is difficult and using them will probably never happen. Accents are also difficult to grasp. Oral communication creates more challenges than written.'

Many of the language barriers cited tended to occur in less formal situations, often outside of work where informal language is more likely to be used.

'I have no problem in oral communication using academic/general English, but need to learn more about colloquial English and dialects.'

Work situations outside of the institution may also be more likely to create issues for international staff. One respondent highlighted that:

'Misunderstanding the Glaswegian accent has been difficult as my work involves liaising with industry in Scotland. I have not had a problem being understood.'

Cultural references can also create challenges.

'My professional/work life is not affected at all. These [issues] occur in more personal levels with local families who speak quickly about things I am not familiar with – football, TV stars etc… These cultural barriers make me look like I am not fully in command of my English language, even if it is more that I do not know the people mentioned, the happenings mentioned, etc.'

Language phrasing

Some respondents gave examples where they have phrased their English in a similar way to how they would speak in their native tongue, and it has been too abrupt and seen as rude or inappropriate to people in the UK.

'The language barriers go hand in hand with the cultural barriers as sometimes you tend to translate literally from your native language and it doesn't work. Spanish is quite a direct language and if you walk into a coffee shop you can say "I want a coffee" and this is considered completely normal/not rude. In the UK words like "please", "may I", "do you mind", etc, are a must. Not understanding this when you arrive it does get people's backs up sometimes.'

This can happen in work situations and potentially be misinterpreted.

'As English is not my native language, I have not yet acquired a more "English" way to express myself and without my realising it, the tone of my emails could come across as aggressive to my fellow colleagues, causing some stir.'

Such misunderstandings would be unfortunate, especially where a new member of staff is trying to build relationships with their colleagues and establish themselves within the team.

Academic language and academic situations

While a lot of respondents felt that work-related language was easier than informal language, there are still potentially some barriers for international staff. It may take longer (at least initially) for international staff to work in a non-native language, as reading and writing will possibly take more thought and care.

'Despite a great degree of fluency, I still find writing in English a struggle… This makes the writing aspect of my work (writing dissertations and articles for publication) more arduous than it already is. And in the long term, it might make certain career paths inaccessible (for instance I can't imagine myself being capable of writing an academic book).'

Policy implications

International staff need to take responsibility for their English language skills, and there was no suggestion from respondents that this should not be the case, but it was highlighted as a potential barrier. Institutions might want to think about assistance they could provide, at least in the short term. For example, where staff require support, could some of their work be written in their native tongue and translated, or could a proofreader be provided? If the institution is unable to cover the full costs of this, perhaps it could be offered at a subsidised rate.

Presentations and lectures

Issues highlighted by respondents in relation to presentations and lectures were somewhat polarised.

Some respondents commented on it seeming quite daunting at times to deliver lectures and presentations in a second language. They knew their English skills were good but there was added pressure in these situations and often you have to react quickly to questions which could sometimes lead to them feeling flustered.

'My English was already decent, but a course for an advanced level to become proficient and more confident, especially to speak in public, would have been useful.'

On the other hand, some respondents felt they were held back from being chosen to deliver presentations because English was not their first language, which hindered their career development.

'I believe that, due to the fact that I am a non-native speaker, I am not always given the opportunity to make presentation about the university to high profile outside parties.'

Policy implications

It may be useful to offer presentation training to staff if they want it. The training need not be about developing language skills, but about improving a person's confidence in presenting and lecturing in an additional language.

Additionally, institutions might consider how they can encourage managers to delegate work and development opportunities fairly and without bias so that all staff have access to opportunities, and assumptions are not made about abilities or the areas of work and tasks international staff may prefer.

Social interactions

Social situations can pose more of a challenge for some international staff than formal situations, where the language used may be more colloquial with more cultural references.

'Although I regard myself to be fluent in English, I found that (initially) I was not able to make quick-witted responses/jokes as easily as in my first language, which would have made me appear reserved or shy in social situations.'

Additionally, social situations may be louder, with people speaking over each other. If that is then coupled with international staff potentially feeling more introverted and less confident in social situations, then it may be difficult for them to feel like they fit in.

'[Language barriers have occurred] only in social settings, not relevant for work: colloquialisms, humour, noisy party settings, pragmatics (indirect messages and misunderstandings due to politeness).'

'I was initially more introvert and less sociable due to not being able to understand or make myself understood as easily.'

Empathetic native speakers

Many respondents referred to British people lacking empathy for what international staff go through in relocating and living and working in a different country, and often having to learn a new language to do so. This extended to a lack of patience for people speaking English as an additional language.

'Often, UK people resent your accent or inaccuracies speaking their language without realising that you are multilingual!'

Another respondent said:

'UK people are not very patient to wait for a foreigner to complete what they are trying to say.'

Another respondent suggested that British people have less understanding of speaking an additional language and less experience of being in such situations.

'Although I know English fairly well, there are situations that I might use a word or phrase that has a slightly different meaning and I think I'm misunderstood quite many times or thought to be rude. I think one of the problem is that English people VERY rarely have to be able to work and socialise with another language, so they don't seem to realise that if a person speaks fairly fluent English BUT with an accent (which I'm absolutely sure that an English person will hear!) this person comes from a different background and culture and CAN use WRONG words or phrases by mistake. I think every Englishman should go and live abroad (even in USA) and they would realise how "difficult" it sometimes is to be a foreigner even if one can speak the language.'

Policy implications

This is a difficult area which relates to wider societal issues. HEIs are limited to some extent in what they can do, but perhaps this presents opportunities for considering behavioural and cultural change within institutions. One respondent suggested:

'I speak English perfectly. But have often encountered people speaking v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y to me.'

There may be a fine line between being empathetic and being seen as patronising.

Institutions might want to consider providing cultural awareness training for managers and team leaders so they are more aware of situations where this could impact on international staff.

Additionally, encouraging interaction between different staff groups may help with this, as may UK staff gaining experience overseas.

Communication styles

Direct communication

'There are times when situations are best handled by directness, and while the English often find directness uncomfortable, it typically comes naturally to Australians, allowing me to handle some issues more effectively than others.'

Frankness and openness were seen as often lacking in English communication in the UK, and many respondents found this frustrating. Respondents found that communication was often coded and they were unsure what was actually being said.

'I am fluent in English… But the English spoken in the UK though it is using the same words has a completely different meaning (and sometimes a sentence can have double or triple meanings… The customs in England to say no or criticize something or take decisions are very indirect to the point that I most of the time for the first two years did not understand them. I had even occasions where I had to print out emails from British colleagues and ask other UK colleagues to "translate" the email since I did not understand what this person tried to tell me in this email. I understood all the words but the way things were said did not translate.'

Another respondent comments that:

'Brits do not say what they mean, and conversely, they assume I am not saying what I mean. Brits speak very verbosely. At the end of 15 minutes I do not know whether the answer is yes or no.'

This can happen in meeting situations as well as in one-to-one interactions.

'I literally sat in meetings where apparently "decisions" were taken right in front of me but I did not realise it at all since they were stated in a very indirect way'.

In meetings, chairs should ensure that people are given the chance to speak and communicate their opinion. It is good practice to summarise decisions and who is responsible for actions at the end of a meeting. This practice would benefit all staff. There may be as many UK staff who feel talked over in meetings and/or leave meetings unsure about what has been agreed.

Feedback

Directness in communication also affected feedback and honesty in discussions.

'My culture is very straightforward. You say what you think in people's faces and don't go via many polite detours. International academic staff seem generally more open about constructive criticism than British academics who are trying to always please everyone but never say what they think.'

Potentially this is an area of friction. International staff may get frustrated with what they perceive to be a lack of feedback and honesty, while UK staff may interpret honest feedback as unduly harsh and critical.

'I speak my mind and do not necessarily think that disagreement or confrontation is something that has to be negative. Too many times problems arise or are not resolved because people tip-toe around pointing the obvious, especially to persons of a higher position, or just don't want to talk to each other. I favour a more direct approach of pin-pointing the problem and getting to the person that can fix it.'

One respondent highlighted the need for two-way learning in communication styles:

'Living in a different country surrounded by a different culture is always challenging. It is easier the more flexible and understanding you are. This is not to say I had to be the only person who adapts to the culture. The adaptation works both ways. I learn from people I meet and they learn from me. I come from a very direct culture and am very direct in my communication style. I found it difficult to learn the "banter" before I get down to business when communication with colleagues, giving constructive feedback without it sounding like harsh criticism, etc… But [I] learned to appreciate the openness and encouragement of creativity and independent thinking in the UK higher education sector.'

Class and hierarchy

Some survey respondents commented on class in the UK and felt it impacted on the way people communicate and interact with one another.

'The class system is a constant irritant with everyone being judged by their perceived social status and not on their performance and behaviour.'

Respondents perceived social class as creating a hierarchy within higher education which prevents people communicating freely with each other.

'This is a very difficult phenomenon to describe, but I'm sure many of my compatriots (and, indeed, I have compared experiences with colleagues from other traditionally outgoing and/or communicative cultures – eg Mediterraneans, Russians) would have felt a chilly sense of exclusion which can be traced to… Pre-established, semi-exclusive social networks… obviously… [these social networks are]… permeable even at the highest levels, but it does tend to promote an internal recognition system that disadvantages outsiders.'

Another respondent commented about the hierarchy:

'North Americans in general (I know I'm stereotyping here) tend to be more forward and less worried about perceived hierarchy. This has helped me as I will ask questions if needed to the person I need information from instead of being worried about "not being allowed" to approach certain people.'

Hierarchy and levels of perceived importance relate to job role, as well as social class. One respondent commented:

'I feel that once people hear that I'm an administrator, they simply switch off. For example, I was at a black and minority ethnic talk to do with gender, race and inequality. I tried to engage in conversation with the speaker after the talk; three of us were chatting together, however the speaker (ironically!) only directed the conversation to the other male, who had a much "bigger" job than mine. It was insulting and demeaning and meaningless to have such a speaker at [the university].'

Many respondents felt that one of the benefits of being an international staff member was that they were not part of the class hierarchy.

'Being a New Zealander in the UK means you kind of get a pass on the tedious obsession with class, which means people from all sorts of backgrounds can approach you as an equal.'

Policy implications

This is a difficult area to address, but useful considering in terms of international communication more generally. As well as impacting on international staff in the UK, it may impact on UK staff when working abroad. Some institutions also have overseas campuses, and so communication between staff at the overseas campus and staff in the UK is important.

As above, institutions may wish to provide managers with cultural awareness training to consider how they interact with and perceive people with different communication styles.

UK perception of international staff

Being treated the same as UK colleagues

Survey respondents were asked whether they felt they were treated equally to their UK colleagues. While 83.2% reported that they did, 16.8% felt that they were not. Respondents often emphasised that such behaviour was confined to certain colleagues and/or part of wider inequality within the institutional culture, but that these interactions nevertheless were difficult experiences.

'There are some colleagues who are very friendly and supportive and appreciate the contribution of international staff while there are also a good number of other colleagues who fail to appreciate a different perspective, who dislike other cultures and treat international staff/their culture as second class. These colleagues would welcome you to conform to the UK culture but do not welcome a different culture. You can be implicitly bullied by their attitude and behaviours.'

Commonly reported examples of unequal treatment included being:

- the subject of negative comments related to international status
- assigned greater workloads than UK colleagues
- given fewer responsibilities/duties than UK colleagues with the same or less experience, particularly in relation to research and teaching opportunities
- placed on a lower salary range than UK colleagues of equivalent level
- under greater scrutiny for work performance, actions and travel movements
- given less support in relation to pursuing and/or being allocated research opportunities and funding
- receiving less recognition of previous educational and professional experience
- excluded from the decision-making process or discussions
- provided with inferior office space compared with UK colleagues of equivalent level and/or segregated from UK colleagues
- offered fewer opportunities for promotion or career progression
- having experiences of discrimination or prejudice dismissed by line manager

Examples of unequal treatment provided by respondents ranged from overt discriminatory remarks to more subtle, less tangible behaviours and actions.

'There is a low level of discrimination. My feeling is that the dominant culture has been so indoctrinated in not being racist that their discrimination or hesitance or discomfort in being with someone from a different country or of a different ethnic background is not fully self-realised. I have only had a few people say to me that they "hate Americans". But I have had many people in lots of contexts seem standoffish, seemingly for no other discernible reason than difference in race/nationality.'

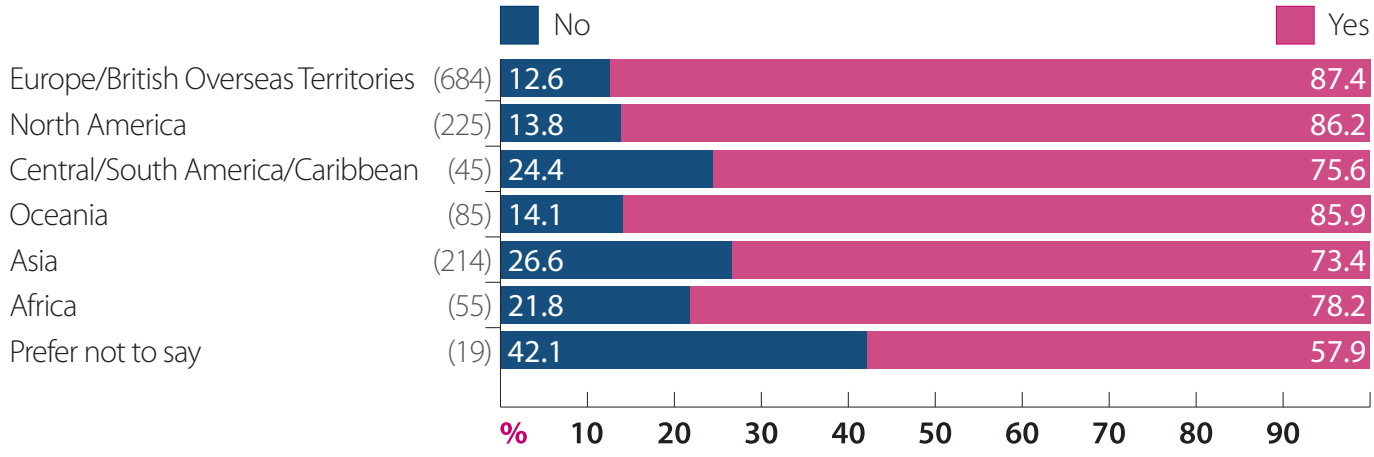
Some respondents highlighted how such behaviours culminated:

'British colleagues receive better support in terms of more conferences to attend, more collaborations and their names are often included on papers for which they do not contribute… In general, British colleagues are given inflated status in our workplace. I endure regular anti-American comments at work and am ridiculed for the manner in which I speak.'

There was a clear link between perceptions of treatment and respondents' countries of origin. Those from Europe and British Overseas Territories, North America, and Oceania were most likely to state that they had been treated equally to their UK colleagues, with only 12–14% indicating they had not. In comparison, 24.4% of respondents from Central/South America and the Caribbean Islands, 26.6% from Asia, and 21.8% from Africa reported feeling that they were treated unequally to their UK colleagues.

If country of origin is used as a crude proxy for ethnicity it appears that there is a connection between perceived treatment and race.

Do you feel that you are treated equally to your UK colleagues?



Many respondents expressed their belief that their unequal treatment was driven by conscious and unconscious xenophobia, stereotyping, and racism.

'It is not only my point of view, but also the one of most of my foreigner friends living here, that the UK has great dichotomies in many aspects of life. You would think of the UK as a very advanced country with many great things, but then there are a few issues which seem impossible to understand for us who have been raised abroad. Starting with… the ethnocentric attitude of the vast majority of the local citizens, who in many cases believe themselves to be at the top of the whole world and could not even consider other points of view, which sometimes leads to creating almost apartheid-like situations with some ethnicities (although I luckily am part of the very well accepted Spanish, as half of Britain visits my country every year).'

Xenophobia and national stereotypes

'Discrimination is not always apparent and can be very subtle: given the choice between working with a UK national and working with a non-UK national, most UK nationals would invariably prefer to work with the former.'

There was a strong perception from many respondents that their British colleagues preferred working and socialising with fellow British workmates over international staff. This is not dissimilar to findings from ECU's report: *Attracting international students: equitable services and support, campus cohesion and community engagement* (**www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/attracting-international-students**). That report highlighted that group work can cause issues within student groups, where UK students tend to work with other UK students. This is widely recognised as an issue for HEIs and the Higher Education Academy has pedagogical advice and guidance for lecturers for overcoming these challenges. **www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/ISL_Group_Work**

The results of the survey suggest that this impacts on staff as well as students, and therefore on work cultures.

The following comments illustrate other examples of national stereotyping that respondents reported.

'There are several assumptions about my character, personality and tastes that are based on stereotypes about my nationality.'

'I feel that some members of staff do not follow my advice on work issues because I am not British. Often during meetings more senior members of staff just talk over me and do not let me finish my sentence. Some people are openly discriminatory and tell me that Eastern Europeans steal British jobs, and that even if they are university graduates they are only good for filling shelves in a supermarket.'

'I am Czech and my English language is at native level, with an Australian accent. Having lived in the UK for eight years, it is surprising how often I am referred to as a convict or an Eastern European, neither of which I identify with, and neither of which feels like a compliment. These things are superficial, but I do find it far more difficult to feel truly accepted into an English person's social life than if they are from a non-English background.'

Racism

In addition to the above, survey respondents cited a variety of examples of racism, ranging in extremity and openness.

'There is a subtle difference that is difficult to pinpoint, and can only be described as "institutional racism".'

Some mentioned more subtle examples of being overlooked in a meeting or not being approached or listened to by colleagues, while others gave examples of open resentment from UK staff.

'The vast majority of people are fine. But there are a few colleagues whom have made unpleasant comments such as "we need more indigenous lecturers" and "module leadership should not be given to non-native English speakers".'

Another respondent went so far as to say:

'England is being less tolerant, fair and socially advanced by the day. I am shocked at the behaviour of staff and students to issues of race and diversity. The colonial mentality is still vibrant. There is little genuine attempt to understand difference and to ensure that people are treated equally and fairly.'

Perception of accents

'Although I am fluent in English, I feel that I am sometimes not taken seriously at work by some people because of my foreign accent.'

Many respondents expressed concern that their colleagues, upon hearing their foreign accent, formed negative judgments of their ability based on preconceived ideas of people from outside the UK.

'People notice an accent immediately and some treat you as less capable than someone without an accent in the same role.'

'No matter how long you have lived in the UK, it is difficult for people to understand that you will always have an accent because English is not your first language. Too often people who have not been exposed to that accent think your English is not good. Once they get to know you they think your English has improved.'

Many respondents felt that their accent is held against them and react differently to them as a consequence.

'Even if you're fluent and can express your needs, if you have an accent or make small mistakes and don't speak "posh" English with lots of big words, you're looked down upon and immediately regarded as not as intelligent, just because you can't express yourself in the perfect prose of Shakespearian English.'

Policy implications

As mentioned previously, much of this is cultural and linked to wider societal issues, however the examples of racism and national stereotyping are a significant concern for the sector.

Some of the examples given resonate with the findings from ECU's previous publication *The experiences of black and minority ethnic staff in higher education in England* (**www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/experience-of-bme-staff-in-he-final-report**). Tackling racism and national stereotypes could be part of an institutional strategy to create an inclusive culture.

Conscious and unconscious discrimination may permeate the way staff are perceived by their colleagues and students, and institutions may want to look at what can be done to tackle this.

Seen as temporary

'I have felt on a number of occasions (it has even been said to me) that responsibilities and other opportunities for progressing my career were not available to me because there was the idea that I would not "settle" here making investment in myself useless. This manifests itself in the management level, but also in casual interactions with colleagues (eg research grant writing collaboration, curriculum design…) Even now that I have bought a house and have two kids born here, people are wondering when I will "go back home" despite a considerable personal investment in my job.'

'I currently find it very frustrating that 19 years after I arrived in the UK, I still get asked where I come from regularly, and where my children were born, and "when are you going back?". And I am a white, English-speaking immigrant from a former colony. I have voted here for decades, I contribute taxes (even though for years I could not claim any benefits). I paid thousands of pounds for work permits and leave to remain and still get treated like an outsider. I hate to think what others must put up with.'

These frustrations can impact on people's perception that their institution is less likely to invest in them if they are seen as temporary and may be exacerbated by the use of fixed-term contracts. One respondent commented that:

'I was on [a fixed-term contract] for many years, which I believe held me back in terms of promotion. How does one begin to think of promotion when one is not sure whether one's one year or three years' fixed-term contract would be renewed at its expiration or not. In my case, this casualisation of job went on for eight years before my job was made permanent.'

Social life

Survey respondents were asked about their social interactions both inside and outside their institutions and whether they had encountered any obstacles. Establishing a social network is one of them. Different social norms and customs are to be expected and there is only so much that HEIs can do to intervene. That said, institutions are able to consider social interactions within the institution, and social situations can be a good way to foster good relations between different members of staff.

When asked whether they had encountered barriers to socialising and networking, 23.5% stated that they had experienced this inside their institution and 27.5% indicated they had outside the institution.

'It is a very difficult place to socialise or network if you are not from this institution. I think a lot more could be done to help newcomers feel welcome that would pay enormous dividends for this institution.'

Respondents described a number of social barriers, including language and communication differences, many of which have been described in previous sections of this report. Some respondents hypothesised that because international staff are often viewed as temporary, colleagues may not make an effort to socialise with them. Others felt that the work environment was unfriendly and unwelcoming for newcomers, and that some social groups appeared closed to international staff. Some also

responded that international staff are segregated from UK staff in the physical workplace, a situation that impacted upon their ability to socialise with UK colleagues.

Some of the other areas identified by survey respondents are outlined below.

'British reserve'

Many respondents reported that British people can be difficult to get to know, they prefer to socialise with other British people and/or people they have established friendships with.

'British people are quite cautious in making friends, so I (and most foreigners, even those who have lived for a long time in the UK) find there is a usually a two-year delay before a British person decides that they might like to socialise with you.'

Other respondents commented that:

'I had trouble socialising with my British colleagues or with British people in general. It is not (only) down to the linguistic barrier, because I am nearly bilingual by now, but more to do it seems with a certain resistance from British people to go beyond simple acquaintance. On the contrary, I have lots of friends and I socialise very well with [international] people like me. I do have a few British friends, but interestingly enough, they nearly all have had a quite international career/life experience and hence are probably more prone to meet and socialise people from an international background.'

'I find it extremely hard to make British friends… Friendship with most British people never seems to progress beyond the few pints and chat at the pub.'

As a consequence, many respondents said that they ended up befriending other international staff more often, which can have wider implications. One respondent highlighted:

'One can see that the lab is split roughly in half, between the English natives and the international staff and students. This mostly reflects the social interactions, rather than the professional side of

things, but it is noticeable. Also, international principal investigators tend to have more international students and post-docs than UK-born ones. I am not comfortable with the English vs international split, I don't fit in either group very well. '

Internal networking opportunities

'There were no opportunities to socialise within the institution as there are limited staff gatherings. Everybody tends to do his job and leave.'

A number of international staff respondents cited the lack of networking opportunities at their institution as a social barrier.

'There is no network outside the university, so I do not have any friends… When I was at [a different institution], there were societies of many different kinds, and it was far easier to socialise. Here people stick to themselves and do not open up.'

Some viewed this as a universal problem across the institution, while others felt that international staff were excluded or not made aware of networking opportunities.

'I found very difficult to socialise within the institution as there was a closed network. No one made an effort to include me.'

Some stated that the layout of the institution was not conducive to socialising. The lack of physical social spaces meant that there were few opportunities for international staff to get to know colleagues outside of their immediate department/office.

'Within the institution, the departments are very segmented with virtually no opportunity to network with colleagues. In the building which I work in there isn't even a shared staff room for people to meet in. I recognise faces and say hello in passing, but there is no sense of knowing who colleagues are and what they do.'

Alcohol

There were also comments about the UK social life focusing on alcohol consumption, which can be alienating.

'I find the need to consume alcohol in this country quite difficult to deal with. I enjoy a drink, but it seems that every time people want to socialise here, it has to involve alcohol.'

Inviting partners

Some respondents stated that many social opportunities excluded partners, which made it difficult for them (and their partners) to develop friendships and integrate into UK society.

'The UK idea of "just colleagues"/"just the girls" instead of including partners is quite awkward and to avoid going home alone late, I've not attended events I would have otherwise.'

Policy implications

As mentioned above, institutions only have so much influence on how staff socialise, but often small things can make a significant difference. One respondent commented on how they had regular tea times as a department. They all met on a regular basis as a wider team to have a cup of tea with each other, allowing colleagues the chance to build relationships with each other which can improve team working.

Team leaders and managers might want to consider team cohesion and social situations that are not necessarily in pubs and bars. This not only benefits international staff but UK staff who would prefer different social situations.

The **University of Bristol** ensures that an international adviser sits on their staff club committee to ensure international aspects are considered in all decisions by the committee.

Performance reviews and career development

'I feel that native speakers [who work at the institution in foreign languages] are relegated to teaching language and discouraged to pursue research through different methods: they teach longer hours, they often do not have a "proper" contract (abuse of the casual teaching scheme) and therefore they do not enjoy the same benefits (research allowances, sabbatical leave, etc). Since one's research portfolio determines the chance of success in the academic ladder, I think many native speakers are being denied the chance to climb the ladder.'

Performance reviews

Of those who undergo a probation, appraisal process and/or performance review process, one in four respondents (25.6%) stated they were not comfortable with the process at their institution.

Nearly all of the comments regarding performance reviews and appraisals were general issues, rather than specific to international staff. Some respondents were unaware of an internal performance review process, or where they were aware, it was not mandatory and their manager did not complete it.

'The appraisal system/performance review is very poor in my team. I cannot remember when I was last appraised. The actual appraisal outcome was not well communicated to me and there was never any action taken as a result of my appraisal. The appraisals were meaningless.'

Where people had undergone a performance review some felt that they were a box-ticking exercise and were not connected with career development discussions or opportunities.

Student feedback

Student feedback is one area that might have a disproportionate impact on international staff.

'[The appraisal system is] heavily based on student feedback. Expected to have 4.5+ out of 5 with 200+ classes.'

As mentioned in the previous section, some respondents reported feeling that negative judgments of their ability and work were formed on the basis of their foreign accent, even when they had a high level of fluency in English. This may make student feedback biased and disadvantage international staff in the appraisal system.

Career progression

'In UK academia, rarely have I seen many non-English academics being offered or promoted beyond the post-doctoral level. Lectureships go to locals – it's a common joke among foreigners.'

Others commented that:

'All key positions in the department are held by native English speakers. One third of the staff is international. The impression is that foreigners are not to be trusted when it comes to managerial roles.'

'A UK colleague with the same experience, expertise and skills like me would have been promoted or given much more responsibility or a team management role. International staff have a glass ceiling above us in terms of promotion and taking a leadership/ management role. This is mainly to do with people's perception of you as a manager, both from the senior management and other colleagues. You can be an excellent professional but rarely someone who is managing or leading a team of UK colleagues, especially in a region and university when a large proportion of staff (especially non-academic staff) are local.'

Respondents felt that their career progression was hampered by the fact they were international staff, and that they had less chance of being promoted than their UK colleagues, even where they had fulfilled the criteria for the promotion or where their experience and skills were clearly more extensive.

'When I was hired I was told I could apply for a readership after a few years. I performed the tasks and roles appropriate to a reader, bringing in two [research] grants, but when I applied for a readership, I was passed over in favour of a number of my UK colleagues who had been playing roles in the administrative side of things.'

Some respondents also felt that international staff are paid less than their UK colleagues.

'Less experienced or staff with less evidence-based research profile gets promotion quicker, although the salary spine is confidential, there is a trend of comparatively lower pay for international staff. The proportion of international staff reduces significantly at higher levels.'

Networking

Some respondents felt that networking impacted on career progression.

'Loads of academic appointments in UK universities are not based on competencies of the applicants, but depends on the level of connection and friendship of an applicant with one of the influential members of interview panel.'

'British colleagues leave me out of their politicking with university management. It is interesting to see that all academics who occupy senior management posts (head of department, deans, etc) are all British. International academic staff seem to be more linked to international academic community while British academic staff seem to enjoy more internal university business.'

Promotion and research funding

'I've seen people passed over for promotion while others are promoted simply as a reward for receiving outside grants.'

Some respondents commented on career progression being closely linked with success in being awarded research funding. International staff may find it more difficult to obtain research funding and to be subsequently promoted because it may be more difficult for them to:

- know and understand the process of applying for UK-specific grants and which grants are available
- collaborate with British colleagues on research funding applications

Communication styles

Communication styles were covered in more detail previously, but they were also mentioned in relation to career progression.

'Certain cultural differences, such as accent and body language make native-born English people respond differently. Also, Australians find it difficult to be obsequious – doesn't come naturally so makes it difficult to climb the greasy pole.'

Another respondent suggested:

'[My career progression is impacted by my] not being accepted as my reactions are less formal, but more real and open.'

Gender-specific issues

One respondent commented that:

'It is far harder for international female staff to combine family responsibilities and the long hours required to do the expected research, teaching and administration. UK staff have family to help out with childcare and emergencies, international staff do not have that option, but still have to meet the same targets.'

The main issue here is the general workload expectations on academics. While there are likely to be many UK staff without extensive support networks, this is likely to be a significant issue for international staff, in particular women.

Policy implications

When monitoring performance appraisals, analysing staff surveys, and conducting equal pay audits, analyse differences by nationality to identify any disadvantage.

Additionally, institutions may want to review workload allocation models, and the methods for allocating career development opportunities to ensure they are unbiased and give all staff the opportunity to develop and progress. Bias in promotion and recruitment procedures is also a potential area for review.

While the above is based on academic staff, this could also be applied to professional and support staff.

Training and development opportunities

Respondents were asked about the training and development opportunities they had received from the institution and 82.9% felt that their institution provided adequate training and development for them, while 17.1% did not.

While it may be anticipated that similar issues exist for UK staff given current financial changes, respondents felt that career development opportunities such as external speaking opportunities were more often given to UK staff.

However, there were also positive examples where people felt that they had been given good development opportunities.

'During my first year, the careers office organised Springboard women's development programme. It was the only and the best thing the university had done for the newcomers (international or not). It gave me lots of options and confidence. It ran parallel to an informal mentoring scheme, which was also very helpful. A senior female professor was my mentor, someone from a totally different faculty, and I've received more guidance from her than any other staff member in my own department/faculty.'

Utilising international experience

More than 3 in 4 (78.9%) respondents felt that there were aspects of their background and culture that could be of benefit to their institution and/or to their role. Many provided examples where their international experience and background had been utilised by their institution.

'Coming from multicultural background with a knowledge of several languages and cultures helps a lot in research as well as working with students and academics from different background; also helps to work as part of a team.'

However, 1 in 7 (14.4%) respondents who felt that their background and culture could be beneficial to their institution/role indicated that they had not been able to use these aspects in practice.

Multilingual and multicultural

'I am fluent in Malay and this has helped in the work that I do in Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia. It also helps that I am of South Asian descent as this helps with the work that I do in India and Sri Lanka as I have a good understanding of the local culture.'

The most obvious benefit that many international staff bring with them is their ability to speak additional languages. Respondents gave numerous examples of how this had helped their work from roles in communications and administration to teaching and pastoral support of international students.

In addition to communication, international experience can influence teaching materials and make curriculum content more relevant and real for students.

'As an African who teaches and researches Africa, I think my cultural background and understanding of the continent has exposed the students to a different way of viewing Africa, its people and its troubles, and has exposed them to viewing Africa in a different light.'

Another respondent commented that:

'I draw on examples from Russian literature, music, intellectual culture, in my lectures, making parallels with British culture where relevant. I think it's a good thing as it increases students' understanding of the large world they live in.'

International research and collaboration

'I have an understanding of cultural differences between nations that helps me obtain funding from Europe and to collaborate closely with [academics overseas].'

In addition to language skills helping with communication and research, international experience is also very useful in securing research collaboration and funding. Respondents highlighted the benefits of:

- international contacts
- knowledge of overseas research priorities and needs
- knowledge of international research grants and application processes

They can increase collaboration prospects and the potential to apply for research funding.

'My experience of international education (in two other countries) positively affect my teaching and the understanding of students, but also useful in terms of making contacts and collaborations for research.'

Additionally, some respondents suggested that international staff can improve research funding applications by making the research team being put forward appear more diverse and internationally aware.

International students

Some respondents suggested that international staff are more aware of the issues international students may face, as they resonate with their own experiences. It may be useful for institutions to involve international staff when developing support for international students.

However, at the same time there should not be an expectation that international staff should, or will want to, support international students.

Creativity and willingness to change

Many respondents commented on their ability to bring new ideas to their work and to try new ways of working. This included new and different ways of teaching and assessing students, and harnessing new technology. This is invaluable for institutions, but it is important that institutions are willing to embrace new ideas.

'In regard to both teaching and research, my background involves a substantially different system, allowing me to see and suggest possible ways to deal with various concerns that people who have grown up only within the various UK systems often cannot see.'

'Without resorting to stereotypes, I think the US culture is more likely to respond positively to change, is less frightened about risk, and is more open to multiculturalism and less class conscious.'

Some respondents expressed their frustration at their institution's lack of willingness to change or consider doing things in a different way. These respondents felt that their previous experiences were not fully utilised as they were unable to implement any previous good practice.

'Having experienced several other universities in another culture, I am aware of other/different ways of doing things that, to my mind, are (in some cases) better, more efficient. But some of what the universities here do seem to be entrenched in hundreds of years of practice and thus are not easily changed (or even open to change).'

There was a feeling among some respondents that the sector is not interested in changing or learning what other countries are doing, which was a wasted opportunity.

'I've lived in and taught at universities in three continents, and visited about 20 countries for research. At [department/school] level I sit through meetings which are so provincial, but yet so arrogant in not wanting to know other ways of looking at issues from other places. The UK tertiary scene is not that brilliant, but still thinks it is.'

Academic-specific issues

Many of the academic-specific issues are not unique to international staff, but may be more pronounced for them.

For example, job security and decreased budgets were mentioned by respondents. This is clearly an issue for all staff with significant shifts in funding and extensive restructuring taking place in many institutions. However, international staff may have the additional worry of their visa/work permit being dependent on their job, sometimes having moved their whole family for a job that is no longer secure.

Academic processes

Relevant survey respondents were asked about the IAG they had received on teaching/assessment and research. Of those who indicated that teaching and assessment was relevant to their role, 61.6% felt that they had been adequately advised on teaching and assessment methods in the UK; 38.4% did not.

Of respondents whose role involved a research element, 54.2% believed they had been adequately advised on the UK research process, such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The remaining 45.8% did not believe this to be the case.

'People acted like I should obviously know things that there was no reason whatsoever that I should know – for most of these people, it felt like they couldn't discern the different knowledge base of someone who hadn't spent their entire schooling and career [at the specific institutions] (let alone somebody who came from a different country and didn't know the system at all!).'

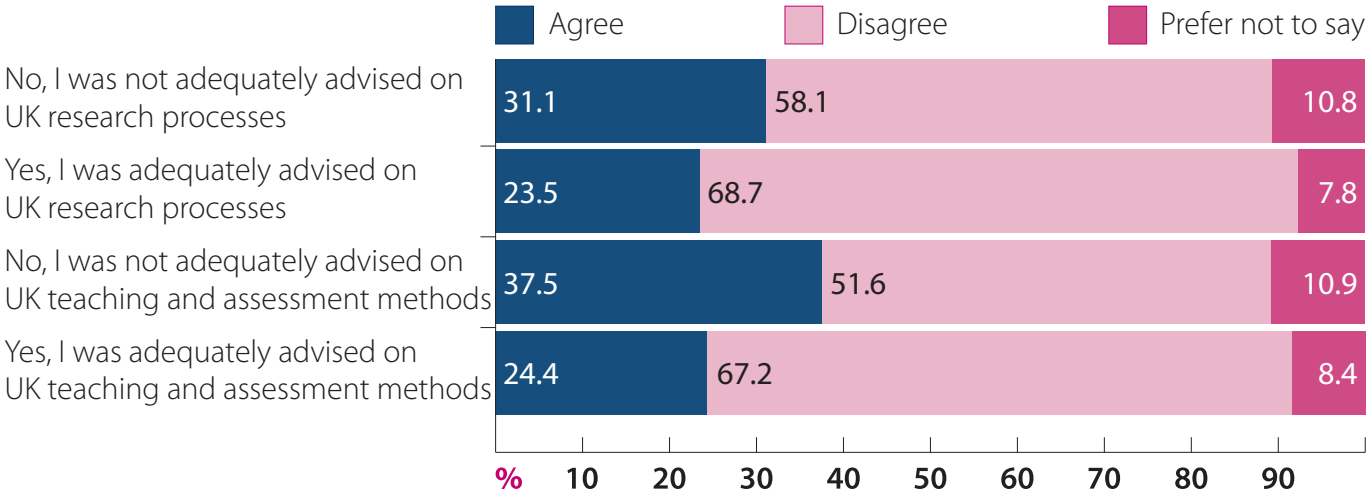
Respondents were asked whether any issues related to teaching and assessment methods and/or research processes had arisen in their work. Just over 1 in 4 (25.9%) respondents replied in the affirmative. 64.0% reported that they had experienced no issues and 1 in 10 (10.1%) preferred not to say.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, respondents who stated that they had not been adequately advised on methods and processes were more likely to report that they had experienced issues related to teaching and assessment methods and/or research processes. 37.5% of respondents who indicated they had not

been adequately advised on UK teaching and assessment methods reported that a related issue had arisen at their work. In comparison, only 24.4% of those who felt they had been adequately advised stated that a related issue had arisen. The former group was also more likely to select 'prefer not to say' in regards to issues arising at work than the latter (10.9% compared with 8.4%).

Similarly, 31.1% of respondents who indicated they had not been adequately advised on UK research processes also reported that a related issue had arisen at work and 10.8% preferred not to say. In contrast, only 23.5% of those who felt they had been adequately advised on the subject reported a related issue had arisen at work and 7.8% preferred not to say.

Issues related to teaching and assessment methods and/or research processes reported, by advice received



Respondents commented on the difference in teaching and research methods between the UK and the previous countries in which they had worked.

'Coming from a very different higher education culture, I was thrown in at the deep end in the UK. It was assumed most of the time that I already understood how assessment and research work in the UK, which was of course not a correct assumption. I had a very steep learning curve in the first two years.'

Many respondents felt that it was assumed they held prior working knowledge of practices in the UK or that these were similar to those in their country and therefore no induction or training was required.

'It's all new and you need to learn about it by yourself as you go. Nobody explains the basics to you. Things that are clear to you if you studied in the UK are all taken for granted. Nobody is aware that in another country things are done differently; and thus some induction on assessment practices would be useful.'

Policy implications

As mentioned in the previous section, having an academic-specific induction may be useful, as may having a central body of information on UK education and academic processes. Line managers could also be made aware that international academic staff may have questions about academic processes.

Some of the issues raised by respondents are described below, and institutions may want to include them in any academic-specific induction.

The UK education system

Some respondents wanted an overview of the UK education systems, such as content and assessment types and times. It was felt that there was a lot of assumed knowledge that someone who has not studied in the UK will not know. Understanding the education system enables staff to better support students.

'[it would be helpful to have] more information about the English school system and the habits/attitudes of the incoming students. And also more information about the quantity of studying outside classes that is expected of students.'

Some respondents commented on their perception of UK students. One respondent expressed that they had expected students to have a greater level of knowledge.

'Home engineering students generally struggle with the basics (eg math, physics) even at the top universities. The don't understand the core concepts in full in the first place but are pushed to progress stage after stage.'

Staff are better able to develop courses, course materials and course assessments when they have some understanding of the students' level and educational background.

An understanding of the education system is also important for university admissions.

'I needed to know more about the processes involved when candidates apply to study at a UK university. I have found most of the information that I need to know by searching for it myself, and asking colleagues.'

Those involved in admissions decisions need to understand the different qualification systems within the UK. Having an understanding of the different types of school in the UK is also essential where institutions use contextual data in admissions decisions.

Supporting students

Some respondents were unclear on the level of pastoral care they should provide for students. Some respondents felt they should provide more, while others were surprised at what was expected of them.

Some respondents felt that students expected different levels of support than the students they had taught in other countries. A clear indication of what the institution expects from academics would be useful.

Another issue raised was a lack of familiarity with what is expected of students. Respondents commented that it was difficult to offer advice to students about systems and degree programmes with which they were unfamiliar.

Institutional structure

Respondents commented on the need for a fuller induction to the structure and workings of their institution. They wanted to understand the different committees and committee structures and how decisions are made.

Marking and assessment

Many respondents commented on marking and assessment processes and three main issues were raised.

Methods of marking

'I just had to pick up how the assessment system worked, because when I asked colleagues about this they didn't understand my questions [about how the assessment system worked] as they weren't aware that one could have those questions (which for me were logical questions given the assessment system I had worked with in the past).'

Some respondents felt there was a lack of awareness that marking and assessment operates differently in different countries. Respondents had to spend time finding out how the marking system worked at their institution so that they could apply it to their teaching and marking, and where they had no guidance on this, it created another task for them when they first started.

'I have not been informed of the scale of assessment or marks given to each section… I had to look at what older staff were doing and imitate them because no guidance was given at all.'

Providing guidance on assessment scales and how to apply them would be useful, and has the added benefit of aiding consistency across a department and institution.

Being too generous/tough in marking

Several respondents were surprised to be told that the grades they had given were too high.

'It was explained to me that I was never to give a student more than 75% no matter how good the essay was. It seemed strange to me.'

Others were told they had been too tough.

'I was not familiar with UK higher education marking scales and standards. I've had to increase the marks I have given on several occasions.'

Having assessment scales and explaining the rationale for how they should be applied may prevent any subsequent confusion.

Second marking

Second marking surprised a lot of respondents and created upset for some.

'Another problem is the use of external and second markers. Why should I have to have my work constantly assessed? I am shocked at the lack of academic freedom.'

Another respondent said:

'The whole system of second marking/sampling, external examining, etc, I have found completely mystifying. After 16 years, I feel I'm just starting to understand it.'

Some respondents have taken second marking and external examiners personally, and see it as questioning their skills and experience. This may be alleviated to an extent by clearly explaining the rationale for second marking. This will help reassure academics that the primary focus is not to test them.

Applying for research funding

Some respondents commented on having to learn about applying for research grants and the different processes in place in the UK. They suggested that being given information on this would be helpful, as would some direction from managers within their department. This also correlated with comments on collaborative working and a perception that UK staff are more likely to collaborate with UK colleagues (see p68).

REF

Many respondents mentioned the REF as an area of confusion and concern. Many of the comments were not specific to international staff, but more general concerns about the way their institution was communicating the REF process and the lack of transparency around who was going to be selected and how it would be decided.

The REF is UK-specific and international staff may benefit from being informed about it. Also, academics are recognised differently in different countries and academics may need to adapt their outputs to fit with the REF. For example, one respondent pointed out:

'I had to adjust my publishing strategy to the REF system, where journal articles are ranked and book chapters are not valued as highly.'

Properly understanding the impact of REF submission on an academic's career progression is also important, and an area where advice would be helpful for international staff.

Academic mentor

Many respondents mentioned the need to have an academic mentor who could advise on many of the issues listed above, and answer questions as they arose. The mentor could also provide advice and guidance on career development and the promotion process. Academic mentors may benefit all staff, not just international staff.

Workload/role expectations

A heavy workload was mentioned by many respondents. Again, this is the same for UK staff, but can be particularly difficult when first settling into the UK. Some respondents were surprised by the hours they were expected to work, including teaching hours in addition to applying for and securing research funding.

Policy implications

Institutions could consider how to make workloads more manageable, for staff generally, and for new international staff. Staggering the introductions of the various parts of the role and responsibilities is one way of doing this.

'They have eased me into teaching by giving me no teaching in the first year, and an increasing load over the following four years, allowing me to develop new coursework but also keep my research effort strong.'

Conclusions and recommendations

This report contains the findings from a survey of over 1400 members of international staff currently working in UK higher education, and provides a valuable insight into the experiences of international staff in higher education. There are areas that are outside the control of HEIs, but providing good IAG and signposts to appropriate support may be possible.

International staff have much to contribute to UK higher education and the sector should be responsive to ensuring they are able to thrive.

'I think international staff should be more celebrated. They contribute to the diversity of the student experience and the university as a whole. Just because some international staff speak with a strange accent or dress differently, it doesn't make them worse at their jobs. They have a lot to contribute and I wish this could be recognised by students.'

Key areas that institutions may wish to explore are to:

- ensure adequate resourcing to support international staff
- include support for international staff in corporate strategies and equality and diversity objectives
- monitor internal processes (eg promotions, grievances and disciplinaries) by international status
- have a dedicated international staff manager
  Such a post will depend on the size and structure of an institution, but it would provide international staff with something equivalent to the support provided to international students. Having a named contact was suggested by many respondents and would ensure there is someone with specific remit for providing support.
- provide accessible IAG to international staff
  This should include links to existing resources, government and other relevant websites and information on the institution and local area

- create safe spaces for international staff to communicate with each other
  This may be through existing forums, such as the international staff website (see the annex) and may be especially useful for staff at institutions with very few international staff members.
- provide cultural awareness training for managers and team leaders and potentially all staff
- consider providing language classes for international staff and their families and provide social spaces for international staff to get to know their colleagues
- appreciate the different perspective that international staff can offer and make use of their expertise to improve existing teaching and research methods

It should be re-emphasised that the above summarises the issues raised, but there were also many positive experiences that we should celebrate.

'I have a wonderful team of colleagues of different nationalities, including British, who are highly supportive, intelligent, creative, and it is a joy to work with them. My university has been exceptionally supportive and sensitive recently in a very serious and difficult family matter, their personnel department and my own department and immediate colleagues could not have handled it better.'

Annex: useful resources

The international staff website (**www.internationalstaff.ac.uk**) run by the **University of Leeds** offers information for international staff, with the main site free to access without subscription.

The website currently has around 10,000 visitors a month. It provides information for people considering moving to the UK, in addition to support for academics who have already moved to the UK from abroad and need help adjusting to life in the UK and to UK higher education.

Currently, 36 HEIs subscribe to the website as a means of supporting their international staff and research postgraduates.

Subscription to the website is £1000+ VAT per year. With subscription comes the benefit of adding your own institution-specific content to the site. This then allows the institution to add a section for their own specific content, for topics such as accommodation, childcare, banks, shops, doctors and the like.

The website also has a facebook page and a Twitter feed. The more people that use it, the more useful it will be. Signposting new staff towards these resources and asking existing staff to contribute will help this community grow.

The **British Council** has many resources for people relocating to the UK, including *The guide for international researchers moving to the UK* (**www.britishcouncil.org/new/euraxess/Guide-for-international-researchers**) published with Euraxess UK, which people may find a useful reference point.

Equality Challenge Unit

ECU works to further and support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education across all four nations of the UK, and in colleges in Scotland.

ECU works closely with colleges and universities to seek to ensure that staff and students are not unfairly excluded, marginalised or disadvantaged because of age, disability, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation or through any combination of these characteristics or other unfair treatment.

Providing a central source of expertise, research, advice and leadership, we support institutions in building a culture that provides equality of both opportunity and outcome, promotes good relations, values the benefits of diversity and provides a model of equality for the wider UK society.

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