

Survey on Admitting UK Students to US Universities

Background: As an EducationUSA centre, the US-UK Fulbright Commission is the first point of contact for 5,000+ UK students interested in US study annually. We also aim to serve as a resource for US universities, by providing information on recruitment opportunities in the UK and the local educational system.

To improve our resources and understanding of issues around US admissions for UK students, we invited US university admissions staff to participate in a survey, based on the questions UK students most commonly ask our advisors. Simultaneously, we survey UK schools to learn more about their experiences supporting US applicants (over).

Outcomes: To date, 117 admissions staff members and 75 UK schools have completed the surveys. Of the admissions staff, 67% worked in undergraduate admissions, 10% in graduate admissions and 23% in both. This information will both inform today's session, as well as lead to the development of new advising tools and handouts for students and admissions staff in 2010.

Summary of Results – US Admissions Staff:

- **Evaluating Qualifications:** The vast majority (88%) of admissions staff are **evaluating UK qualifications internally**.
- The remaining 12% of universities indicated that they require students to use a credential evaluator. However, they vary based on whether the credential evaluator must be a NACES member (6%), from a list of preferred evaluators provided by the institution (5%) or any evaluator (1%).
- **Qualifications for Undergraduate Admissions:** US universities reported admitting UK students for undergraduate study who had completed a **variety of qualifications, including the new and non-traditional qualifications** we will discuss in the session: 100% A-levels, 95% International Baccalaureate, 26% Scottish Highers, 15% BTEC, 21% Cambridge Pre-U, 4% access / foundation and 18% other diplomas.
- Some institutions also reported **considering students with GCSEs for admission to undergraduate programs**, on the basis students “prove maturity, readiness for college life and academic challenges of a college curriculum.” One particular university reported their rationale was that: “A-level work is very similar to AP or IB higher level work in US or international high schools where higher grades on AP/IBHL exams are granted college course exemptions. Many US colleges/universities grant exemptions for higher marks on A-level exam results as well; in many cases, up to a year college credit.”
- **Advanced Standing:** 75% of institutions award advanced standing or academic credit for A-levels, fluctuating between 3 – 12 hours per A-level. Most respondents noted that policies were determined by the students' academic department. **On average, institutions awarded 5.9 credit hours per A-level.** There was also a trend of awarding 3 hours for student studying a subject to AS-level.
- **Qualifications for Graduate Admissions** At the graduate level, universities have granted admission to students with a three-year Bachelor's degree for Master's level study in the US (n=23) and less commonly for Doctoral study (n=2), with 90% of respondents **recommending UK students complete a Master's prior to applying for their Doctoral program**.
- Several institutions had admitted students with non-traditional qualifications such as those from the ACCA (n = 3 universities), ICAEW (1) and UK Master's without prior Bachelor's (5).
- For the **ACCA and ICAEW** qualifications, one university reported: “I do consider students who complete all of the necessary exams and hold associateship/membership in one of these organizations to have the equivalent of a US Bachelor's degree (even if they did not obtain a separate degree from an actual university). This conclusion is based on the entry requirements of these programs, the quality of the exams, and how they are often viewed in the UK.”

Key Issues Reported by Admissions Staff:

- **Number and variety of qualifications** to consider and be informed about.
- **Lack of continual assessment and class rank:** “I would very much like to always have internal assessment marks throughout the GCSE and A-level coursework and not have to rely only on exam actual and predicted results.”
- **Existence of multiple testing bodies:** “I find it confusing that students seem to take some tests through certain administrators and other tests through other administrators.”
- **Changes within the qualifications they are familiar with** – such as the new A* for A-levels, the Pre-U which can incorporate A-levels and “As many independent schools, no longer cash in AS results, a student may only be able to produce GCSEs, AS predictions and A-level predictions.”
- For **one-year Master’s degrees**, there is little to report on a transcript at the time of application.
- For **mature students**: “Our biggest concerns involve the seeming inability of more mature students to obtain detailed academic records of their university studies in the UK.”

Key Issues Reported by UK Students and Schools:

- **Cost of getting a copy of each GCSE / AS / A-level certificate:** “Duplicates [of certificates] cost around £25 each, and some students have 7 or 8 documents for each university. Asking the student’s school to send stamped, certified photocopies... is much quicker and £100-200 cheaper for the student.”
- Development of **new or non-traditional qualifications**, which are designed to as pathways to UK universities and are given points on the UCAS Tariff, **give the expectation that UK students can apply to university** in the US with these:
 - “US institutions are going to expect students to study in the more academic areas such as math, science, economics, social studies, English and foreign language.”
 - At the graduate level, email from a student: “I am a UK Accountant who has worked in the US since 1999 at the Controller and VP Finance level positions. I am an ACMA, but do not have a UK undergraduate degree. I want an MBA to advance my career in 3-5 years, but the US admissions departments I’ve contacted found it too difficult to research the ACMA and wanted me to sign-up for a Bachelor’s degree.”
- **Differing policies on the minimum qualifications required confuses applicants** and requires students to contact universities individually: “At a current applicant’s request, I have confirmed... that we would accept a BTEC National Diploma in Media as a basis for admission.”
- Recent change by the **NCAA to not recognise the BTEC** in the Clearing House
- Experience and **training on US admissions varies between schools**
 - In our survey, schools’ answers to a question on how many US applicants they advise each year ranged from “none recently, but occasionally one may be interested” to 70 per year.
 - Some schools hire educational consultants to do advising in school; others report, “We are novices, so ANY information is most useful” and “I know very little and always default to Fulbright.”
- For schools less familiar with US process, **difficulty creating a transcript.**
 - We report “just predicted results... Are we putting enough information on the transcript?”
 - “There is no advice to UK teachers on what to include in a transcript. The only way I found out what should be in a transcript was to ask a friend who used to be a High School teacher in the USA.”
 - “Giving rankings is very difficult and not part of the UK culture.”
- Schools that are more adept to working with US applicants and at higher-performing schools, express **concerns that they may be hurting a students’ application** by giving truthful answers:
 - “It is our school policy not to complete the general questions at the beginning [of the Common Application form] as we feel that in a highly selective school it is foreseeable that a very strong candidate may not tick the ‘top 5% in my career’ box would therefore be disadvantaged.”
 - “We have many issues with the [Common Application] questionnaire based on excellent, very good average etc. as it involves comparison with our own students which is not a representative sample of students in the UK. If we say average we might be disadvantaging the applicant.”

DEMYSTIFYING POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN ENGLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND

DEMYSTIFYING SECONDARY AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ)

<http://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/index.aspx>

All secondary and vocational qualifications in the United Kingdom have to be accredited by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) in England, Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) in Wales, and Council for the Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland. Details of all these qualifications can be found on the NDAQ website.

NOTES:

Awarding Bodies:

<http://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/awarding-body/awarding+body+directory.seo.aspx>

Ofqual is the primary authority that regulates awarding bodies and grants institutions the authority to become one. Thus, awarding bodies refers to all institutions that are recognized to offer accredited secondary and vocational qualifications in the United Kingdom. NDAQ provides a complete list of awarding bodies on their website. These could range from examination boards like Edexcel Ltd. to professional education institutes such as City and Guilds of London Institute, as well as institutes of higher education (e.g. Thames Valley University) that offer secondary, vocational and professional qualifications, in addition to university-level ones.

NOTES:

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

<http://www.qcda.gov.uk/resources/assets/qca-06-2298-nqf-web.pdf>

All accredited qualifications in the United Kingdom are assigned a level within the NQF (except higher education qualifications) in order to help learners understand and make informed choices and to facilitate progression opportunities. The framework was revised in 2006, and currently has 8 levels (not including Entry Level). It is regulated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) in England, the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland. The NQF is, however, due to be replaced by the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) by the end of 2010.

NOTES:

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ)

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/educationandlearning/qualificationsexplained/dg_10039029

These refer to applied qualifications where one learns practical, work-related tasks designed to acquire the skills and knowledge to do a job effectively. Potential students have to be employed in order to enroll in a NVQ (which is offered through awarding bodies). Currently NVQs are offered at Levels 1 to 5 on the NQF but by the end of 2010 they will be replaced by new qualifications that are being developed as part of the QCF.

NOTES:

Universities and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS)

http://www.ucas.ac.uk/students/ucas_tariff/how

UCAS is primarily responsible for managing applications to higher education courses in the UK. It also offers a tariff system which allows qualifications to be converted to UCAS points based on the grades earned. Universities and colleges may set a total of a certain number of UCAS points as a requirement to get into a particular course. UCAS now offers tariff points for almost all qualifications offered in the UK.

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DEMYSTIFYING HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS

Recognized versus Listed Bodies

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/recognisedukdegrees/index.cfm?fuseaction=institutes.list>

The Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) is the ministerial department of the United Kingdom Government that is responsible for higher education. All institutions that offer higher education qualification must be recognized by the United Kingdom and Scottish Parliaments and by the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies. The department differentiates between recognized bodies (i.e. institutions which have been granted degree awarding powers) and listed bodies (i.e. institutions that do not have the power to award their own degrees but can provide full courses which lead to a degree of a recognized body) as well as recognized awards (i.e. institutions or bodies which can award degrees which are unique to them, but do not have the powers to award any degree.)

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Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI08/FHEQ08.pdf>

Similar to the NQF, the FHEQ covers qualifications provided by universities and other higher education institutions. The framework covers levels 4 to 8 and is meant to broadly compare to the NQF so that students can transfer from vocational to more academic routes. The framework is also meant to correspond broadly with the three sequential 'cycles' from the Bologna Process. Universities and colleges in the United Kingdom are independent and self-governing. However, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), which developed the FHEQ, is an independent body that serves as a quality assurance agency, ensuring that these institutions uphold academic standards.

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European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf

Introduced in 1999 as part of the Bologna Process, ECTS refers to the European Union (EU) standard for comparing higher education study attainment and performance of students across the EU in order to recognize international qualifications and facilitate greater academic mobility. Six ECTS credits represent one academic year or 1500 to 1800 hours, whereby one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work.

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Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) Points:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/standardsandquality/credit/default.asp>

In 2001, the four credit bodies on the United Kingdom, Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW), Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS), the Northern Universities Consortium for Credit Accumulation and the Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer released a joint publication that introduced the CATS Points. The point system, which is increasingly adopted by universities and colleges in the United Kingdom, awards one credit for 10 notional hours of learning. Typically, each coursework or module is assigned 10, 15, 20, 30 or 60 credit points. Students are required to complete a certain number of points per year (as well as a certain number overall) depending on the qualifications. The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) that is to be introduced by the end of 2010 seeks to provide better correspondence with the CATS points in order to facilitate transfer of credits from the vocational/ professional streams into the academic streams.

NOTES:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL):

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/apl/apl.pdf>

The Credit Framework makes provisions for higher education awarding bodies in order to recognize learning that may have taken place in previous academic (Accreditation of Prior Certified Learning) or work-related (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) settings. In 2004, the QAA laid out clear guidelines and policies and procedures that institutions must follow in order to recognize such learning and award credit for it.

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