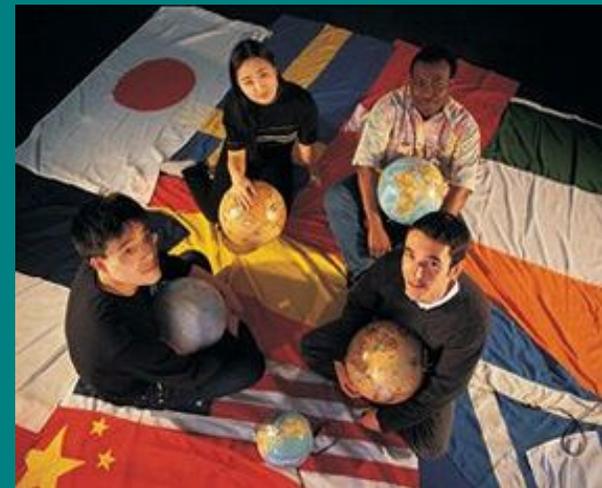


# Motivations and experiences of UK students studying abroad

- Centre for Applied Population Research (University of Dundee) and
- Sussex Centre for Migration Research (University of Sussex)
  
- Funded by: Department of Business, Innovation and Skills



Presentation to UK Students Abroad event. London 20<sup>th</sup> April 2011

# Outline

- Introduction to the research project
- Motivations for and experiences of mobility
- Institutional framing of student mobility
- Conclusions

# Introduction

Focus:  
UK students who are  
“diploma mobile” in  
international HE



## Methodology

### School survey

Questionnaire survey of over 2000 final year school pupils  
Interviews with school career advisers and guidance teachers

### International student survey

Questionnaire survey of 560 UK students studying abroad in six countries  
Interviews with 80 students and 20 officers in International Offices of foreign HEIs

### Meta-analysis of national and international secondary data

# Best estimates of UK students studying abroad, 2006-07

Researchers' total estimate – 20,473

Of which –	USA receives	8438
	Ireland	2282
	Australia	1783
	France	1620
	Germany	464

- UK diploma-mobile students abroad account for the equivalent of 1.7% of all UK students enrolled in HE
- The number is growing

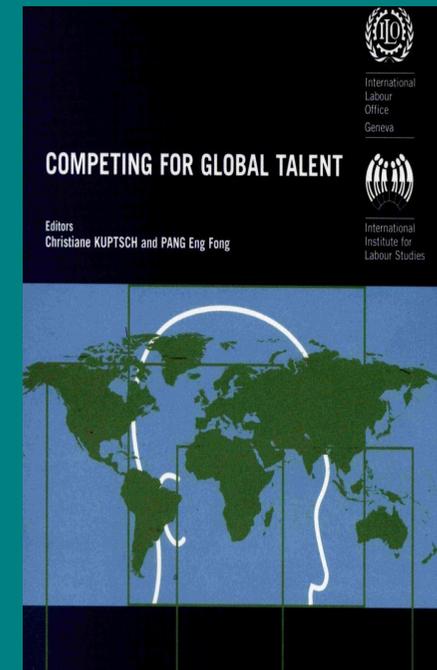
(See [Metadata Report](#) for detailed analysis of secondary sources)

# Introduction

- The processes are socially and spatially uneven
- Our school survey shows many more school pupils would like to study abroad
- Yet little is known of the phenomenon
- Should it be seen as a potential brain drain or an essential aspect of global integration?
- Is it only about labour force issues?

# Conceptualising International Student Mobility

- **Human capital** theories interpret the competition for global talent as a key driver of attempts to increase international student numbers
- **Cultural capital** arguments see the increase of international student numbers as driven by social structures and as a means of reproducing social distinction through mobility
- The **globalisation of higher education** produces an uneven supply and demand in the international HE market
- Others see this as part of **youth transitions** to adulthood and independence



# Motivations and experiences of UK students abroad

# School Survey Results

## Study abroad by school type (% of all pupils)

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Year 13 school pupils who were UK nationals

State %  
(n = 655)

Independent %  
(n = 586)

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Proportions  
applying abroad

2.8

5.5

Proportion that  
considered  
applying but did  
not do so in the end

10.2

14.9

Both answers

13.0

20.4

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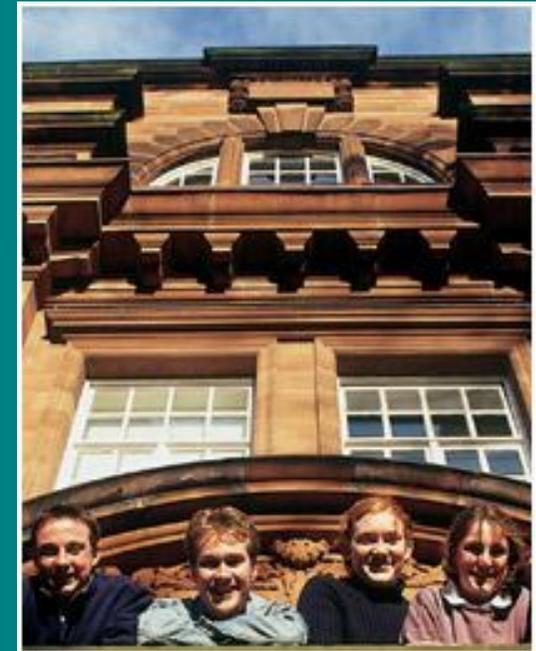
# Evidence of Selectivity in Applications to Study Abroad

- Gender – female more than male
- Ethnicity - 'White' and 'Chinese' more than others
- Educational Ability – applications highest among those with 3 A levels at A
- Socio-economic background – applications highest from those from the professional and managerial classes
- Institutional effects – Independent/ private more than state

# International Student Survey

Seeking to understand:

- Motivations
- Experiences
- Future plans



# Declared motivations for international mobility

Determinant/motivation	Percentage of applicable responses rated as very important
Determined to attend a world class university	55.0
Study outside the UK was an opportunity for a unique adventure	50.4
The first step towards an international career	33.8
Limited course places at a UK university to study a favoured discipline	24.1
Student fees in the UK	18.6
Family encouragement to study outside UK	11.6

# Experience of Studying Abroad – the benefits

	Studying abroad very worthwhile in terms of... (%)
Enhanced academic and professional knowledge	59.6
Personal development	58.9
New ways of thinking about UK	44.8
General career prospects	40.5
Potential for international career	40.5
Understanding of another country	37.5

# A “world class” education

- Students had a clear sense of a global hierarchy of HEIs
- “... I always thought that good universities were more preferential to what I wanted to study. [...] In England [sic] I felt like that my only real options were either to go to Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh or Durham. And I only got Edinburgh as an offer. And then my dad suggested... because my dad went to school over in Ireland... and he said ‘Why don’t you just do a CAO application alongside your UCAS, just so it gives you more options?’.” [Anna, Trinity College, Dublin]

# “It’s the reputation that’s the thing...”

- Many were positively looking for an ‘international reputation’, key specialisms or different attitudes to education
- “... it’s the reputation that’s the thing. [My career guidance teachers] wouldn’t have encouraged you to go to some... state university of Alabama. But if it was Harvard or Berkeley... the Ivy League then...” [Finlay, TCD]
- “I will likely be working overseas, so if that’s the case I need to go to an institution that has an international reputation. I had no interest of studying at Oxford or Cambridge. So I only considered ANU because I didn’t consider any other University in Australia to be world renowned. [...] It was kind of SOAS; Hawaii, Stanford, Columbia and then the next the next most published place on my subject was ANU.” [Ellen, ANU]

# Student Mobility in relation to wider Mobility trajectories

Intentions	Country of study		
	Ireland	Australia	USA
Never return to UK	16.8	50.0	25.0
Return to UK only after working elsewhere	45.6	14.7	26.6
Return to UK to work after graduating	24.0	14.7	10.9
Other	13.6	20.6	37.5
Total	100	100	100

**Brain drain? Or brain gain? Many of the best students were less likely to want to settle abroad in long term**

**UK students' future mobility intentions cross-tabulated by A-level results (%)**

	3 A levels at A or B grade	Less than 3 A levels at A or B grade
Return to the UK to work after study	22.0	20.7
Return to work in UK after a period of work outside UK	30.2	16.8
Not intending to return	18.1	35.5
Other	29.7	27.0
	100	100

# Impact of fees and access to places\*

Table of % stating 'limited places' and 'fees' as important or very important (columns) by destination

Country	Limited Places	Fees
Czech Republic	90.0	17.6
Ireland	53.8	69.2
Australia	38.5	36.2
USA	37.3	25.0
France	25.0	60.0
Germany	16.7	100.0

\* Research undertaken prior to 2010 and announcements of changes in fees in UK.

# Relative economics of mobility...

- “It is actually cheaper for me to come here than stay at home... Yeah, the financial aid here is really good. If your household income is under GBP£ 60.000 than you have to pay nothing towards your costs... in term of your tuition, your housing, your food, even travel expenses they’ll cover... bus expenses and books and so on. So they will expect your parents to pay or you to pay nothing... towards your education, so that’s pretty impressive” [Ben, Harvard]
- 33% of students were dominantly funded by their parents
- 24% of students had received grants or bursaries from their host institution

# Looking for adventure

- Emphasising independence and doing something distinctive...
- Less 'strategic' than migrating for a particular career plan.
- “I was 16 when I came the first time, met some German friends here, and then came to Berlin on holidays. So I had an independent kind of style. [...] I wanted to do things like that, I wanted to have my independence.”  
[Calum, Berlin]

# The institutional framing of student mobility

Observations from the USA

# Conclusions

- UK students do not make international mobility choices in a neutral environment
- Social segmentation
- Concepts of a “ world class” education, specialist knowledge and reputation are central
- Future mobility and career trajectories suggest brain “exchange” in global flows of talent, rather than brain “drain”
- Patterns of mobility, structured by the international business of HE and national migration policies produce an uneven geography of international student mobility
- The ‘distinction’ provided by international mobility may be about adventure and independence, as much as about an international career.

# Further information

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- Main project report - <http://www.dius.gov.uk/~media/publications/B/BIS-RP-008>
- Metadata analysis <http://www.dius.gov.uk/~media/publications/B/BIS-RP-008A>