Abstract

This paper examines the attitudes and plans of Year 13 (final-year secondary school or 'upper sixth form') pupils towards studying at university abroad. Our main empirical base is a questionnaire survey of more than 1400 Year 13 pupils in a stratified sample of schools and sixth-form colleges, both state and independent sector, in two parts of England (Brighton and Sussex, and Leicester and Leicestershire). In addition, 15 face-to-face interviews were taken with teachers and HE advisers in the schools surveyed, and follow-up telephone interviews were made with 20 pupils from the questionnaire survey. The objectives of the research were, firstly, to discover the proportions of school-leavers who are applying to study at a non-UK university, or who had considered doing so but not actually gone ahead with the application, and which countries and universities they were attracted to. Against this orientation to (think about) studying abroad as the key dependent variable, the paper analyses several independent variables, based on quantitative data drawn from the questionnaire results and informed by insights from the qualitative interviews. These include pupils' academic profile, type of school, gender and ethnic heritage, parental socio-economic class, and family and personal links (prior residence abroad, travel experiences, friends or relatives who had studied abroad etc.). Results show that students applying abroad, or who considered this option, are academic high-achievers and high-aspirers, more likely to come from independent schools, have parents who are in the higher socio-occupational classes (managers, directors, professionals, teachers etc.) and who are themselves graduates, and have family links and extensive travel experience abroad. Females are slightly more likely to consider the study-abroad option. The relationship with ethnicity is not clear, except that foreign-domiciled non-UK nationals have a greater propensity to apply to non-UK universities, as do UK-nationals studying at international schools. Overall, however, and for all groups surveyed and interviewed, the study-abroad strategy appears to be supplementary to the dominance of what are widely perceived as the best UK universities, above all Oxford, Cambridge, and the other Russell Group research-intensive universities.

Introduction

Within the global thematic map of migration studies – an interdisciplinary research field nowadays of burgeoning scale – the mobility of students has not been a major focus of concern. Rather, in this so-called 'age of migration' (Castles and Miller 2009), the main academic and policy interest has been concentrated on 'economic' migrants and on refugees and asylum-seekers. However, there are signs of a growing appreciation of the role of students in the evolving patterns of international mobility, not so much because of their numbers – at around 3 million they are a relatively small fraction of the overall 'stock' of 200 million international migrants (King et al. 2010: 84-85) – but because of their strategic importance as 'elite' migrants and as temporary sojourners who may 'convert' into long-term skilled immigrants after graduation in their chosen destination country.

Existing studies of international student mobility (ISM) tackle the phenomenon from a number of different angles. From a human and economic development perspective, the main analytical lenses are the 'brain drain' debate and the rise of international student migration as a multi-billion-dollar global business, where countries like the USA, the UK and Australia are the major beneficiaries (for introductory overviews see Castles and a d s

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Teichler 1996). Other studies view ISM as part of a broader canvas of 'knowledge mobility' and the migration and circulation of academic and scientific talent (Ackers and Gill 2008; Byram and Dervin 2008; Gürüz 2008; Solimano 2008).

Attempts to theoretically frame ISM reflect some of the above perspectives (Findlay et al. 2005, 2006: 292-294). It is seen as part of skilled migration, either amongst highly-developed countries or (with links to brain drain) from lesser- to more-developed countries; as part of the globalisation of higher education; or as part of youth mobility and consumption cultures in which 'going abroad' is seen as a rite of passage and a means of accumulating 'mobility capital' (Murphy-Lejeune 2002). In their recent research on the international mobility of Hong Kong and UK students, Brooks and Waters have drawn attention to the way in which ISM is embedded within structures of social class reproduction and elite formation (Brooks and Waters 2009; Waters 2006, 2009; Waters and Brooks 2010).

Meanwhile, empirical studies (which include much of the literature already cited above) tend to focus either on students' mobility behaviour and experiences

education.[2] 'Leakage' of UK-domiciled students to non-UK universities, where they are 'lost' from the national figures, could therefore compromise achieving these targets. This is the concern. Second there is a component. This refers to the issue of selectivity: is it the 'brightest and best' of the UK's aspiring university students who seek to study abroad, or are there other selection filters?

This leads us to a more explicit statement of research questions, limiting them to those which can be realistically answered by a fairly large-scale questionnaire survey of 'Year 13' (final-year) school students who have recently applied to university or other form of HE. As we shall see, this statistical evidence is supported by interviews with sixth-form heads and HE advisers in a range of different institutions, and follow-up telephone interviews with a small sample of school-leavers. The following questions reflect those listed by the commissioning body of this research.

1. What proportion of school-leavers aspiring to enter HE are applying, or thinking of applying, to study abroad?
2. For those who are applying, or considering applying, to study abroad, which countries, institutions, and subject areas are they oriented towards?
3. Does the type of school hold an influence? The main contrast we wish explore here is that between state schools (comprehensives, sixth-form colleges etc.) and the independent, fee-paying sector. What kinds of information, advice and support are available within the school environment? What kinds of direct overseas linkages do schools have – school trips, exchanges, twinning arrangements etc?
4. What is the academic profile of those who wish to study abroad?
5. Are demographic factors relevant, such as pupils' gender and ethnic origin?
6. What is the role of parental educational and occupational background in framing the propensity to want, or be advised, to pursue studies abroad?
7. What is the role of personal and family links abroad? Here we aim to identify the possible relevance of prior residence outside the UK, travel and holiday experience, parents' foreign residential history, and other family members or close friends who have studied at university abroad.

When we come to the results and analysis part of this paper, we will revisit these research questions and restate them in more formalised hypotheses.

Research design and methodology

The core research instrument was a questionnaire survey of 1400 sixth-form or equivalent pupils, backed up by in-depth interviews with 15 guidance teachers and advisers charged with managing their respective schools' applications to university. Most of the material in this paper is derived from these two principal research instruments. A third, relatively minor, part of the research design was 20 follow-up telephone interviews with Year 13 university applicants who had applied to study abroad, or thought about applying, and who had indicated on their questionnaire their willingness to be contacted this way.

We selected two parts of England to administer the questionnaire survey and the teacher/adviser interviews: Brighton and Sussex in the South East of England, and Leicester and Leicestershire in the East Midlands. Both areas consist of one medium-sized city with a constellation of surrounding smaller towns and rural districts. Brighton/Sussex was deemed

[2] These targets were those of the previous Labour government. The present Coalition government's commitment to attaining these targets may well be less.

to complete on average, with a range between 10 and 20 minutes. It was filled in on the hard-copy version, either in special sessions (such as morning assembly) organised by the schools with the researchers present, or distributed via tutor groups, and collected by the researchers on a later visit or posted back to the research team at the University of Sussex. The on-site methods worked very well on the whole, and we are extremely grateful to the schools for facilitating this exercise.

The questionnaire was designed to provide useful data to answer, or at least shed light on, the research aims listed above. The questionnaire was divided into five sections that mainly involved closed questions, simple to tick or write a one-word response, with a few spaces for elaborations where it was thought necessary or useful. Section 1 documents the respondents' current studies: A2 and AS levels or other qualifications. Section 2 records past studies, mainly GCSE grades. Section 3 asks the important questions about plans to study at university, including universities applied for. The key question here is 3.3 which asks about applying to study abroad – whether respondents are actually doing this; or whether they considered applying abroad, but then decided not to. Other questions in section 3 elicit motivation for (not) applying to study abroad, levels of information and guidance available etc. Section 4 asks about pupils' previous links outside the UK (travel, holidays, residence abroad), and section 5 collects general demographic data, both for respondents and their parents, including the education and occupations of the latter.[3]

The second research instrument was a target-sample of staff interviews. We interviewed, in most institutions where the questionnaire was administered, the corresponding local 'key informant' – usually the head of sixth form, HE adviser or other such strategic person. These interviews, which usually lasted between 20 minutes and one hour, yielded useful insights based on the interviewees' accumulated experience of monitoring HE applications over many years. The staff interviews were recorded (permission was always sought, and granted in all cases) and subsequently transcribed. The interviewees were offered the chance to

[3] The questionnaire is available to researchers on request: please contact Russell King or Jill Ahrens.

England were 700 questionnaire returns in Leicester(shire), 700 for Brighton and Sussex, 700 state-school pupils, 700 independent-

population (subject to the same caveat). Our reasons for an equal sample stratification between state and independent schools, rather than a representative sample divide, will become apparent later.

Results

We divide the presentation of our survey results into several subsections. We start with the basic questions,

of university applications are applying to study abroad, or have at least thought about this possibility? We then move on to examine the

of the prospectively internationally mobile pupils/students and the potential

them from those, the vast majority, who do not have the same inclinations to pursue their university degrees outside the UK. Throughout the analysis, we mix questionnaire results with extracts from interviews with teachers and HE advisers in the schools surveyed and with occasional quotes from the telephone interviews with pupils.[6]

Table 2 sets out the questionnaire results for answers to the key question 3.3: 'Have you ever thought about applying to a non-UK university?' Responses to the two possible positive answers are tabulated for the two sample types described above, together with the percentage proportions, for both the Leicester sample and the Sussex sample, as well as the total sample. For the standard sample the totals are 700 each for Leicester and Sussex and 1400 overall; for the narrow sample, net of the overseas pupils, the totals are 636 for [redacted] and 605 for Sussex. In other words, overseas peinatit270(pou)6(ue)3y

[6] It has to be said that the telephone interviews with pupils did not work very well. Often it was difficult to find a time (either cold-calling or by prior emailing) to have the conversation, and their recollections of filling out the questionnaire were sometimes very vague. We attained the target of 20 interviews, but many of them were very short.

any. I can’t remember the last time we

To round off this first series of interviews on numbers applying (and going) abroad, we can hear from the HE adviser to a large, ethnically diverse, sixth-form college in Inner London:

> Only a few end up going abroad. I would say out of a year group of 400 or 500 students we would get only a handful who would actually go ahead and apply… maybe one per cent… Usually [to] America, occasionally Canada. Occasionally we get the sports scholarship type student (IL1).

Although few of the staff interviewees were able to give precise percentages on how many pupils had applied (or had actually gone) to study abroad, we have the impression that the figures and estimates given ('hardly any', 'only a handful' etc.), when measured against the sizes of the schools' university-applicant cohorts, were less than 1-2 per cent, and therefore below the outcomes given on Table 2.

If there is a discrepancy, why might pupils have higher study-abroad inclinations than their teachers think they have? We suggest a number of reasons.

First, teachers were more focused on the relatively few cases of (former) pupils who had to study abroad, whereas the questionnaire respondents were replying on the basis of of studying abroad. If we consider the 'middle ground' of those who had actually made applications, we can observe more congruence, although the teachers' evidence is mainly impressionistic rather than statistical.

Second, applications might be made without the teachers knowing. The teachers and advisers are mostly responsible for managing the UCAS system of applying to UK institutions of higher education. Pupils might be working with the help of their parents, friends or private tutors to make applications abroad, unbeknownst to their schools. Or, pupils might be planning a Gap Year and thinking of applying abroad at a later stage. A few of the teachers admitted to these possibilities:

> So when they go off and make their own research [referring to those looking for sports scholarships

fo (S9)al.

teachers' main task, and hence their socio-psychological (if not financial) 'reward', is to get their pupils into (good) UK universities. There is probably no reward for placing them abroad, and this is mainly outside their job remit as they see it.

Third, pupils may have inserted a positive answer to question 3.3 on a partial misinterpretation that it could also refer to UK degrees with a year or semester at a foreign university.[7] Certainly many teachers and advisers – virtually all of them in fact – mentioned that the 'Erasmus route' of studying abroad for up to a year within the framework of a UK degree was a more attractive proposition than doing the entire degree at a foreign university. Two typical quotes:

> They are interested in studying abroad, they are interested in universities that offer an Erasmus year... They like the idea of having a British base and of having a year in the middle and spending it abroad (L1).

> I think that those who have done Modern Languages are more likely to apply to a UK university that offers the Erasmus scheme or would be looking to a university that offers a one-year placement abroad as part of the degree course [than apply to do a full programme abroad] (L5).

Fourth, whilst recording students who have left to study abroad or who are actually applying to do so is a relatively objective measure, the notion of having 'thought of' studying abroad is far more imprecise, ranging from serious consideration and active research into the options, to a fleeting thought or passing whim. No doubt the relatively much greater share of students (around one eighth) who ticked the response 'I thought about it but decided not to apply abroad' embraces a range of depth of 'thought'. Teacher and adviser interviews again shed light on this process,

[7] The questionnaire wording was quite clear that this is not what is being asked, but given the circumstances in which

Prior quotes given in the earlier sections of this report have indicated that applying to study abroad seems to be heavily

> Somewhere in the region of 70 per cent of our students are of non-white-British origin... Asian and Black African, now more East European... [Some of] these students come to us not having been in the country very long... So the cultural mix is extreme and the social mix probably equally diverse... The higher socio-economic groups are definitely students who have come to us through the county schools... [Regarding universities] Midland universities, and that is culturally driven, it's about Asian students not moving away from home. So Leicester, DMU [De Montfort University], Coventry, Aston, Warwick and to some extent the Nottingham universities... and Birmingham and maybe I should add Loughborough as well... these are the main attractors... I mean it's nice that we are next to what was voted 'University of the Year' [Leicester University], so why would you want to move somewhere else if that is on your doorstep? It is the cultural expectation of these kids [referring to the Asian-heritage pupils] and it is particularly for girls to stay at home... [The white population] are far more diverse across the country and take the gap years... (L6).

The Sussex staff interviews generally

Table 4 Study abroad: revised estimates (all data %)

	Standard sample (n = 1400)				Narrow sample (n = 1241)		
	all schools	state sector	indep. sector	weighted average	all schools	state sector	indep. sector

per cent in the state sector and 10.9 per cent in the independent schools.[9] These percentages are used to weight the re-calculation of the combined averages of the state and independent sector responses – see the final column under 'standard sample' and under 'narrow sample' in Table 4. These 'weighted averages' represent our final estimate of the 'real' proportions of English pupils who are applying to study abroad (3.8 per cent for the standard sample, 3.1 per cent for the narrow one), or who thought about applying and did not go ahead (11.0 and 10.7 per cent for the two samples respectively).

The data in Table 4, particularly the final-column weighted averages, are critical as they enable us to make broad estimates of the absolute numbers applying abroad (though not those who actually go, which is unknown). Moreover such a calculation demonstrates that many more apply from the state sector than from independent schools. True, the independent sector has an application rate to study abroad which is twice that of state schools (5.5 vs. 2.8 per cent for the narrow sample, i.e. excluding overseas pupils); but the fact that the state sector contains eight times the number of 16-18 year-olds means that the absolute numbers are likely to be four times greater from the state sector. Using the DCSF data referred to above, dividing the 16-18 years cohort by two, and assuming that all pupils are potential university applicants (but of course a minority are not), we arrive at the following figures, based on the narrow sample. For those actually applying abroad, the overall ballpark figure is 5000, made up of slightly less than 1000 independent-sector pupils and slightly more than 4000 state pupils. For those who merely thought about applying and did not do so, the estimates are around 17,700 overall, comprising 15,000 state and 2700 independent sector pupils. The standard sample results are somewhat higher, but they are compromised by the distorting effect of the overseas pupils.

One of the surprising outcomes of the survey research in schools was the scale of the presence of foreign students who had been sent to Britain by their foreign-resident parents to study for secondary-level qualifications, especially A-levels, in order to gain entry to UK universities. As noted earlier, this group also tends to have higher rates of application to non-UK universities, usually alongside UCAS applications; and this group constitutes the 'difference' between the standard and narrow samples of our questionnaire analysis.

As non-UK nationals, these pupils do not fit within the strict remit of the research that we were commissioned to undertake by DIUS and then BIS. Indeed, in one sense they are migrating in the opposite direction to UK students who go abroad for their

[9] These data refer to '16-18 year-old candidates entered for level 3 qualifications at least equivalent in size to one A level'. The data do not filter out A-level pupils who do not apply for university, who are likely to be more numerous at state-sector institutions. These pupil statistics are from DCSF: GCE/VCE/Applied A/ AS and Equivalent Results in England, 2007/08 (Revised). Source: http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000827/index.shtml (accessed 27 April 2009)

university education. But they are worth saying a little bit about, for several reasons.

> wouldn't get in [to Oxbridge]... nearly all of them would put in a British application at the same time. They do it dual, and if they don't get into Oxford and Cambridge, they want them to get into Harvard. The Hong Kong Chinese are slightly different, because again they put in dual application and if they don't succeed over here, their fallback is to go to Hong Kong (S1).

Intriguingly, the overseas pupils studying in English schools have their mirror-image in the form of UK-nationals studying at international schools abroad. Yet in some respects the behaviour of the latter group is quite different. Questionnaire data from a small-scale survey of UK-nationals at international schools in Europe (107 pupils responded) reveals that 93 per cent were in the process of applying to study abroad (i.e. outside the country where they are currently studying); of these, two-thirds were applying to UK universities (not necessarily exclusively).[11] Only 3 per cent of the international-school sample had thought about applying abroad but did not go ahead, and only 4 per cent had not contemplated foreign study. The general picture from the international schools is that the best students academically are those who are set on getting into UK universities, using other countries' universities as a back-up. Nevertheless, despite this UK-orientation, international schools' UK-national pupils do have a higher tendency than UK-resident pupils to apply to non-UK universities, so this channel of higher education international mobility should not be ignored.

The interview extracts from the teachers and advisers quoted earlier give a clear indication of the range of countries which are targeted by pupils aspiring or thinking to move abroad for their higher education. Summing up from the various quotes already given, the English-speaking countries loom large, above all the United States, Canada, Australia and Ireland. Additionally, some of the foreign students will return to their home countries for their university education, either as a fall-back to not getting into world-class universities, such as the Hong Kong Chinese (see the quote immediately above), or as part of their planned educational progression, such as many of the Germans.

Question 3.3 on the main questionnaire asked those who are applying to study abroad and those who thought about applying, to name their preferred country. Table 5 sets out the answers for the two samples. The United States is the dominant destination accounting for half of the narrow-sample responses and four in ten of the standard sample. The main difference between the standard and narrow samples, apart from the aggregate numbers responding (211 vs. 147), is the German and East Asian (mainly Chinese) effect: the narrow sample has far fewer respondents for these countries. Filtering out the non-UK respondents reveals the dominant Anglophone nature of the top destinations: in order of importance the US (51.0 per cent), Australia/NZ (13.6 per cent), Ireland (11.6 per cent) and Canada (5.4 per cent). Note that Ireland attracts more than half of those opting for a European destination. Our data indicate very little UK-domiciled student movement to continental European

[11] This survey was administered by Allan Findlay and his colleagues at Dundee, who sent the questionnaire to a small selection of European international schools where there were significant numbers of sons and daughters of British 'expats' attending.

Several questions on the questionnaire allow us to explore this relationship.

We tested the association between A-level predicted performance and applying to study abroad for both the standard and the narrow samples. In order to simplify the analysis, we collapsed the two answer columns 'Yes, but not applying' and 'No' into one, 'Not applying'. Table 7 sets out the revised data and the chi-square test for this association, and shows that the results are significant, more so for the standard sample than the narrow version.

Given the conjectural nature of A-level predicted grades, we feel we are on safer ground with GCSEs since these represent actual, rather than projected, grades obtained. Again we have a threefold division of scores (see Table 6, bottom

Table 8 Applying to university abroad by GCSE results

	Standard sample		Narrow sample	
GCSE scores	Applying	Not applying	Applying	Not applying
7+ at A* and A	36	483	25	460
7+ at A or B	12	415	9	

the UK and a propensity to consider applying to study abroad. The small difference between the percentages for Oxbridge and pre-1992 universities means that the chi-square statistic for the top part of Table 9 is not significant. For those who are actually applying, the Oxbridge and pre-1992 categories are close; the gap comes with the post-1992 type – 7.8 down to 3.2 per cent.

For those who considered applying, but did not follow that through, the percentage scores are more evenly spaced across the three categories. A clearer contrast is evident for the Top-10 group of universities: those who had at least three of their UCAS choices as top-10 ranked universities were more likely to consider also the foreign option. Table 10 verifies the significance, following the model of Tables 7 and 8.

The dual or linked hypotheses that propensity to apply, or consider applying, to study abroad, are correlated with academic high-performers and with applicants to the top UK universities are supported by interview evidence, both teachers and pupils. Here is an interview extract from the Assistant Principal of S4, a Sussex independent boarding school:

> We had for example a guy from here… actually he had dual nationality and he got offers from Oxford and Yale and somewhere else in America… and he chose Yale over the others. But I mean that is a very unusual case not just because he was very talented but because we don't have many applications [from British pupils] to America. So, yes, we track them [the applications abroad], but it isn't difficult because there are so few and they tend to be outstanding… outstandingly good.

A not dissimilar story surfaced in the pupil interviews where the 'Oxbridge types' or those who had failed to get into Oxbridge first time round thought about the United States:

> Yes, we [classmates] talk about studying overseas. Obviously while we've been applying [for UCAS] we've been talking about it quite a lot… especially now that we're getting our offers. One of the guys in the year above us has just gone to an American university. So the people that haven't [got their main offers] this year or those who are re-applying to

Table 9 Answers to the question 'Have you thought about applying to a non-UK university?' by type of university applied for: standard sample

	Yes, and applying		Yes, not applying		No		Total
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	
UK university type (n = 1192)							
Oxbridge	13	8.1	33				

Cambridge are thinking about re-applying as well, because it sounds quite exciting. But I think that most people, if they are not applying for a languages degree where you have a year abroad... I think most people think about travelling rather than going abroad... or the couple that are thinking about applying abroad are going to English-speaking universities in America or wherever... So yeah there is quite a lot of awareness of opportunities out there... [but] everyone is just more willing to stick in their comfort zone [laughs] (Sp6).

I think that [applying to America] is just for the Oxbridge kind of people – maybe they are told 'Why don't you apply to the Ivy League?' (Sp10).

This is the hypothesis on which there is already plenty of published and other recent survey evidence, much of it linked to wider questions of broadening access to HE amongst pupils from lower socio-economic family backgrounds. For instance, the recent Sutton Trust report on intergenerational mobility and access to HE in the UK found that there was no evidence of improving intergenerational mobility and, moreover, the UK remains low in international comparisons of social mobility when compared to other advanced nations (Blanden and Machin 2008). HEFCE-sponsored research on Erasmus and Year Abroad mobility found a correlation between international mobility and social class (based on linking the HESA and Erasmus datasets), and a further

correlation between credit mobility and parental education – in terms of whether the student's mother and/or father had a degree (HEFCE 2004; also see Findlay et al. 2006: 303-304). There is also a wider literature on the intergenerational transfer of educational and cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu 1986; Findlay et al. 2006; Reay et al. 2005).

On the questionnaire, a question asked if the respondent's parents had university-level education. Possible answers are 'both', 'yes, my father, 'yes, my mother', and 'neither'. Parents' level of education split the sample as follows: 40.6 per cent had neither parents with education at university level; 32.7 per cent had both parents; and 26.7 per cent had one parent university-educated, made up of 18.3 per cent fathers only and

The ‘Other’ category is by nature heterogeneous and so stands somewhat apart, especially for the ‘applying to study abroad’ answer. From this, we can deduce that parental occupational class, which comprises bot

students who engage in international study for credit.

Unlike the female-dominated Erasmus flows with their strong association with foreign-language degrees, our questionnaire data exhibit only moderate sex-selectivity. Table 14 shows that there is a greater tendency for females to apply, and consider applying abroad; however, this difference is at the margins of statistical significance (based on chi-square values applied to dichotomised 'applying' and 'not applying' columns). At least as far as the standard sample is concerned – where p = .057 – the male:female ratio is slightly more marked for those actually applying to go abroad; for the narrow sample this gender difference is rather less evident.[15]

The situation with ethnicity is much more complex. Whereas sex is a dichotomous variable, ethnicity is not (except in an artificial and simplistic division into 'white' and 'non-white'). Leicester is a particularly emblematic place to examine for ethnicity-related research because of the city's now-exactly-equal division between its white population and the 'non-white' population, which is predominantly Indian. But there is a rather specific geography to this division, which reflects itself in a particular way in enrolment. The city itself is very 'Asian' and therefore all secondary schools in the city and its suburbs have large shares of Asian-heritage pupils. This applies also to the

[15] Our interpretation of this difference is that foreign-

ownership), mainly inhabited by working-class white people. Otherwise the city and its adjacent rural areas and small towns (Lewes, Haywards Heath, Horsham etc.) have a predominantly middle-class population, with managers, directors, professionals and teachers over-represented vis-à-vis the country as a whole.

Having set out in some detail the necessary background context, let us turn to the questionnaire data. Table 15 presents the full 'raw' data for 'apply abroad' and 'thought about applying but did not' cross-tabulated with ethnic origin, for the standard sample. Several things to note here. First is the numerical dominance of two groups of respondents: 'White-UK/Irish' and 'Indian'. At 840 and 234 respectively they make up 80 per cent of the sample who answered the 'ethnic' question (n=1347). Second, we note from the 'total' column of the table that the ethnic groups are unequally distributed between the two regions: to facilitate this comparison, the Leicester data (as the most 'ethnic') are put in brackets. Leicester accounts for 227 out of 234 of the ethnic Indian respondents, or 94 per cent, and 13 of the 16 Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic-origin respondents. On the other hand, Leicester accounts for below-par proportions of most other groups, including White-UK/Irish (42 per cent), White European (37 per cent), Chinese (25 per cent), and Black-African (42 per cent). Third, even from the raw figures we can observe that there are certain groups which are more abroad-oriented than others, notably the categories 'White European' and 'Chinese'. Table 16 selects out of the main ethnic groups and presents the relevant data in percentage form to bring out this comparison more clearly.

The results show that both the White-UK/Irish and South Asian groups have very low propensities to apply to study at a foreign university (3.6 and 4.0 per cent respectively), whereas the White European and Chinese rates are, at 30.0 and 41.7 per cent, around ten times higher. When we look at the second option on Table 16, three ethnicities, the two 'White' groups and Chinese, all post similar rates of 12-15 per cent, whereas the South Asians are much lower at 5.6 per cent. The two groups which are by far the most oriented to the possibility of moving to university abroad – the White European and Chinese – are, however, precisely the two groups which are more likely to be 'non-British'. This is clearly revealed when we check the 'narrow sample' figures (those in brackets in Table 16), which show that the vast majority of these respondents are not long-term British

Table 15 Study abroad by ethnic origin: standard sample

Ethnic origin	Yes, and applying	Yes, not applying	Subtotal	No	Total	(Leicester)
White-UK/Irish	30	125	155	685	840	(335)
White European	18					

residents. For the South Asian groups there is an interesting gender dimension – the

> going to choose Bristol [because it is too far away] they are not going to study in Brussels (L6).

Finally, it is worth listening in to part of the long interview with lL1 which gives an Inner-London perspective which certainly replicates some of the Leicester issues of university application patterns from ethnic-minority pupils (especially Asian-heritage), but also raises other important factors, such as finance and the emotional concerns of single-parent families.

> We are a London sixth-

Overall, the situation portrayed is one of few students taking one or more languages at A-level: only 146 out of 1320 or one in nine. Two-thirds of these are Arts students. These small numbers limit the statistical analysis: all we can say with confidence is that, for Arts students, doing a language (or two) at A-level approximately doubles the chances of considering studying abroad. For Science students the problem of small numbers makes comparison even more difficult.

The background to this is the well-known long-term decline in the uptake of languages at A-level (and GCSE) in English and UK schools. This drop-off is especially the case for the 'traditional' European foreign languages, French and German; Spanish and Italian are holding up better.[17] The downturn in languages was noted in several of the staff interviews. For example:

> We are part of a national trend, I think, that languages are being studied less. However, we have some very high-achieving boys, and some of our best students go off to do languages. A big factor of that is the excitement of the Year Abroad… because I talked to them about the process and UCAS and advising and so on, and they are abuzz with it (L3).

> There aren't that many applications [for university] in Modern Languages. I mean they do fall through the school right from Year 9 onwards… [We have] French, German, Spanish and Italian – so you know in that sense it's a healthy state. But we don't have that many applications. What we do have is people applying for a dual course somewhere… often the degrees have a Year Abroad (S4).

> Languages, I am afraid to say, are no longer part of our programme here. Having said that, many of our students speak two or three languages fluently… and English is not always their strongest language… It is, I suppose, the best word to use is ironic; there is a linguistic richness in the college… But in terms of Modern Foreign Languages… there is a little bit of Spanish going on here, connected with Tourism and Travel at advanced level. But we don't have French on the curriculum any more… We have an arrangement with a couple of students who want to study French and they do it at [names another Leicester sixth-form college] for example (L7).

The second contextual element is that foreign language study at degree level is

[17] On the other hand, the increasing ethnic and national diversity of the UK's school population does bring in pupils with varying knowledge of many other languages. Amongst those mentioned were, in Leicester state schools, Dutch (from Somali refugee families onward-migrating from the Netherlands to the UK), Arabic and a variety of Asian languages (above all Gujerati); and in Leicester and Sussex independent schools, Chinese and Russian. From the interview and questionnaire evidence, however, none of these languages has much relevance to university destination choice.

generally combined with credit mobility – a year or semester abroad at a foreign university or some other form of 'foreign experience' such as a work placement. This is commented on by L3 and S3 immediately above and also earlier interview quotes. A prospective Erasmus student summed it up like this:

> Actually, because I am doing Politics, Philosophy and Economics, you can

Table 18 Study abroad by various personal, family and information factors: standard sample (narrow sample in brackets)

but three other interpretive remarks are in order. First, the picture is somewhat muddied by pupils of immigrant background, for whom foreign languages proficiency and prior residence and travel abroad may have more to do with family migration history than with the kind of more cosmopolitan experience that might logically lead to study in, say, North America, Australia or France. Second, the differences in frequencies between the standard and the narrow samples should be kept in mind. In most cases, these differences attenuate the relationships observed. This attenuation is generally more evident in the first column, on actual

applications abroad, than it is in the second option, on merely considering the possibility of studying abroad (where, for the first two factors in Table 18, there is no rel

Erasmus and we tell them about that...
so we do highlight that to them. But we

To conclude, we affirm that this paper represents the first study on English school-leavers' attitudes and plans of studying at university abroad. It is of relevance to government debates on internationalising the student experience through increased mobility, as evidenced for example in the UK's participation in the Bologna Process of creating a 'European Higher Education Area' and the Prime Minister's Initiatives of Tony Blair (PMI 1 1992; PMI 2 2006) which also favour enhanced international student mobility (Gürüz 2008: 192-195). At a different level, this paper contributes to the still small geographical and social

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