

International students 'keep promoting UK decades after study'

Alumni who studied in the UK consistently more positive about the country as a travel and study destination, finds British Council survey

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Most international students who study in the UK become lifelong advocates for the country, a new global survey has found, with more than 80 per cent recommending British universities long after graduation.

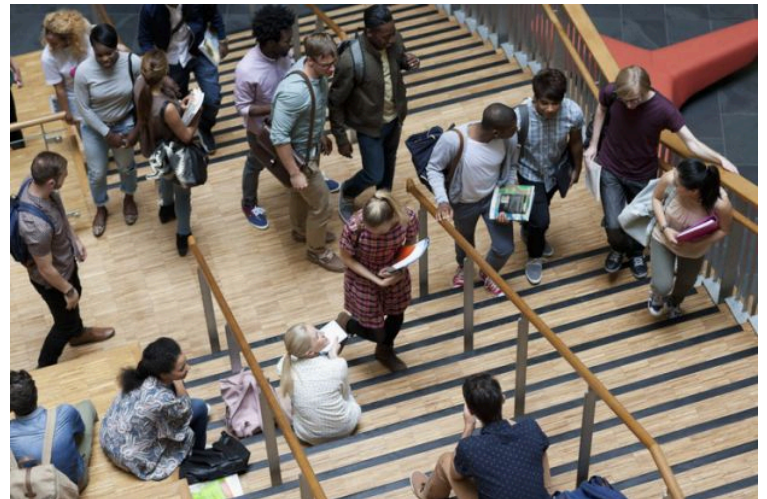
The research, published by the British Council, reveals how UK-educated alumni continue to promote British education, tourism and cultural values for decades, describing their experiences as “life-changing” and “transformative”.

Based on responses from 3,094 alumni across 123 countries, the study found that 84.5 per cent had recommended a UK education within the past 12 months.

Advocacy was even stronger among older alumni, with 78.4 per cent of those who graduated more than 25 years ago still promoting a UK education.

Additionally, 87.8 per cent had recommended the UK as a travel destination in the same period.

The findings, drawn from the second round of the British Council’s Alumni Voices longitudinal survey conducted between November 2024 and January 2025, underline how educational experiences in the UK foster enduring networks and influence.



Source: iStock/David Schaffer

University students walking to lectures



“These alumni often serve as authentic ambassadors for the UK,” said Maddalaine Ansell, director education at the British Council.

“The evidence from this survey shows that their educational experiences foster long-lasting emotional and professional ties that extend far beyond graduation. They consistently show favourable views of the UK and greater trust in its institutions and people, ultimately promoting education, tourism and UK cultural values through personal and professional networks long after they have graduated.”

The report found that more than three-quarters of respondents had contacted or met someone from their UK study experience in the past year, illustrating the enduring social networks built during their time in the UK.

Regional variations in advocacy were also highlighted. Alumni from the Middle East and North Africa were the most likely to recommend UK education (88.6 per cent), closely followed by South Asia (88.2 per cent).

This is seen as particularly significant given the growing importance of South Asia to UK higher education recruitment. (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/uk-recruitment-falters-asian-students-enrol-closer-home>)

In comparison, 81 per cent of alumni from the Americas recommended a UK education, while advocacy levels were notably lower among European Union (EU) respondents, at 64.8 per cent.

Researchers noted that while EU alumni remain broadly positive, their enthusiasm has waned compared with other regions, reflecting wider geopolitical shifts.

With an estimated 2.5 million international students having graduated from UK higher education institutions in the past decade, and 732,285 international students studying in the UK in 2023-24, the report says that the potential for global influence through alumni networks is significant.

The report also found that alumni perceptions of the UK, its people, institutions and global role were consistently more positive than those of their non-alumni peers in G20 countries.

“International alumni are a hugely valuable soft power asset to the UK (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/soft-power-pioneer-policy-clout-loses-edge-outside-government>),” Ansell said. “They go on to serve as advocates not because they are asked to, but because of the authentic and lasting impact their time in the UK has had on them personally and professionally.”

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