

A photograph of four diverse international students sitting together outdoors, looking at a laptop. From left to right: a woman with curly blonde hair and glasses, a man with dark hair and a beard, a woman with long dark hair, and a woman with long blonde hair. They are all smiling and appear to be engaged in a collaborative learning activity.

International students' digital experiences: Key issues in delivering and supporting international students with their digital learning

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Overview

- International students who are studying in the UK at a UK HE provider
- Universities and agencies involved in this project
- International students in the UK: facts and figures
- Differences in digital experience between countries
- Feedback from HE staff working with international students
- Recommendations

The context is changing

- UK higher education embeds digital into teaching and learning like never before; it is now integrated into almost all course processes from course application through to assessment
- Numbers of international students coming to the UK to study are higher than ever
- It is important for those in UK HE to consider the expectations and experiences of international students in order to support them as they transition into UK HE teaching and learning
- This isn't just about access; this is about considering cultural and digital expectations and differences
- Understanding the experiences of international students ultimately helps all students to better access and learn from technology enabled learning

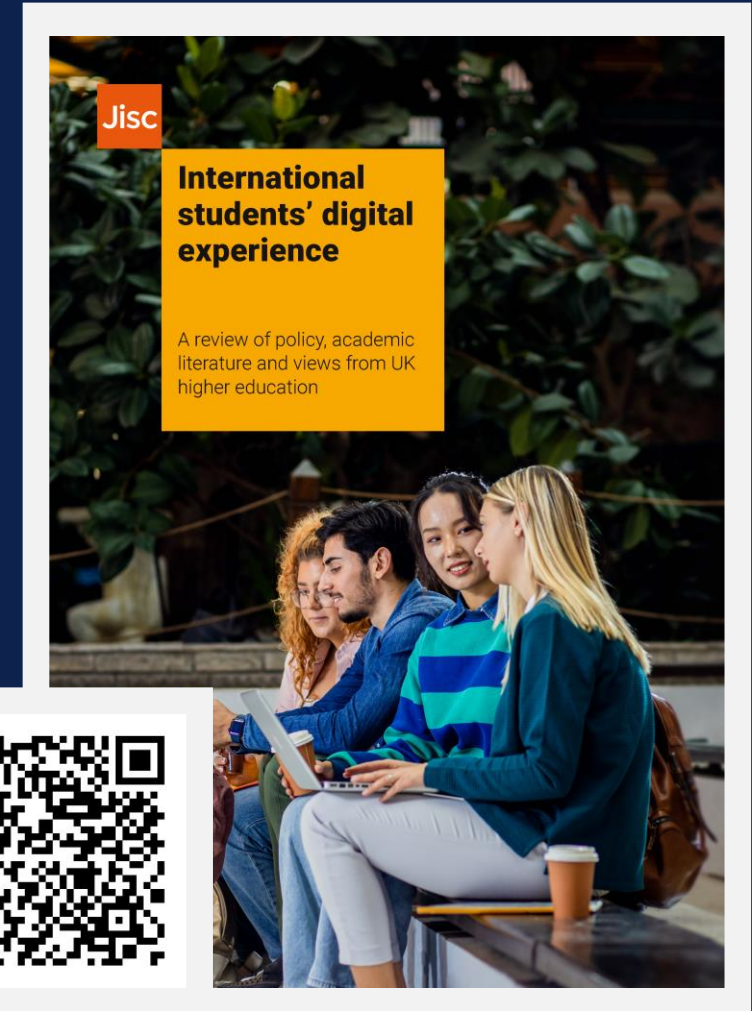
Bringing agencies and HEPs together

- The digital experience of international students is under-researched. This work has provided an opportunity to bring those working with international students together, to share knowledge and perspectives.
- We have worked with the following sector organisations to inform this body of research:



Four phases of Jisc ISDX research

- **International student digital experience (ISDX)**
- **Phase 1** reviewed issues and perspectives from UK HEIs policy makers, academic and grey literature, and advocates working in this space
- Phase 1 report published today available from ji.sc/international-students-digital-experience
- **Phase 2** works directly with international students at 10 HEIs to better understand their experiences

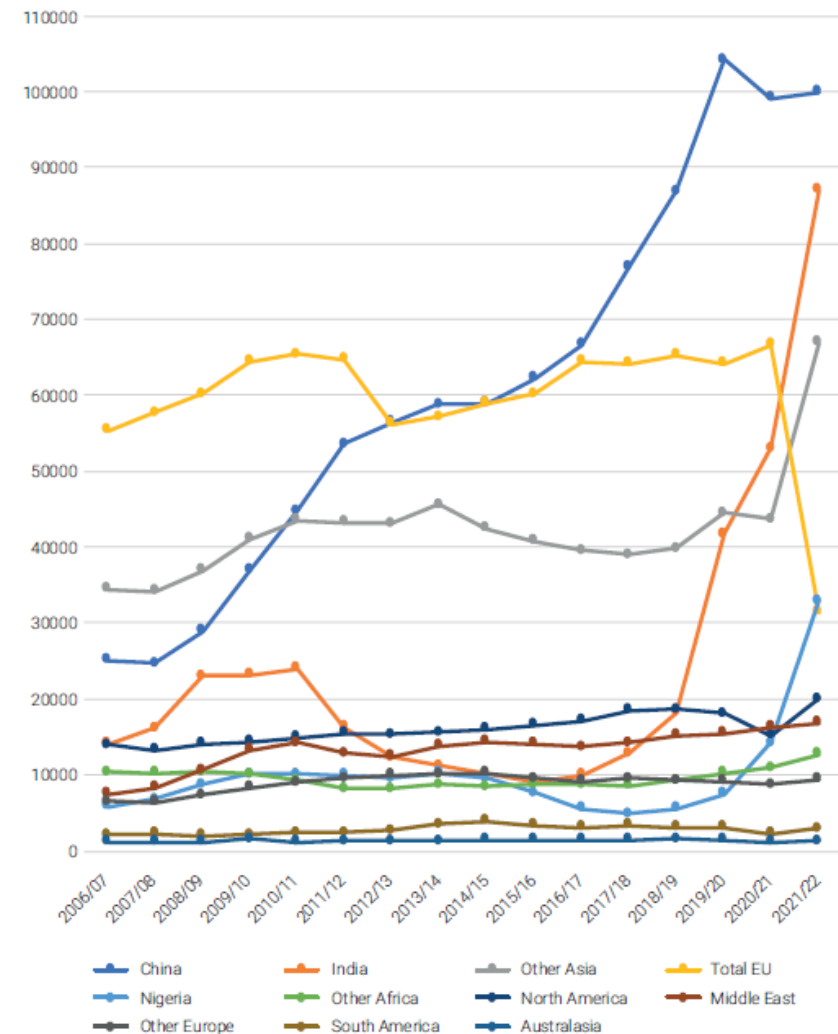


International students in the UK: facts and figures

International student population

- 2021/22: 680,000 international students from 200+ countries/territories (HESA data)
- 17% full-time UG and 67% full-time PGT are international students
- In last five years there has been a significant increase in students coming from Southern and Eastern Asia and a decrease in EU students

Figure 1. First year non-UK domiciled students by domicile. HESA data, recreated here under CC-BY 4.0



Original chart available from the HESA website

Top six contributing countries

- Between 2020/21 and 2021/22 there was a 53% drop in EU students, 32% rise in non-EU students, 2% drop in UK-domiciled students
- In 2021/22, top six countries contributing students to UK HE were China, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, USA, and Hong Kong

Table 3. The top ten countries contributing international students to the UK HE education system in 2021/22, together with comparator data from 2017/18 to illustrate changes over that five year period.

Rank order	Country	No students in 2017/18		No students in 2021/22	Comparing numbers between the 2017/18 and 2021/22 academic years
1	China	107,215	▲	151,690	In 2021/22 China sent more students to the UK than any other overseas country: an increase of 41% since 2017/18. In 2021/22, 27% of all non-EU students were from China.
2	India	20,335	▲	126,535	There has been a very large increase in students from India: 23% of all non-EU students were from India in 2021/22 representing a six-fold increase since 2017/18
3	Nigeria	10,685	▲	44,195	There has been a four-fold increase in the number of Nigerian students between 2017/18 and 2021/22
4	Pakistan	5,980	▲	23,075	There has been a four-fold increase in the number of students from Pakistan between 2017/18 and 2021/22
5	United States	19,485	▲	22,990	Numbers of students from the USA have increased by 18% between 2017/18 and 2021/22
6	Hong Kong	16,620	▬	17,630	Numbers of students from Hong Kong have remained relatively steady between 2017/18 and 2021/22
7	Bangladesh	2,560	▲	12,700	There has been a five-fold increase in the number of students from Bangladesh between 2017/18 and 2021/22
8	Malaysia	15,305	▼	12,135	Numbers of students from Malaysia have decreased by 21% between 2017/18 and 2021/22
9	France	14,090	▼	11,870	Numbers of students from France have decreased by 16% between 2017/18 and 2021/22
10	Italy	14,585	▼	11,320	Numbers of students from Italy have decreased by 22% between 2017/18 and 21/22

What challenges do international students studying in your country face in relation to their use of digital?

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Digital differences between countries

Digital 'shocks'

- The move to digital teaching and learning during the pandemic revealed that access to technology was only one issue that some international students struggled with
- The pandemic also revealed issues relating to expectations of how UK HE expects students to learn through digital
- These UK HE expectations are not global and may create a 'digital shock' for international students transitioning into UK HE
- International students arrive with a wide range of previous experience of digital teaching and learning
- International students are not a homogenous group: experience of technology-enabled learning differs within and between countries

Diversity of digital experiences in and between countries

- The Network Readiness Index (NRI) ranks countries in terms of their digital readiness and maturity and provides one way to compare the potential digital experiences of those growing up in different countries
- Looking at the 'people pillar' which focuses on 'the level of access, resources and skills of people and organisations that allow them to productively use technology available' the NRI ranks China as 8th, UK as 19th, India is 47th and Nigeria as 100th
- During the pandemic, countries ranked 50th or below experienced significant issues in moving to online teaching and learning due to inadequate digital infrastructure, unequal access to devices and internet access, and varied experience of online pedagogy

Cultural differences in device and software use

- Researchers interviewed international students at Northumbria University; some reported they found UK HE teaching and learning methods 'strange and challenging'
- Students from Middle East and Asia reported more issues than those from Europe or USA
- Further suggestions identified in our Phase 1 research that students from some countries favour mobiles over laptops, avoid use of web cams, and/or have different perspectives on what constitutes plagiarism

UK HE digital teaching and learning is not universal

- Important to reflect on the fact that UK HE teaching and learning methods are not universal, nor are UK assumptions about how to integrate digital into learning
- International students may need support to cross the border into UK HE digital teaching and learning and so minimise 'digital shocks'
- We asked those working in UK HE what they were seeing, and this is what they told us ...

Feedback from those working with international students in UK HE

Collected via anonymous feedback form

Equal v equitable provision

EQUAL:

“ We have many postgraduate international students who do not get any special treatment. All students (UK and international) are treated the same... all students are actively engaging with peers and tutors. There are no differences in how they ask for help or access support online. ”

Russell Group, England

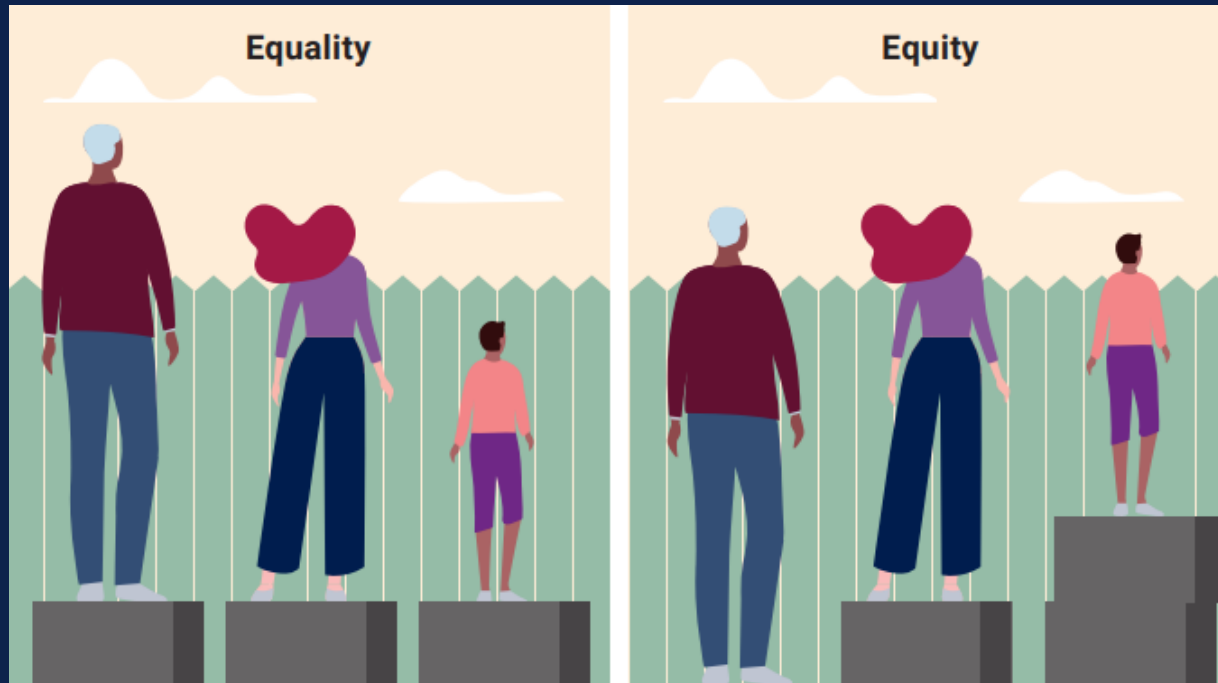
EQUITABLE:

“ There is a new team within the Library Service... that will be looking at provision around digital skills for all students. [They] will begin to gather information from this about the needs of specific student groups, including international students. ”

Russell Group, England

Illustrating equal v equitable provision

Providing equity can be about providing some with 'more' or with 'different' according to their needs



Digital supports students to review, repeat and revisit

“ ASR captioning for all pre-recorded video, and published lecture capture, should help support those with English as an additional language... workshops online now use Padlets instead of discussion groups as some international students expressed nervousness around speaking in groups. ... workshops also make use of anonymous response tools such as Mentimeter, which allows students to contribute answers (or questions) without having to speak in front of a group... I have spoken to international students who have been advised to watch recordings of lectures rather than attending in person, so that they can slow down the pace of the lecture, pause when needed and make use of captions to keep up with the fast spoken content. ”

Russell Group, England

International students can arrive with unfamiliar technology

“ There is a diverse range of devices/hardware/software that are in use with more and more relying just on their mobile phones when off campus or when attending classes on campus. ”

Institution in England

“ International students are more likely to have clone devices (phones) or out of support operating systems/browsers that are not supported by certain apps. ”

MillionPlus, England

Limited access to wifi and hardware

“ [When we used] ... the Jisc Digital experience insights (DEI) survey, more international students reported having no suitable computer or device as making it difficult to learn online (12%, compared to 6% of home students), and 18% reported issues with mobile data costs (compared to 7% of home students)... we signpost our students to the devices available for them to use on campus, and using the campus wifi makes mobile data costs less of an issue. ”

Institution in Wales

Plagiarism and cultural differences

“ ... we have a lot of issues with plagiarism and lack of critical analysis skills as the expectations of these areas can be very different across the world. These differences can often be cultural, and academic and professional services staff are effectively being expected to completely change someone’s cultural mindset and life experiences. Plagiarism is very complex and teaching someone to undo all their previous experiences and beliefs of how to use the words of others and give appropriate credit is not just as simple as attending a one-hour lecture on the topic of plagiarism. ”

MillionPlus, Scotland

Proactive versus retrospective support

“ ...we have a course that is fully international and... we have embedded more explicit content on digital skills delivered in combination by academic staff and the professional services teams. We are also developing more in-depth asynchronous resources on developing digital skills with the aim to incorporate flipped learning tasks more explicitly during the first two weeks of term as part of induction on some of these more ‘basic’ skills. ”

MillionPlus, Scotland

“ We have a module on our VLE all new students are expected to undertake called ‘An Introduction to Library and IT’, although there is no regulation or monitoring of whether students do undertake/complete it or not...”

MillionPlus, Scotland

International students as global digital citizens

“ I think it would be of importance to explore if students feel they are leaving university with the digital capabilities they need to progress to their professional life. I am interested in find out what is, in students’ opinion, the skills and capabilities of a digitally capable citizen. ”

University Alliance, England

Recommendations for higher education

Phase 1: Key recommendations

- It would benefit all students if courses and institutions clearly stated their expectations in terms of the use of digital technologies before the course starts – tell your education agents too
- Successful integration of international students into an institution appears linked to early engagement (pre-arrival)
- Joined up strategic thinking: would help if HEI leaders, and those working in international strategic planning and delivery roles integrated international strategies with digital (transformation) strategies, as well as with equity, diversity and inclusion, curriculum and assessment design and support for digitally mediated teaching, learning and assessment

Phase 1: Key recommendations #2

- All staff would benefit from being actively aware of the digital journey that international students from different countries and backgrounds are making when they travel to study in UK HE – there may be ‘digital shocks’ in addition to cultural ones
- UK HE teaching and learning processes and attitudes are a reflection of UK cultural expectations: these may not be universal, and therefore there may be a need to support international students to make this ‘digital border crossing’
- International students – like all students – should expect equity of access to best-practice teaching and learning
- Remember that international students are not a homogenous group

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Digital experience insights

Explore the findings from 2021/2022 digital experience surveys of thousands of students across the UK:

<https://ji.sc/our-reports>

Find out more



Follow the ISDX project

If you are interested in following the outcomes of this project, please register your interest

ji.sc/stay-informed-isdx

Find out more



Join us at our Demonstrating digital transformation events

Hosted in partnership with universities, designed to inspire new thinking and share good practice, to support you with your transformation journey.

New series being planned for
2023/24



6 July

Rethinking learning and curriculum design
hosted by University of Northampton

<https://ji.sc/DTE-Northampton>



18 July

Developing and implementing a digital strategy
hosted by University of Greenwich

<https://ji.sc/DTE-Greenwich>



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