

OVERSEAS OVERWHELMED

OVER THE COUNTER

Fraud Scandal In United Kingdom

The big story in the British media this past week was the discovery of unqualified international students using fraudulent documents to gain admission to universities. *The Times Higher Education Supplement* reported that an agent had placed “hundreds” of Chinese students at a number of British universities; for several thousand pounds, fake A-Level results could be purchased. The BBC reports that this year saw a record number of university applicants found with fraudulent documents. According to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), which assesses the validity of applications, around 400 of these cases came from China and Pakistan.

Higher-Edge asked George Brown, a PhD candidate at the University of Adelaide, South Australia, for his opinions on these latest developments. According to Brown, whose study seeks to assess the global problem of qualification fraud, the blame “in principle” should lie with the institutions. It should be noted that UCAS agrees that the onus of verification lies on British institutions, when assessing international applicants. Brown stresses “it is imperative that the institution ascertains the authenticity of the qualification by contacting the conferring institution during the assessment stage.” For Brown, even notarized copies or actually viewing original copies is not sufficient; any document can be easily forged, and with the Internet, can be easily purchased.

The “cultural underpinnings” in some risk countries can be one explanation for the prevalence of fake degree holders. The social status that comes with holding a degree can drive students to seek out fraudulent qualifications. Brown has even seen business cards where some have boasted of qualifications such as “B.Eng (failed).”

Brown’s study is titled “An analysis of *testamur* verification systems; Australia compared to world practice.” *Overseas, Overwhelmed* readers may contact George Brown directly at: george.brown@student.adelaide.edu.au.

Source: “Student fraud hits record level,” *BBC.com*, 28 October 2004; “Exclusions as scam is uncovered,” *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 29 October 2004. (Registration may be required)

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LET'S GO CANADA

British Universities Fear Foreign Student Decline

Proposed rising visa fees and increased verification procedures are making British universities fearful of a potential decline in their international student numbers. Considered by some as a “multi-million pound business,” international student recruitment has generated £1 billion (\$2.2 billion CAD) in revenue and has the support of Prime Minister Tony Blair. One proposed fee increase would see foreign students paying £495 (\$1,100) to extend their visas.

Higher-Edge had previously reported on the efforts to streamline the student visa process in Beijing in [Overseas, Overwhelmed 4.17](#). The British Embassy in Beijing’s website states that “Our ability to detect forged documents is improving all the time and detection of such documents will result in your application being refused.” Additionally, the student interview will only be required for select applicants. Procedures such as these are being blamed for the denial of visas for 60 percent of Chinese applicants. Similar procedures are being planned for other countries, and universities are expecting that student recruitment in source countries such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh will also be affected. Their international competitors, on the other hand, could stand to benefit if international student numbers to the UK were to decline.

Source: “Universities warn against visa price rise,” *The Guardian*, 29 October 2004.

ABROAD PERSPECTIVE

Opportunities In Indonesia?

In a 2003 issue of *Overseas, Overwhelmed* (3.26), Higher-Edge encouraged Canadian institutions to consider expanding in Indonesia, as legislation was pending in the Southeast Asian nation that would have allowed local universities to partner with their foreign counterparts. Today, the debate in Indonesia surrounds the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS), which would give foreign universities the opportunity to open campuses and compete with Indonesian institutions. Local universities are against this possibility, although one government official believes the “competition would force local universities to improve their quality. And in the end, the people who would be benefited the most would be students, who will get a better education.”

The Indonesian government has until May 2005 to decide on whether to adhere to the terms stipulated by GATS.

Source: “Govt committed to liberalizing education sector,” *The Jakarta Post*, 27 October 2004.