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Student recruitment at international branch campuses
Can they compete in the global market?

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The majority of international branch campuses are located in competitive higher education hubs, such as Singapore and the United Arab Emirates. Many find themselves having to recruit students regionally, and some, even globally, which results in them competing head-to-head with the home campuses of well-respected Western universities. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing the decision of international students to study at a particular university in the UK and to investigate their attitudes towards international branch campuses. The study involved a self-completed questionnaire administered to 160 international students. A logit model was developed that was able to significantly predict whether or not an individual student would consider study at an international branch campus. Reputation, quality of programmes and rankings were found to be the strongest influences on student choice of institution, suggesting that these are the factors that international branch campuses should focus on to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

Keywords: *higher education hubs; international branch campuses; student recruitment; competition; international student destination choice*

Introduction

In 2007, some 2.8 million students were studying outside their home countries (UNESCO, 2009). The three most popular destinations for international students are the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, which between them account for approximately 44% of the world's overseas students (Lasanowski, 2009). These countries have benefited from having long-established systems of higher education that are widely perceived as being of high quality and which deliver their programmes in the English language, the lingua franca in international business, science and diplomacy. However, in recent years, universities in many other countries around the world have also begun to offer courses in English. For example, China, which is the world's largest supplier of international students, also has a 7% market share of incoming students and 34 institutions that deliver programmes in English (Lasanowski, 2009).

Among the Gulf States, in countries such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) the vast majority of higher education is delivered in English. During the last decade, patterns of student flow, traditionally from East to West, have begun to change with more students moving from East to East or West to East. The multi-directional flow of international students that has emerged at the start of the twenty-first century is the result not only of universities in Middle and Far Eastern countries offering degree programmes in English but the fact that higher education capacity has expanded significantly in some of these countries, the choice of programmes and institutions has widened and the quality of programmes has improved. Furthermore, students have found it cheaper and more convenient to study at a place closer to their homes. The establishment of international branch campuses in the new higher education hubs has provided much of the global increase in higher education capacity.

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that influence an international student's decision to study overseas and the factors that determine their choice of institution. The competition for international students has increased significantly during the last two decades and as a result students face an increased range of choices, which include universities in countries where English is the native language, universities not in English-speaking countries but which deliver programmes in English, well-respected universities in countries closer to the student's home and, most recently, international branch campuses. The main aim of this study is to consider the extent to which the new international branch campuses can compete in the competitive global market for foreign students. First, background information is given on the emergence of the new higher education hubs, in which most of the international branch campuses are located; then, the topic of student recruitment at international branch campuses is examined. Finally, before the conceptual framework and research questions are stated, the theory of international student destination choice is reviewed.

Emergence of the new higher education hubs

During the first decade of the twenty-first century a new phenomenon emerged in global higher education in the form of the higher education hub. The most notable examples are Singapore, Malaysia, Qatar and the UAE, although other countries, such as Hong Kong also aspire to be regarded as regional, if not global, hubs for higher education. The initial principal motivation for governments establishing education hubs was to satisfy the demand for higher education that was not being met by existing providers. For example, in Malaysia in the 1990s, only 7.2% of those of university age were actually enrolled at a local institution of higher education (Morshidi, 2005); the corresponding figure was 15% for Singapore in 1990 (Mok, 2008) and, even in 2007, only about 18% of nationals in Qatar had a bachelor's degree (OBHE, 2009).

International branch campuses (also known as transnational branch campuses) have provided much of the capacity at the new higher education hubs. An international branch campus may be defined as an educational facility that has its own premises (which normally include at least teaching rooms, a library and a refectory, and sometimes also recreational facilities and student accommodation) in a country different to that of its parent institution, where students receive face-to-face instruction; the branch operates under the name of the parent institution and offers qualifications bearing the name of the parent institution; it usually offers courses in more than one field of study; it has permanent administrative staff and usually at least some permanent academic staff too (ACE, 2009).

Since the early 1990s, education policy in Qatar has focused on equipping nationals with the knowledge and skills they need to take up employment in both the private and public sectors (Witte, 2010). In 1995, the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development was established as a not-for-profit organisation, to promote education and learning amongst nationals. In 2001, it established Education City, where six US universities including Northwestern, Carnegie Mellon, Georgetown and Texas A&M have established branch campuses. In 2009, the total enrolment at Education City was about 2,500 students, of which 49% were Qatari nationals; most of the remaining students were expatriates already residing in Qatar.

Whilst Education City in Qatar is focusing on meeting the needs of its local population, the ambitions of some of the other new higher education hubs are somewhat greater. In 1995, 20% of the Malaysians undertaking higher education were studying overseas (Ziguras, 2001), which made Malaysia one of the world's top source countries of international students (Hatakenaka, 2004). Malaysian students studying abroad drained about $1 billion a year from Malaysia's foreign exchange (Sato, 2005). In 1996, a series of acts were passed, which were intended to encourage further development of private higher education in the country. The

government realised that if it allowed further expansion of the private sector, whereby private institutions delivered undergraduate programmes using twinning or franchise arrangements with foreign universities, then not only would more of the demand for higher education in the country be satisfied and the skills of the workforce improved but the massive currency outflow caused by students studying abroad could also be reduced. The aim of the 1996 acts was not only to tackle the nation's shortage of skilled labour, which would enable the country's development from a basic manufacturing driven economy to a technological and knowledge-driven one, but also to establish Malaysia as a regional hub for higher education.

The 1996 Private Higher Educational Institutions Act was amended in 2003 to permit the establishment of international branch campuses and the upgrading of some private institutions to university colleges. In 2006, there were 13 private universities, 15 university colleges and four branch campuses, which included Monash University from Australia and the University of Nottingham from the UK (Tham & Kam, 2008). The government's aim of establishing Malaysia as a regional hub for higher education is slowly being realised, with students being attracted from countries such as Indonesia, China and Thailand as well as from several Arab and African countries. For example, of the 2,618 students enrolled at the University of Nottingham's Malaysian campus in 2006, 35% were international students (Tham & Kam, 2008). However, as the branch campuses of the Australian and British universities have grown, the competition for students has intensified and many of the 400 smaller private colleges feel they are unable to compete with their newer, larger rivals, which have the powerful brand names that attract students and the finances to invest in premises, equipment and high quality staff.

Singapore, like Malaysia, has ambitions to shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a high-tech, knowledge-based one and its government realised that expansion of its higher education system was required in order to equip its population with the required knowledge and skills (Olds, 2007). In 1998, the government introduced the World Class Universities (WCU) programme, which had the objective of attracting a number of the world's top universities to set up branch campuses in Singapore, to spearhead world-class research and development, knowledge transfer to industry and to establish Singapore as a premier educational hub (Ng & Tan, 2010). In 2009, having attracted 12 foreign universities, Singapore was the world's third largest host of international branch campuses (Becker, 2009). These include INSEAD (Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires), the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and the New York University Tisch School of the Arts.

Singapore's Global Schoolhouse strategy aims to establish Singapore as a global higher education hub, as a serious competitor for international students to rival countries such as Australia, Canada, the US and the UK. It is hoped that by attracting foreign students to study in Singapore that the country will benefit not only from the revenue they bring but that they might stay as employees or entrepreneurs after they have completed their study and that their presence will attract more world-class research and development and multinational corporations (Gribble & McBurnie, 2007). In 2006, some 80,000 international students were studying in Singapore; the target is for around 150,000 by 2015 (ibid.). However, whilst the government wants to increase choice for students, this has led to increased competition between the private providers of higher education. Singapore is also different from some of the other new higher education hubs in that it already has two world-class public sector universities: the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University (Sanderson, 2002). These two universities remain the preferred choices of most local students. Foreign universities cannot assume that their strong brands at home will guarantee them success in Singapore. For example, the University of New South Wales, based in Australia, survived only two months in 2007 before closing, when it enrolled just 148 students after an initial investment exceeding $S17 million (Ng & Tan, 2010).

During the last decade, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman each opened their first private universities (Deghady, 2008). In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Australian University of Wollongong has had a campus in Dubai since 1993. At the end of 2009, it had 2,812 students enrolled on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. In 2003, Dubai Knowledge Village was established, followed in 2006 by Dubai International Academic City (DIAC). Both operate as higher education free zones, where 100% foreign ownership is allowed, where there is no taxation and where 100% repatriation of profits is permitted. DIAC's target is to provide a home for 40 universities and 40,000 students, drawn from across the Middle East, North Africa and Asia (Bardsley, 2008). The emirate of Dubai is not alone in the UAE in wanting to expand higher education capacity by attracting foreign universities to establish international branch campuses; Abu Dhabi and Ras al Khaimah share similar objectives, but Abu Dhabi is by far the wealthiest emirate, and it has used its wealth to attract and fund the development of campuses for Paris-Sorbonne University and New York University.

More recently, Hong Kong has made clear its intentions to establish itself as a higher education hub (Hacket, 2006), and countries such as China and South Korea could still develop such ambitions. Research conducted by Naidoo (2009) found that of the new higher education hubs, Singapore and Malaysia were the largest exporters of higher education, followed by Hong Kong, and then lastly the UAE and Qatar, which export relatively little.

Student recruitment at international branch campuses

In each of the new higher education hubs, competition for students is fierce, especially since the advent of the global recession in 2008-9. The previous section provided a background on the development of international branch campuses in the new education hubs, and by considering the motives of governments we can understand how and why the highly competitive higher education markets have arisen. Wilkins (2010) used the UAE as a case study to investigate some of the outcomes and impacts on institutions and students of a highly competitive market, where supply exceeds demand in the private sector. He found that several institutions were failing to achieve their student recruitment targets or to break-even. As a result, institutions were unable to undertake planned investment and expansion, unable to increase their tuition fees in line with increases in costs and unable to run all planned/advertised programmes/modules. Altbach (2010) has suggested that many students studying in international branch campuses globally would probably not have been accepted onto the same programmes at their institution's main home campus. A survey conducted in the UAE revealed that many professors believed their students had insufficient ability in mathematics and writing in English and that many students were being awarded higher grades than they deserved (Gerson, 2010). It is possible that these things are due, in part, to the need for international branch campuses to recruit and retain students.

To date, at least eleven international branch campuses have closed (Becker, 2009); these include the Australian-based University of Southern Queensland in Dubai, US-based George Mason University in Ras Al Khaimah and the University of New South Wales in Singapore. Becker (2009) suggests that insufficient market research and poor enrolment figures are probably the main reasons for the closure of international branch campuses. Institutions have had the tendency to overestimate their future enrolment numbers and underestimate their costs. Some world-class universities are known to have considered establishing an international branch campus, but then decided against it; two examples are Yale University (US), which considered setting up in Abu Dhabi and the University of Warwick (UK), which considered Singapore.

The universities that have established campuses overseas are finding that they must compete not only locally for students, but also regionally and globally. This means that

international branch campuses have not only to compete with each other locally and regionally but they must also compete with the main home campuses of well-respected Western universities. To date, many of the international branch campuses in the UAE have concentrated on recruiting students from the large expatriate community, which represent about 80% of the country's population (UAE Interact, 2009). However, New York University in Abu Dhabi, which admitted its first students in September 2010, believes that there are only a limited number of local students who can satisfy its admission requirements, and as a consequence it expects to recruit most of its students from outside the UAE, and mainly from the US, which may be the source of up to half of all enrolments (Witte, 2010).

Models of international student destination choice

Most of the models that attempt to explain or determine student choice are based on the push-pull concept. Various studies have adopted the push-pull concept (Baldwin & James, 2000; Bodycott, 2009; Li & Bray, 2007; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; McMahon, 1992). McMahon (1992) was one of the first researchers to recognise this concept when analysing the flow of international students from 18 developing countries to the US during the 1960s and 1970s. The push factors operate within a source country to initiate the student's decision to study overseas, while the pull factors operate in the host country to make that country more desirable than others as a place to study and live. Push factors identified by McMahon (1992) included the availability of higher education and each country's economic strength, while the pull factors focused on the economic, political and social attractions of the US as a destination for HE study. Other pull factors identified by Altbach (1998) include advanced research facilities and the prospect of multinational classmates. Davis (1995) observed that push factors only had the effect of creating the desire within a student to study overseas without any clear direction, whilst it was the pull factors that drew the student to particular countries and institutions.

Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) continued working with the push-pull concept in their study of students whom had gone from four different Asian countries to Australia to take a course in post-secondary education. They were able to identify two separate sets of pull factors, one relevant to determining choice of host country and the other relevant to determining choice of institution. Significant factors in determining choice of host country were found to be the degree of knowledge or awareness a student has of a particular country, the perceived quality of education in that country and the extent to which its qualifications are recognised in the student's home country and internationally. Parental influence was also a strong determinant of host country, especially for undergraduate students, as were levels of tuition fees and general costs of living. Key factors determining choice of institution were its reputation for quality, the quality and expertise of its staff, whether the university recognises the student's previous qualifications and whether employers will recognise the university's qualifications.

Whilst the push-pull model has proven to be a useful concept to explain international student destination choices, it is not without limitations. The push and pull factors are both external forces that impact upon a student's choices and behaviour, but a student's decisions are also influenced by their personal characteristics, such as socio-economic status, age, gender, academic ability, motivation and aspirations (Li & Bray, 2007). In examining the role of personality and subjective judgement in student decision-making, Hemsley-Brown (2001) found that while economic, cultural and structural forces do influence students, they are filtered through layers of preconceptions shaped by family circumstances, culture, life history and personality. If this is how students make decisions, then it may explain why some students are influenced by push and pull factors more than others.

Conceptual framework and research questions

The majority of the world's international branch campuses are located in higher education hubs in which the competition for students is intense. Marketing researchers and practitioners have become increasingly interested in how these institutions can achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Many international branch campuses are now seeking to recruit students not only from their local areas but also regionally, and in a few cases, globally. This study seeks to investigate the reasons why international students decided to study at a particular research-intensive university in the UK and whether or not they had also considered any international branch campuses. The students in this study obviously had the desire to study overseas and they decided to study in the UK. International branch campuses need to identify the motives of such students and to then develop and implement a range of suitable strategies in order to tempt them away from the home campuses of well-respected Western universities. The second part of this study seeks to identify the factors that may lead to a student choosing to study at an international branch campus over the home campus of a Western university. The research questions, then, that this study seeks to answer are:

1. What are the factors that influence an international student's decision to study overseas?
2. What are the factors that influence an international student's choice of institution?
3. What are the factors that would enable accurate prediction of whether or not an individual international student would consider international branch campuses for future study for themselves or friends/relations?

Methodology

The study was conducted at a single research-intensive university in the West of England. In designing the questionnaire to be used in this study, the existing literature was first examined to discover the previous findings about how international students make their choice of destination. In order to determine the most suitable construct variables to include on the questionnaire, a pre-study was conducted, which involved a series of twelve in-depth individual interviews with international students. A convenience approach was used to gain volunteers, and a diverse mix of students was achieved with respect to gender, nationality and subject studied. The interviews took a semi-structured format, with an emphasis on open questions so that the students would not be constrained in their responses. The interviews each lasted about 15-30 minutes and were recorded, from which notes were later made.

Each point made by a student was categorised as a push or pull factor, against pre-prepared lists that had been guided by the literature. Of particular interest were factors mentioned by the students that were not on the lists. A few of these were gained such as "somewhere I could easily buy food I like" (from a Chinese student) and "at a place where there are not so many Indians" (from an Indian student when explaining why she had *not* selected a particular university in Birmingham).

The resulting questionnaire consisted of 60 items. The questions about the students' decision to study overseas, choice of country and choice of institution each had between nine and sixteen factors that were each rated using tick boxes on a four-point scale according to extent of agreement/disagreement or importance to them personally. For example, statements such as 'difficult to gain university place at home' or 'lower quality of education at home', which each required an agree/disagree response, were seeking to discover the extent to which push factors were affecting the student's decision-making. The questions about choice of country and destination listed factors such as quality of education, high rankings, best for employment prospects, safe environment and best for improving English. A response was required for each factor, ranging from 'not important' and 'slightly important' to 'important' and 'very important'.

The final set of questions asked the students whether they had thought of any international branch campuses when they had been considering where to undertake their current study, their views on a range of criteria relevant to destination choice and branch campuses (using a five-point Likert scale, representing their extent of agreement/disagreement), and their views on international branch campuses using a series of dichotomous agree/disagree responses to statements such as 'tuition fees and living costs are lower at international branch campuses' and 'branch campuses are closer to my home, so would be cheaper to get to and easier to return home for vacations'. Finally, respondents were asked (1) whether they would consider international branch campuses if they were to undertake further study after completion of their current programme, (2) whether or not they would recommend considering international branch campuses to friends or relations from their home country who want to study overseas.

The self-completed questionnaire was administered to 160 international students using the convenience sampling method. Students completed the questionnaire at a variety of locations: in classrooms, after the lessons had finished; at the university international office; and in the university library, in an area where group working, talking and eating/drinking is allowed. The sample comprised of 84 males, 76 females, 28 undergraduates and 132 postgraduates. The most common nationalities were Chinese (60 students) and Indian (21 students), but students from Thailand, South Korea, Germany, Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria and a range of other countries also participated in the survey. The sample is considered broadly representative of the student population at the university used in the study.

Logit model

The logit model developed is a qualitative non-linear binary-choice model, where individuals are faced with a choice between two alternatives and the choice they make depends on a set of characteristics of the individuals. Logistic regression is well suited to the study of categorical outcome variables in an educational context, for example determining whether individuals enrol on a particular course or not, or whether individual students complete a course or drop out, or indeed, as Wilkins (2001) investigated, whether students rate the efficacy of a programme as good or not good.

The logit model was selected for this study because it has the advantages of being able to work with binary response independent and dependent variables, it is not constrained by normality or equal variance/covariance assumptions for the residuals and in terms of classification and prediction it has been shown to produce fairly accurate results (Fan & Wang, 1999). Similar to other statistical models, logistic regression models derived from samples are subject to sampling errors, thus making them unsuitable for small samples. Long (1997) suggested that, as a rule of thumb, a minimum of 10 observations per independent variable is advisable. The model developed in this study has twelve independent variables. As the actual sample size used in this study was 160, the minimum observation/predictor ratio recommended by Long (1997) has been met.

In this study, the choice facing the international students was whether or not they would consider going to an international branch campus if they were to undertake further study or, given their experiences of studying in the UK, whether or not they would recommend friends or relations in their home country to consider international branch campuses if they wanted to study overseas. A student responding 'Yes', that they would consider international branch campuses for themselves or that they would recommend friends/relations at home to consider them was coded 1; if they responded 'No', that they would not consider or recommend considering international branch campuses, this was coded 0. For each of the independent variables, if the respondent selected 'important' or 'very important' from the four-point rating scale on the questionnaire, then this was considered an important factor to them and was coded as 1. Factors that were not important or only slightly important to the respondent were coded as 0.

The logit model is estimated as:

$$Ln\ [P/(1-P)] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \ldots\ \ldots\ \ldots + \beta_n X_n$$

where P is the odds that the student responded 'Yes', 1-P is the odds that they responded 'No', β_0 is the intercept or constant term, X_i are the independent variables as defined and coded in Table 1, and β_i $i = 1, 2, 3, \ldots n$ are the logistic regression coefficients associated with each independent variable. The model was developed using the SPSS software package.

Results and analysis

The most popular reasons given by students for wanting to undertake higher education overseas were to improve employment prospects, to experience a different culture and to improve their English. Interestingly, all of the pull factors were far more influential than the push factors. As most nations globally have expanded their higher education capacities, few students reported seeking to study overseas because it was difficult to gain a place in their home countries. However, nearly a quarter of postgraduate students believed that higher education was of a lower quality in their home countries. Doctoral students in particular were more likely to report that their chosen course was not available at home and, if it was available, that it was of lower quality than the course being taken in the UK. As found by previous researchers (Chen, 2008; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), the students in this survey had been considerably influenced by family beliefs, values and opinions. Nearly a third of the survey participants believed that studying overseas would improve their prospects for emigration. Table 2 shows the factors influencing the decisions of the international students to study overseas.

Amongst the survey participants, the factors mentioned most often as being 'very important' in determining their decision to study in the UK were quality of education, high rankings, best for employment prospects, best for improving English language skills and, for postgraduate students, the fact that most taught master's programmes in the UK can be completed in one year rather than two years, which is common in some other countries, such as the US and Canada.

The most popular factors identified by students in determining their choice of institution were the reputation of a university, the quality of programme, university/department rankings, programme content and professor expertise/reputation. For both Chinese and Indian students, a university's reputation was more influential than the actual quality of its programmes. Some 98% of postgraduate students were influenced by university and/or department rankings. In the pre-study, several students mentioned referring to rankings published by *The Times* and *Financial Times* newspapers and/or scores achieved by departments in the official research assessment exercises, the most recent having taken place in 2008. Surprisingly, more undergraduates than postgraduates were influenced by professor expertise and reputation.

The factor that was least influential in determining the choices of students was university marketing, indicating perhaps that students do not like the idea of having things 'sold' to them. However, nearly a third of the survey participants said they were influenced by information they could obtain about individual universities, such as from their websites. When students wanted advice or opinions, they were far more likely to be influenced by their parents than by professors in their home country or by private agents, professional advisers or government organisations, such as the *British Council*. Table 3 shows the factors considered by international students in their choice of institution for higher education.

Of the 160 survey participants, only four said that they had considered one or more international branch campuses when considering where to undertake their current study.

However, 20 students said that they would consider going to an international branch campus if they were to undertake further higher education in the future. In the interviews of the pre-study, the main advantages of international branch campuses identified by students were cheaper tuition fees and costs of living, and the fact that they were closer to their home, which meant that less money would be spent on travel and that more frequent visits home might be possible. Given their experiences of studying in the UK, 34 students said that they would recommend friends or relations in their home country to consider international branch campuses if they wanted to study overseas.

A logit model was developed which possessed the ability to predict whether or not an individual international student would consider international branch campuses for themselves or recommend friends/relations at home to consider them. A total of 160 cases were analysed and the full model significantly predicted the students' choices (omnibus chi-square = 48.098, $df = 12$, $p < 0.001$). The model accounted for between 26.0% (Cox & Snell R^2) and 37.8% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in student choices. The model was successful in predicting 96.6% of the students who said they would not consider themselves or recommend friends/relations to consider international branch campuses, and 34.9% of those who said that they would. This resulted in 80% of all predictions being accurately predicted by the model. Table 4 shows the observed and predicted values, and Table 5 gives the coefficients, the Wald statistic, the associated degrees of freedom and the probability values for each of the predictor variables. It was found that the only predictor variables that were significant at the 5% level were EURO (whether or not the student was from a European country), PROF (professor expertise/reputation) and CULT (experience a different culture).

One method of assessing the goodness of fit of logistic models when using the SPSS software is to examine the -2LL measure (Mazzarol, 1998). If a model fits perfectly, then the value for -2LL will be 0, which would mean that there is no unexplained information after the model has been fitted (Field, 2000, p.177). When only the constant was included in the model, -2LL = 186.244, but in the final model, -2LL = 138.146. This reduction of 48.098 indicates that the predicting ability of the model has improved. This value has a chi-square distribution, and, as it is significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, it can be concluded that the final model has reasonable goodness of fit that is unlikely to be the result of chance alone (Miles & Shevlin, 2001, p.159). The Hosmer and Lemeshow test divides the subjects into deciles based on predicted probabilities and then computes a chi-square from observed and expected frequencies. A non-significant chi-square (above 0.05) indicates that the data fit the model well and so the result of $p = 0.593$ implies that the model's estimates fit the data at an acceptable level.

Conclusion

Whilst earlier studies (Li & Bray, 2007; Maringe & Carter 2007; Mazzarol & Souter 2002; McMahon 1992) found that the decision of international students to study overseas was typically initiated by sets of push and pull factors, this study found that push factors had significantly less influence on a student's decision to study abroad than pull factors. As social, political and economic conditions have improved in many countries, and as HE capacity has expanded and the quality of programmes improved, there have been fewer push influences forcing or encouraging students to look abroad for HE. However, in the short term, situations can always occur that act as push factors, such as political and economic crises, wars and natural disasters, such as earthquakes.

As the influence of push factors decline, universities that seek to recruit high numbers of international students should focus on developing, maintaining and strengthening the pull factors that might enable them to differentiate themselves in a crowded market. Given that 98% of the survey participants said that a university's reputation was important or very

important in determining their choice of institution and 94% said that university/department rankings were important or very important, these are two things on which international branch campuses should concentrate their efforts. As rankings and quality reports become more focused and widely distributed, the reputations of institutions will be increasingly impacted (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007).

During the last 2-3 years, a number of international branch campuses, such as Heriot-Watt University in the UAE and the University of Liverpool in China, have made clear their intentions to recruit higher quality faculty and to increase the volume and quality of their research output. If international branch campuses were able to develop reputations for research excellence, at least on a regional if not global basis, then it is possible that the home campuses of Western universities could lose some of their competitive advantage. In addition, several international branch campuses, such as Monash University in Malaysia and the University of Nottingham's campuses in China and Malaysia, have introduced doctoral programmes and a wider range of subjects for study. As the tuition fees charged by institutions in countries such as the US and UK are relatively high, and so too are the costs of living in these countries, there is scope for some international branch campuses to engage in price competition, but whilst changes in exchange rates can be significant in the short term, they have been found to be less significant in the long term (Naidoo, 2007).

Given the limitations of sample size and convenience sampling strategy of this study, marketing practitioners and researchers should do more research into the decision-making processes of international students, especially with regard to their attitudes, beliefs and opinions on international branch campuses, which have so far been largely ignored in the literature. Furthermore, the fact that this study was conducted at a single research-intensive university means that the findings are not generalisable to all international students in the UK. Nevertheless, the key finding of the increased importance of pull factors (*vis-à-vis* push factors) warrants further investigation. The findings clearly support the idea of increasing global and regional competition, forcing higher education institutions to carefully (re)consider their internationalisation strategies. The keenness of many international branch campuses to start recruiting overseas students on a larger scale suggests that should they be successful then the current inflows of foreign students to Western universities may change considerably in the years to come. All higher education institutions dependent on foreign students need, therefore, to maintain and strengthen their attractiveness.

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Table 1
Definitions and coding of independent variables

X_i	Variable name	Variable acronym	Coded as 0	Coded as 1
X_1	Gender	GEND	Male	Female
X_2	Level of study	LEVL	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
X_3	Chinese	CHIN	Not Chinese	Chinese
X_4	Indian	INDA	Not Indian	Indian
X_5	European	EURO	Not European	European
X_6	Quality of education	QUAL	Not important	Important
X_7	University/department rankings	RANK	Not important	Important
X_8	Professor expertise/reputation	PROF	Not important	Important
X_9	Improve English	ENGL	Not important	Important
X_{10}	Experience a different culture	CULT	Not important	Important
X_{11}	Level of tuition fees/cost of living	COST	Not important	Important
X_{12}	Improve employment prospects	EMPL	Not important	Important

Table 2
Factors influencing students' decision to study overseas (as percentages)

Factor	U/G (n = 28)	P/G (n = 132)	Chinese (n = 60)	Indian (n = 21)	European (n = 40)	All students (n = 160)
Difficult to gain place at home	7	5	7	0	5	6
Course not available at home	4	11	12	19	0	10
Lower quality of education at home	11	24	31	19	10	22
Experience a different culture	79	93	86	100	98	90
Improve my English	75	93	83	9	95	89
Improve employment prospects	86	92	86	100	95	91
Higher quality education overseas	39	73	69	81	48	67
Parental decision/influence	75	61	67	57	58	63
Improve prospects for emigration	29	32	28	33	43	32

Notes: U/G = undergraduate students, P/G = postgraduate students

Table 3
Factors influencing students' choice of institution (as percentages)

Factor	U/G (n = 28)	P/G (n = 132)	Chinese (n = 60)	Indian (n = 21)	European (n = 40)	All students (n = 160)
Reputation of university	89	100	97	100	100	98
Quality of programme	100	94	93	90	100	95
Content of programme	71	90	88	90	83	88
University/department rankings	64	98	95	100	83	94
Professor expertise/ reputation	89	85	76	90	93	86
Recommended by professors at home	7	21	29	19	13	20
Recommended by agent/ professional adviser	18	31	17	43	23	26
Parental decision or influence	71	50	53	52	48	52
Recommended by friends/ relatives	21	24	21	33	25	23
Accommodation provided/ arranged	43	61	50	86	43	58
University marketing in home country	4	8	12	9	5	7
Good information on university e.g. website	18	33	28	48	23	30
Pleasant and/or safe town/ location	18	17	16	38	8	17
Tuition fees and/or cost of living	57	67	64	76	63	65
Easy application process	32	39	38	19	28	37
Lower entry requirements e.g. IELTS score	11	17	17	19	10	15

Notes: U/G = undergraduate students, P/G = postgraduate students

Table 4
Classification table: observed and predicted values[a]

Observed			Predicted		
			BRAN[b]		
			would not consider	would consider	Percentage Correct
Step 1	BRAN[b]	would not consider	113	4	96.6
		would consider	28	15	34.9
		Overall Percentage			80.0

[a] The cut value is .500

[b] BRAN: would you consider or recommend considering international branch campuses? (yes/no)

Table 5
Summary information for independent variables and constant term

		β	*SE* β	Wald's χ^2	*df*	*p*	e^{β}
Step 1	GEND	-.524	.450	1.356	1	.244	.592
	LEVL	-1.062	.595	3.189	1	.074	.346
	CHIN	-.864	.522	2.738	1	.098	.422
	INDA	-.445	1.053	.178	1	.673	.641
	EURO	-1.579	.644	6.018	1	.014	.206
	QUAL	-19.385	9601.902	.000	1	.998	.000
	RANK	41.249	13296.517	.000	1	.998	8.209E17
	PROF	-1.628	.677	5.780	1	.016	.196
	ENGL	1.252	.746	2.811	1	.094	3.496
	CULT	-1.801	.924	3.798	1	.051	.165
	COST	-.141	.549	.066	1	.797	.868
	EMPL	-.447	.766	.340	1	.560	.640
	Constant	-18.462	9197.871	.000	1	.998	.000