

Chinese students hail "transformational" UK study experience

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Chinese students who have studied in the UK have seen a "profound transformational experience" in their personal and professional lives, according to research into the impact of studying abroad.

British and Chinese academics examined the extent to which overseas educational experiences may contribute to the personal lives and career development of Chinese students, who studied in the UK after returning to work in their home country.

The report, undertaken by Dr Qing Gu and Prof Christopher Day, University of Nottingham; Dr Michele Schweisfurth, University of Birmingham; and Dr Fengliang Li, Tsinghua University, China, was supported by the British Council Beijing.

The research found that despite intense intercultural, social and educational challenges and struggles, studying abroad was perceived by the majority of returnees as:

- A satisfying and happy experience; and so was the journey of coming home – 94% were satisfied with their overall study experiences in UK higher education and for 83% found coming 'home' a happy experience
- A highly valuable experience – 92% were particularly positive about their intellectual development and 84% felt that they were able to take advantage of their overseas experience at work.

The two-stage project first explored the views of a sample of 652 returnees of wide age ranges – who had been back in China from less than six months to up to 27 years – on their perceptions of professional and personal change after a period of study in the UK. The second part focussed in greater depth on 14 returnees of different ages with differing personal and professional backgrounds, to investigate the effects of the study-abroad experience over time.

Dr Qing Gu, Associate Professor at the University of Nottingham, explained: "For more than half of those involved in our survey, career opportunities in China were a clear pull factor. About 72% felt that their academic experience in the UK was particularly valued when they were looking for jobs and was helpful for their ongoing professional development in the longer term.

"Despite the challenges and tensions that some had experienced in pursuit of a new career and a new social life immediately upon return, our research found that the large majority of the Chinese students fit back into their daily personal and professional lives, with little adjustment required."

An international outlook and awareness was cited by 93% as a quality which was significant to their work, with a large majority (82%) feeling the UK experience had made them more comfortable about working in teams.

Dr Michele Schweisfurth, Reader in Comparative and International Education, University of Birmingham, added: "In the workplace, our returnees enjoyed a more confident professional identity at work, particularly in terms of their improved English language skills and their ability to take deal with change and work under pressure. We found that 78% took on leadership at work."

"Also, from a relationship perspective, the vast majority of those surveyed felt that they had accepted the diversity of the world and, as a result, had become more flexible and open-minded than they were previously, with increased tolerance for different ideas and behaviour."

However, rather than diluting their own Chinese backgrounds and home culture with their international experience, 73% of the returnees felt that their study abroad experience actually enhanced their appreciation of their own culture. This figure rose to 80% in the older 40+ age group.

Notes to Editors

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