



Trends overseas resonate with Britain's independent schools

Sam Fraser is research director at ISC Research, which has been exploring the global English-medium international independent school market this academic year.

Schools are facing many changes right now prompted by a variety of external factors. Catalysts such as COVID-19, diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ) and global politics are impacting

school improvement and financial plans, as well as admissions and hiring practices. Some schools are addressing the challenges and opportunities they face in alternative and innovative ways.

Some of our research results will resonate with independent schools in the UK.

Blended learning takes a leap forward

In July 2021, ISC Research released a report on research into approaches to teaching and learning (<https://iscresearch.com/reports/teaching-learning-international-schools/>) currently happening and likely to happen in the near future in international schools. From our ongoing research within the sector, we know that some international schools have been moving towards a blended or hybrid approach to learning for several years, and this latest research identified that many more schools are permanently adopting a number of the strategies they found most effective during COVID-19 campus closures.

The blended solutions most popular among international schools

are project or problem-based learning models, flipped classroom, self-directed learning, and supplemental blended learning, as well as classroom instruction that integrates online resources selected by the teacher.

In the research, most international school heads reported notable benefits from the experience of online learning as a result of the pandemic. As a result, there is a common conclusion that online learning will be offered in some form in the future, at minimum, as part of a crisis management strategy but, for more schools, as part of a long-term plan towards blended learning.

School recruitment shifts

Recruitment within the international schools sector, which relies heavily on expatriate educators, has been affected in many ways by the pandemic, mostly as a result of the restricted movement of people between countries. Even without COVID-19, the talent pool for international schools has been shifting, as we identified in our report into recruitment and CPD in international schools (<https://iscresearch.com/reports/recruitment-cpd-international-schools/>) published in November 2021. ➡





Online recruitment is now the new normal for all but the most senior international school appointments, with virtual job fairs and online interviews providing ready access to candidates, regardless of their location. An increasing number of international schools are also adopting additional recruitment routes; training teachers on the job, developing local teaching talent, and sourcing from a more diverse talent pool.

Some recruitment companies supporting international school recruitment have received critical attention as a result of advertising for native English speakers, or shortlisting candidates with this as a criteria. However, our continual market research shows that the range of staff nationalities, which includes teachers from the country of school location, has been increasing within international schools for several years. Those teachers who originate from, or have lived for many years in the country of the school, are increasingly being

valued for the local cultural knowledge and language skills they bring to the school community.

In some cases, increasing the breadth of teacher nationalities is a strategic move by the school to improve diversity and equity within their staff demographics and we expect such initiatives to expand throughout the sector as schools learn more about their responsibilities to DEI and unconscious bias.

Recruitment structures and systems are changing too. Many international schools are now demanding contract intentions from their current teaching staff as early as October, with resignation notice required between November and January.

Senior leadership positions with technology expertise, particularly those with combined teaching and tech skills, have been emerging with the international school sector for some time but, as a result of COVID-19, many more such positions are now being advertised, as are leadership roles that require data management skills.

▼ Many schools are permanently adopting a number of the strategies they found most effective during COVID-19 campus closures, such as a blended or hybrid approach to learning

A new model for CPD

Technology skills now count at every level. Our research identified that many more international schools are seeking teachers with proficiency in their use of technology to support pupil learning. In addition, 66 percent of the international schools that we researched said they plan to develop the skills of their current teaching staff in the use of education technology to support teaching and learning over the next two years.

In an effort to improve access to continual learning for teachers, the delivery of CPD is adapting. Experiences during COVID-19 demonstrated that online CPD in forms that are engaging and easy for teachers to view and revisit are valued and beneficial. More CPD providers are developing platforms that provide constant access to bite-size learning and programmes designed to continually support skill development.

The report suggests that a hybrid model of CPD, with some face-to-face learning supported by online solutions, will become a favoured option for many schools. ►





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DEIJ goes beyond recruitment

Diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ) is now a priority for many independent schools, perhaps none more so than international schools, which can represent diverse communities of pupils and staff. But DEIJ needs to go beyond admissions and recruitment as Judith King-Calnek, director of diversity, equity and inclusion at the United Nations International School in New York (UNIS) explains: “Some school leaders may think that having diverse pupil and faculty bodies is enough to sustain an ethos of equity and inclusivity, but a school community is about relationships, and like any other relationship, it has to be constantly tended with explicit intention and genuine commitment.

“Our aim is to ensure a culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging”.

The school, which has a faculty of 69 nationalities, works closely with the DEI committee of its parents' association, as well as its alumni, pupils, faculty and staff on a range of activities which include anti-bias/anti-racism (AB/AR) workshops,

webinars featuring DEIJ specialists and members of the school community, and reading groups, as well as a pupil mentorship programme. The school also addresses DEIJ through its curriculum.

“Pupils need to have ‘windows and mirrors’: windows to look through and see the world, and mirrors to see themselves reflected in order to feel validated,” says Judith.

For UNIS, this has included engaging curriculum experts to work with teachers to explore ways to diversify the curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices to support the needs and experiences of all learners and better represent global demographics.

Pupil voice increasingly heard

DEIJ has been a cause for pupil activism too. Drawing upon the critical thinking and reflective skills they have developed during their education, more pupils today are involved in action for change, particularly regarding DEIJ and environmental issues – and schools are increasingly listening and responding.

This was highlighted in research

we conducted into the learning of international mindedness during summer 2021. Our investigation included asking pupils and alumni from international schools what international mindedness meant to them.

We discovered that, with no one common definition of international mindedness, many schools use the term loosely or interchangeably with such terms as ‘global mindedness’ and ‘cultural intelligence’ even though these terms have significant differences, as the International School Student Profile report, (<https://iscresearch.com/reports/international-school-student-profile/>) which includes this research, explains. Our investigation also highlighted that there is no current solution designed to effectively measure and track the development of international mindedness of pupils between the ages of three and 18. However, it was still surprising to us that 100 percent of the pupils, alumni and teachers we researched said that international mindedness had not knowingly been measured in their classrooms. ►



As part of our research, individuals were asked what international mindedness meant to them. Responses varied significantly and examples of these are published in the report. One international school alumnus commented: "International mindedness has always been an abstract concept to me, one that principals and directors liked to say and put in our school mission but never really embody or operationalise".

Respondents were also asked to express their thoughts on how their school practiced international mindedness, and their hopes for improvement. One teacher said: "The school struggles to instil international mindedness because it does not have a strong and clear sense of what it could look like in this particular context and with our various stakeholders".

And an IB Diploma Programme alumnus said: "Efforts should be more consistent in trying to increase international mindedness through the years (and from a young age)".

Market development shifts

The international school market continues to face development shifts, not least because of the ongoing

impact of COVID-19. As the market stabilises after many years of significant growth, our data shows that new school development continues but, for now, at a steadier pace, although student enrolment is increasing in many countries, (<https://iscresearch.com/intelligence/>).

Development shifts include more international schools offering boarding facilities, Chinese brand international schools expanding outside China, some relocation of South Korean and Chinese families to South East Asia in order to access the international education solutions there, a rise in applications from pupils with special educational needs, and a growth in online international schools.

Although foreign independent schools in China are currently facing major challenges as government restrictions continue to limit overseas influence on education, this isn't stopping schools from looking at foreign investment opportunities in other countries. Several development projects and partnerships are happening in East, South, and South East Asia where governments encourage foreign development, and where demand for British brand education increases. ◀

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