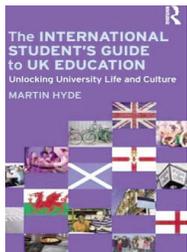


Book Review

Hyde, M. (2012). *The international student's guide to UK education: Unlocking university life and culture*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Reviewed by Paul Sudnik, Munich University of Applied Sciences (Germany)



With the latest statistics issued by the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA, 2012) indicating that the number of students participating in Higher Education courses in the country may be as high as 428,225, and rising, Hyde's contribution seems particularly well timed. Whilst the book has few academic pretensions, in his introductory chapter the author does explain to the reader that it is written with the intention of "Developing your understanding of how you understand yourself and understand your reactions to these various layers of experience" (p. 2). Thus Hyde succeeds in positioning the text firmly within a Kolbian (Kolb, 1984) ambit of experiential learning rather than as a simple self-help book.

The second and third chapters deal with the processes preparatory to undertaking study in the UK. The first of these encourages readers to take time to consider the reasons for embracing an international educational experience and to think about how studying in the UK specifically will further students' life goals. Chapter 3 turns attention to the choice of the right study program and university, emphasizing that the content of programs with the same name often differ from institution to institution, before moving on to a description of the centralized and computerized application system that operates under the acronym UCAS and encompasses all UK universities.

Subsequent chapters will be of interest and use to readers who have already begun their educational stay in the country. In Chapter 4 the author focuses particularly on the early days of a student's stay before turning his attention to the teaching and learning methods extant in UK institutions (Chapter 5), their academic structures and systems (Chapter 6) as well as the administrative and support arrangements that are available in them (Chapter 7). A wide ranging collection of anecdotal information, augmented by full listings of relevant web addresses for further research, give a sense of the author's engagement and expertise in the field. Indeed, the reader may usefully draw on the content of these chapters as a locator for a wide

range of organizations and institutions that may seem to operate below the radar even for UK students.

Two further chapters advise on the cultural aspects of living in the UK from the specific perspective of a student (Chapter 8) and more generally within British society as a whole (Chapter 9). Whilst it may be facile to suggest that it is appropriately sensitive not to leave smelly food in a communal kitchen, one can only think that this is useful general advice to students-although not necessarily specifically in a UK context. More useful are social nuggets of information on shopping, banking and, most pleasing to this reviewer, on pub etiquette!

The tenth and final chapter considers the reader's options upon completing her course of study and gives equal weight to what she should do in order to stay on in the UK to seek work as well as things to bear in mind upon repatriation with the desired UK qualification safely stowed in the luggage. Whilst this chapter falls far short of being a comprehensive guide to requisite employability skills in a tough contemporary environment for graduate job seekers, it does underline the fact that the reader's stay in the UK has a longer term purpose beyond being a thrilling cultural exchange experience.

In a well-crafted and compact 261 pages, the author causes his reader, who may be either a prospective or active student, to consider her choices well before they are made. Hyde goes on to provide supporting material that will be useful for the duration of a student's stay in the UK as well as an array of practical advice on getting the best out of a once in a lifetime opportunity just as soon as the program of study begins. Writing in the style of a consumer guide, the author provides a series of checklists, self-administered questionnaires and reflective exercises that coax, cajole and carry the reader through what can indeed be an intimidating process of leaving behind family, home, a familiar institution and education system for the distant and unfamiliar shores of the UK. The value of some of these checklists might be questionable, one wonders, for example, whether someone who has to consider his level of attainment and need to consolidate skills in cooking basic meals or



using a launderette ought even to be studying in a home country environment. However, other tools are perhaps of greater value as readers are, for example, invited to make use of the universally applicable PESTLE tool of strategic analysis in their planning process.

With an index that starts with “Academic Writing” and ends with “Youth Culture,” Hyde strikes an appropriate balance between the serious aspects of studying abroad and the often underestimated culture shock that faces new arrivals to a country – particularly one as complex as the multicultural UK where more than 300 institutions offer Higher Education courses. The author does a sound job of explaining the differences between English, Welsh and Scottish institutions and systems and of underlining the importance of having solid English language skills that are fit for study and not just for conversation. He explains the different validation systems for language attainment that are on the market and leaves the reader under no illusion that competence in English will be the ultimate key to successful completion of the dreamed of qualification.

If the book has a weakness it is that it is aimed at the younger undergraduate student and as a consequence the graduate student, even if totally new to the UK, is unlikely to be satisfied with the level at which the book is pitched. Nevertheless, this is a useful potpourri which will have something for all international students considering the UK as a destination. On balance, this reviewer will be recommending it to his outward bound exchange students.

References

- UKCISA (2012). International students in UK higher education: key statistics. Retrieved from http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/statistics_he.php
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

About the Reviewer:

Dr. Paul Sudnik currently works with both in and outward bound international business students at Munich University of Applied Sciences, Germany. He has teaching and leadership experience in Higher Education in the UK, India, Egypt, Kosovo and Macedonia. His email is paul.sudnik@hm.edu

How to Cite:

Sudnik, P. (2013). The international student’s guide to UK education [Review of the book *The international student’s guide to UK education: Unlocking university life and culture*, by M. Hyde]. *Journal of International Students*, 3(1), 76-77.
