

'Obama effect' is attracting British students to US

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More British school-leavers are heading to American universities to avoid a culture that produces exam junkies, according to a leading head teacher.

The "Obama effect" has also been credited for encouraging record numbers of British teenagers to begin studying in the United States.

America is the most popular foreign destination for British school-leavers — and Britain the No 1 choice for American teenagers studying abroad.

The British Council has announced that it will contribute £300,000 to facilitate partnerships between universities in the two countries, after moves by the Obama Administration. The council said: "Hillary Clinton has emphasised education and higher education partnerships on her visits."

In the past academic year, 8,700 students from Britain studied in the US, 4 per cent up on the previous year. The data, from the Fulbright Commission, showed that 33,000 US students were studying in Britain in 2008-09.

Lauren Welch, of the commission, said: "In addition to improvements to the visa application process and expanding recruitment efforts by US universities, we suspect there has been a so-called 'Obama Effect' on interest in the US and growing recognition among UK students and parents of the value of a more international education."

Wellington College, an independent school in Berkshire, organises conferences on applying to American universities. Anthony Seldon, the Master, said: "The attractiveness of US universities is more and more apparent to British families and students. The US system is better resourced, has a lower pupil-teacher ratio, and there's far

Relative values

£10,000

average annual cost of tuition fees US

£3,225

average annual cost of tuition fees UK

£14 billion

Harvard's endowment fund

£3.4 billion

Oxford University's endowment fund

Entry requirements to US universities

Scholastic aptitude test including an essay, maths and critical reading test, and a 30-page application form including references and A-level grades

Entry requirements to UK universities

Three A levels and Ucas form, including personal statement and reference

greater celebration of achievement." The US system did not produce students fixated on exam success, he said. It reflected "our best state and independent schools, which try to educate the whole child rather than turning out exam junkies."

"US universities celebrate you playing the clarinet or being a netball star whereas British universities couldn't care tuppence about it, with some exceptions. The courses are very attractive; they're not so narrowly focused, nor dictated to by universities' research interests."

"British universities, for all their success in international tables, are increasingly perceived by students to be places that are underfunded."

"US universities clearly celebrate a far more rounded version. If students win full scholarships, for example, if they are a wonderful musician or sportsperson, it can be very lucrative."

Dr Seldon said that the figures were a "wake-up call" for British universities. "Rather than getting annoyed, they should be looking to themselves."

With the election of President Obama the US had become "a more

exciting and liberal country again," after the comparatively "hardnosed and anti-intellectual Bush years", he said. "I think students are attracted by what they believe to be sincere ideals."

● Colleges could end up millions of pounds out of pocket after taking on more students than the Government will fund. They have recruited at least 15,000 extra school-leavers, amid demand from those unable to find work or university places in the recession.

The number of young people not in education or employment now exceeds one million: it rose by 120,000 in the past three months. Almost one in five 16 to 24-year-olds is now not in work, training or education.

The Association of Colleges calculates that colleges gave places to at least 15,000 more students than they were supposed to this year, at a cost of £37.5 million. Many of those rejected by universities will have turned to colleges to improve their A-level grades.

Iain Wright, a junior Education Minister, told the association's conference yesterday that colleges that had taken on extra students may be eligible for a share of £11 million funding towards this. It is less than a third of what the association estimates has been spent.

