



Citation for published version:

Bunnell, T, Donnelly, M & Lauder, H 2021, 'The clustering of Elite Traditional International School graduates at global universities in global cities', *International Schools Journal*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 26-32.
<https://www.isjournal.eu/2021/arthro/spring_2021-4542/>

Publication date:
2021

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

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The clustering of Elite Traditional International School graduates at global universities in global cities

Introduction: A new phenomenon

Our paper further explores a new phenomenon involving the graduates of ‘Elite Traditional International Schools’ (ETISs), and builds upon a recent journal publication by ourselves (Bunnell, Donnelly, and Lauder, 2020) on the topic. That paper used data in the public domain showing the university entry (i.e. matriculation) of young people from seven ETISs, over several successive years, and revealed that graduates are entering a huge array of institutions globally yet at the same time are beginning to cluster within a few major destinations within North America, and England.

The main stimulus behind that study had been the rather startling assertion that 70% of undergraduates at the University of British Columbia (UBC) emerge from ETISs (Keeling, 2015), effectively making that institution a ‘global university’, and making Vancouver *defacto* a ‘global city’. A second stimulus had been the finding from ISC Research’s *Pathways from K-12 English-medium International Schools to University 2018*, which provided data upon the destinations of graduates from 132 schools, and had reported that UBC was the major matriculation destination. In fact, that report showed a ‘Top 5’ that also included Canada’s University of Toronto, alongside New York University (NYU), plus King’s College London (KCL) and University College London (UCL).

Our resultant study of seven schools revealed that a definite clustering of ‘global citizens/workers’ in ‘global universities’ within ‘global cities’ is becoming typical of ETISs in general. It was shown that the seven schools had sent 2,104 students to a university, entering an average of 138 universities worldwide. However, of these students, 239 (11.3%) had entered the aforementioned grouping of just five universities, in four cities. As expected, UBC scored

highly and came second, although NYU emerged top. In fact, one school in Hong Kong had sent 15% of its 307 graduates between 2015 and 2018 to what we will now call the ‘Great 5: G5’.

That significant finding supports the argument made by Sassen (2000) that the resources required for economic activity at a global level are not hypermobile and spread out across the world, but are contained and deeply embedded within the space and place of ‘global cities’ such as London, New York, Toronto, and Vancouver. Further, it adds substantial weight to Wright and Lee’s (2019 p.682) findings where the IBDP alumni ‘highlighted the appeal of a global city, and international environment’. Below, we will add more randomly selected examples to reveal the strength of the clustering effect, and will begin to highlight two contradictions, or paradoxes, at play.

The evidence of clustering

To begin to fully understand the emergent clustering phenomenon, consider another example of a large ‘Elite Traditional International School’ in Hong Kong which between 2017-2019 had 304 graduates. School A is a very high-scoring IB World School, averaging 38 points in 2019, and where 40% of the cohort that year had scored over 40 points. Of the 304 graduates over three successive years, 90% (277 graduates) entered (i.e. matriculated at) 95 different universities in three nations: Canada, UK, and USA. At first glance, this seems like a large spreading of students, with an average of three students entering each university. However, closer analysis reveals that 42 of the 277 graduates from School A entered just five universities, and these represented the five biggest blocs of students across the 95 universities. In total, 10 entered New York University (NYU), another 10 entered King’s College London (KCL), 8 entered University of Toronto, 8 went to University College London, and 6 went to University of British Columbia (UBC). In other words, 42 (13.8%) of the school’s graduates between 2017

and 2019 had entered the 'G5'. Conversely, the other 235 (86.2%) graduates entered 90 different universities across Canada, UK, and USA, showing the incredible spread of many graduates and the huge global array of options available to them in reality. This fact alone strengthens the clustering as a strange phenomenon.

Consider data from another ETIS to begin to further delve into the real importance of the 'G5'. School B is a very large American curriculum school in South East Asia. It's 740 Advanced Placement graduates between 2017 and 2019 received 2,878 acceptances from 525 institutions, and matriculated at about half of that body (260 institutions). The largest group, by far, went to NYU (35 students, representing 5% of all graduates, over three years), followed by Northeastern University in Boston (26 students). UBC came third, with 21 students, and then the University of Boston (18 students). Santa Clara came fifth, with 14 students, followed by Toronto, with 12 students. School B's 'Top 5' destinations accounted for only 2.5% of total destinations, yet accounted for 15% (112) of all graduates. In fact, one American city (Boston) alone received 44 of those 122 graduates. As a further 9 went to KCL and 7 attended UCL, we can calculate that the 'G5' received 85 students between 2017 and 2019 (11.5% of all School B's graduates between 2017 and 2019). It is perhaps worth noting that only 3 students over the same time period entered Oxbridge (i.e. one per year), which reveals another significant aspect of the clustering phenomenon; the graduates tend to not matriculate in the world's leading universities as represented by the Oxbridge and Ivy League institutions.

To show this is not an unusual trend, consider earlier figures for the period 2013-2016 for School B. The biggest bloc went to NYU (39), showing (when added to the 2017-2019 data) that a regular cohort of about 13 students each year leave School A for entry to NYU. The 'G5' between 2013 and 2016 accounted for 79 students (18 went to UBC, 10 went to Toronto, and 6 went to UCL, and KCL). In other words, each year a further 6 graduates enter UBC.

Consider another, different, type of ETIS, more typical of the ‘Internationally British’ model of international schooling; School C is one of the 10 Dulwich College International (DCI) branches, located in China. This type of franchised and branded ‘Satellite College’ (Bunnell, Courtois, and Donnelly, 2020) now numbers almost 100, and half are in Mainland China. The 231 IBDP graduates from School C (which caters for expats and has students from 40 nationalities, hence our inclusion of it as an ETIS), between 2016 and 2019 entered 119 universities across 19 nations. The ‘G5’ accounted for 33 of School C’s graduates, representing 14.3% of all the 231 graduates over four successive years. KCL (12) and UCL (10) are the top two global destinations from School C (followed by Imperial College London, 9 students, and the University of Melbourne, with 7). Further, NYU (6) is the biggest USA destination, and UBC (4) is the biggest Canadian destination. A further 3 of School C’s students went to Toronto. London easily emerged as the biggest city destination from School C, with 53 students (23% of all graduates). Significantly, another branch of the DCI, also in China, sent its biggest bloc of graduates in 2019 to University of Toronto (7 students).

To show that this is not merely an Asian phenomenon, consider the case of School D in Austria. Between 2015 and 2019, the 204 IBDP graduates at School D received 1,053 offers from 355 institutions in 22 countries. Overall, the 204 graduates entered 115 universities outside Austria. The biggest matriculation grouping attended KCL (10), followed by Bath (8), Edinburgh (8), and Warwick (8). York was fifth (6), UCL was sixth (6), and Toronto (5) was seventh. This ‘Top 7’ destinations accounted for just 6% of all destinations (and just 2% of institutions that gave offers) yet was the destination for 25.5% (52 students) of all the graduates. By contrast, just 3 students attended Oxbridge, and 8 attended the Ivy League institutions.

This clustering trend is repeated in other ETISs. The biggest bloc of graduates from Yokohama International School, between 2015 and 2018 that went to university outside Japan, entered UBC. The biggest grouping of graduates from Washington International School,

between 2017 and 2020, entered the University of Toronto (13 students), and the biggest grouping that stayed within the United States entered NYU (12 students). The biggest grouping of the graduates in 2020 from the International School of Paris went to University of Toronto (6 students), and a further eight went to UCL and KCL. The ‘G5’ is always a major clustering arena of activity.

At the same time, other significant ETIS clusters can be identified, indicative of a cluster beyond the ‘G5’. The International School of Geneva in 2019 sent 88 graduates to North America, and 15 entered Canada’s McGill. Of the 180 who left Geneva for the United Kingdom, 14 entered Durham and 13 went to Exeter. Bath and UCL received a further 10 apiece. In fact, of the 266 students who went from ‘Ecolint’ to university in either North America or the UK, 72 (27%) went to just six universities.

Discussion

The filtering process and mechanism

Our analysis of the university destinations of students from ETISs reflects broader research agendas around the role of place within a globalised world. In an era of rapid globalisation, key questions remain about why place persists and perhaps matters more than ever. What is it about certain places which seem to anchor people? Our findings show place-based patterning not only at the macro level (largely Global North countries) but also micro-level geographies of specific cities that are anchoring students from ETISs.

From the data above, we can start to identify significant anchoring trends. We can observe that School A sent 13.8% of all its graduates between 2017 and 2019 to the ‘G5’ destinations (NYU, UBC, Toronto, KCL, and UCL). School B sent 11.7% of its graduates 2017-2019 to the ‘Big 5’. School C in China sent 14.3% to those five destinations between

2016-2019. We can see that a regular 37 students each year leave School B for entry to the ‘G5’. In fact, a regular grouping of 13 each year leave School B to attend one base, NYU in Greenwich Village.

From all this data analysis we can conclude that, on average, an ETIS sends 13% of all its graduates to a grouping of just five university destinations in four major global cities (London, New York, Toronto, and Vancouver). This rises to over 15% when Boston is added to the listing, and 20% when we add other popular UK destinations such as Edinburgh, Bath, Durham, and Exeter. At the same time, it is common for a large ETIS to send its graduates over three or four years to 120-180 different destinations, after acceptances from 300-600 institutions. Clearly, a substantial *filtering* process and mechanism is at work, leading to a clustering of graduates in a handful of global universities in global cities.

The defiance of logic

This finding defies two sets of logic. First, one might expect these students, mainly the offspring of the Trans-National Capitalist Class and who have attended high-scoring IBDP and AP schools, to attend top/elite universities (‘The Class Logic’). However, they tend to cluster in lower-ranking universities. Relatively few attended either Oxbridge or Ivy League institutions, or even England’s Russell Group of 24 elite universities, made up of destinations such as Birmingham, Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle, and Nottingham. This latter body of institutions barely features in the matriculation data from ETISs, although it is a dominant destination for graduates of England’s elite private schools such as Harrow School (Bunnell, Donnelly, and Lauder, 2020).

Second, one might logically expect IB Learners from elite IB World Schools to undergo a more risking, adventurous Higher Education pathway (‘The International Mindedness Logic’), given their schooling exposure to the attributes of the IB Learner Profile such as risk-

taking (Barratt Hacking et al, 2018). Yet, we can see that many students, given a choice, ultimately attend a relatively safe, liberal campus in a highly developed English-speaking nation. This does seem paradoxical, and adds weight to Wright and Lee's (2019 p.693) observation about ETISs in China where 'there are paradoxes as perceived cosmopolitan sensibilities coincided with a lack of engagement with the local at university, and in society.'

The emergent areas of further research

Further, this finding leads to two substantive areas of research inquiry. First, we need to know how and why the filtering process occurs. The role of key players such as college counsellors, peer students or family members, as well as the global universities themselves needs investigating. It is obviously not a coincidence that about 1-in-7 graduates from an ETIS enters one of five universities around the world.

Second, we need to learn more about the long-term implications of the clustering phenomenon. How does this play out in the emergent (global) labour market? If young people attend a similar type of school and undergo a similar schooling experience, do they then enter the labour market together, using the links and networks that are forged by attending university together? This is potentially a very powerful platform for class solidarity (Bunnell, Donnelly, Lauder, and Whewall, 2020), and it makes the elite international schooling experience of rituals and character-formation a potentially very 'elite' and advantageous one indeed (Bunnell, 2020).

Moreover, it adds considerably to our discussion raised recently in this journal (Bunnell and Fertig, 2020) regarding the changing nature and purpose of international schooling, which seems to still involve at some level the long-term pursuit of global peace sustainability within an innovation-led paradigm of teaching and learning, but is also becoming more closely linked to the potential formation of a class that might in the near-future seek to utilise its growing

inter-connections and inter-dependencies (Bunnell, 2020b). It is argued (Ball and Nikita, 2014) that a ‘global middle class’ has emerged in nations such as Vietnam and Malaysia that is utilising the choice of international schooling for advantage, yet it might be equally true that their children might forge such a class in the future.

We would welcome comment and suggestions about the two research avenues of inquiry, and would particularly invite insights from the readers of this journal about how and why this clustering phenomenon is occurring. In the meantime, the study of the long-term impact and implications is being developed. We argue that a study of labour-market entry, and even career, would be useful for investigating and closer observing in practice the long-term, permanent effect of the clustering that we have begun to identify.

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