



Cobham Egham Hillingdon

London, England

International Relocation:

Exploring the experiences of students and parents



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Foreword

ACS International Schools is a truly global community, with over 70 nationalities represented in our student body. With such a rich mixture at hand this survey tapped into the relocation experiences of our students and families across our three campuses, gaining valuable insights into the challenges they share, and the way they feel before, during and after an overseas move.

Over the years our understanding of the market has led us to recognise that a successful international relocation is very much a family affair – the benefits to the sponsoring organisation are closely linked to the happiness of the parents it assigns overseas, who in turn rely greatly on the happiness of their children. Family-friendly policies really do benefit the bottom line.

As a leading international school our findings in this area help us to support and advise the following groups:

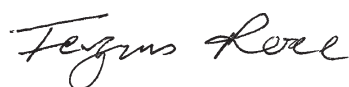
- families who have already made the move – knowing that others are experiencing, and have gained from, the same situations can be very reassuring;
- families about to embark on an international move – the personal insights of predecessors helps prepare them for what lies ahead; and
- relocation industry professionals and organisations involved in relocation support, including schools – to share insight on the services families need in order to achieve a successful transition.

Building on the success of the previous survey in 2006, which looked at 100 High School students at our ACS Cobham campus, the 2008 research was extended to include students from all three ACS schools, ranging from Middle School to High School (ages 10 to 18).

It is interesting to note that the extended survey group in 2008 still returned results in line with the 2006 findings, pointing to fundamental universalities between ages, genders and nationalities.

It is also very heartening to find that relocation has been a positive experience for the vast majority of our students and parents and, whilst there may be concerns at the time of departure, broadly speaking these are quickly resolved once families are settled into their new life in the UK.

There is little doubt that an international move brings with it many challenges, however, it is safe to say that most families find it a life-affirming experience, where new friends are made, new skills acquired and rich cultural experiences enjoyed.



Fergus Rose, ACS International Schools
March 2009

Main Findings

Overall...

1. Overall, has relocating to England been a positive or negative experience for you?

Students

For 70% of students, relocating to England has been a positive experience. The small group of students who reported negative experiences were mainly older students.

"At first it was hard to be in a different country, but now I'm glad I moved and wouldn't trade it for the world!"



70% = combination of very and fairly positive

Very positive Fairly positive Neither Fairly negative Very negative Not stated

Parents

For most parents, relocating to England has been a positive experience. Interestingly, parents coming from North America found their relocation more positive than those coming from Europe.

"I enjoy being an expat, and I think it is a great experience for our daughter – it really helps her to see the world as more than one place."



75% = combination of very and fairly positive

Very positive Fairly positive Neither Fairly negative Very negative Not stated

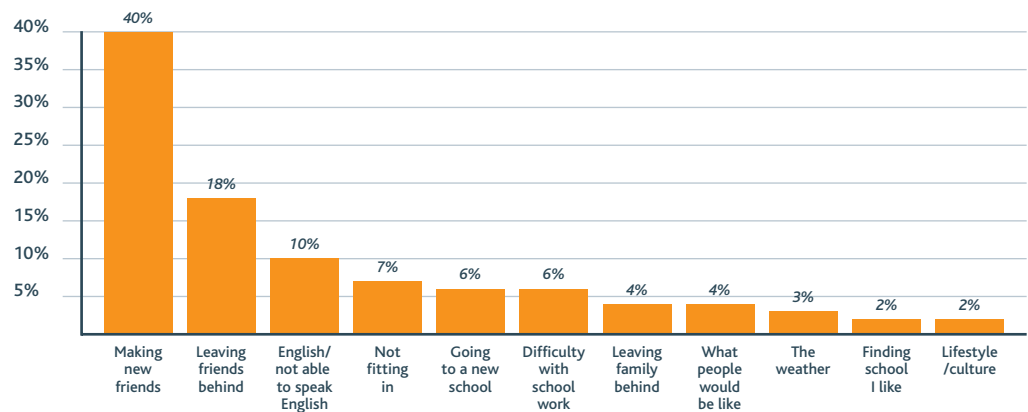
Pre-departure...

2. Thinking back to when you were relocating to England, what, in your own words, were the biggest concerns or issues facing you at that time?

Students

The greatest worries among students relate to friendships: making new friends (40%) and leaving old friends behind (18%). 10% had concerns about the English language, or not being able to speak English, while 7% were concerned about possibly standing out/being different/not fitting in. Of students for whom English is not their first language, unsurprisingly, a larger percent (31%) said that the language was one of their biggest worries when moving to England.

What were the biggest concerns or issues facing students at the time they relocated to England (in their own words)?



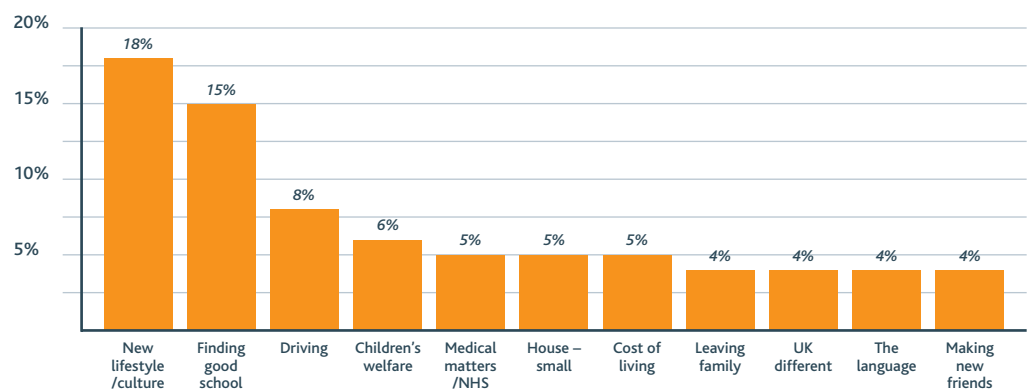
"Relocating was hard because I didn't know what to expect. Now I know and I am really happy."

Parents

The greatest worries for parents about to move to England relate to adjusting to a new culture and lifestyle, including, for most, driving on the left, smaller houses, and the cost of living. Looking for and finding a good school was the second most frequently mentioned spontaneous concern.

Of those parents for whom English is not their first language, 12% said that learning the language was one of their biggest concerns.

What were the biggest concerns or issues facing parents at the time they relocated to England (in their own words)?



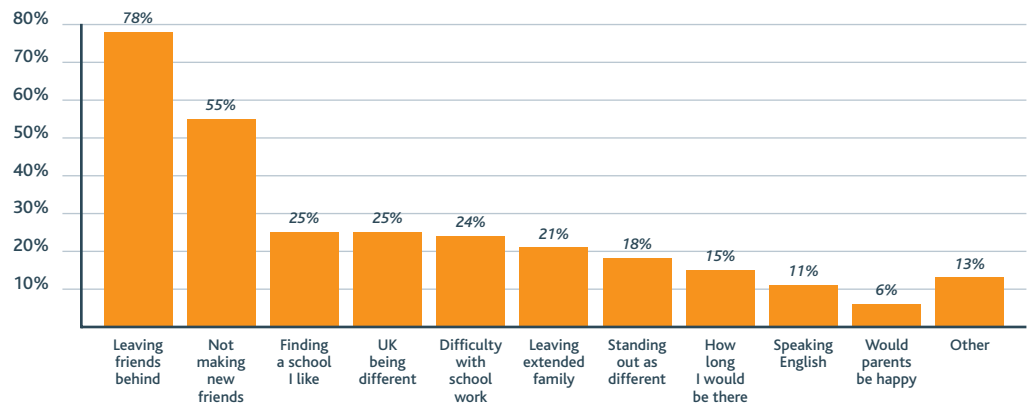
"I was told to bring things that make a house a home. I'd re-word that: bring the things that make a home yours! It helps to feel your rental is your home and not just a rental."

3. What were your top three concerns when you were relocating to England? (multiple choice responses given)

Students

When prompted to list their top three worries when relocating to England, two issues about friends came out top. Three quarters were worried about leaving friends behind and 55% were concerned about not making new friends (more so among younger students). A quarter said they were concerned about finding a school they would like – particularly among boys (30% expressed this concern) and students at High School (29%). Of those students for whom English is not their first language, 36% said that the language was one of their top three worries when moving to England.

What were the top three concerns facing students at the time they relocated to England? (multiple choice responses given)

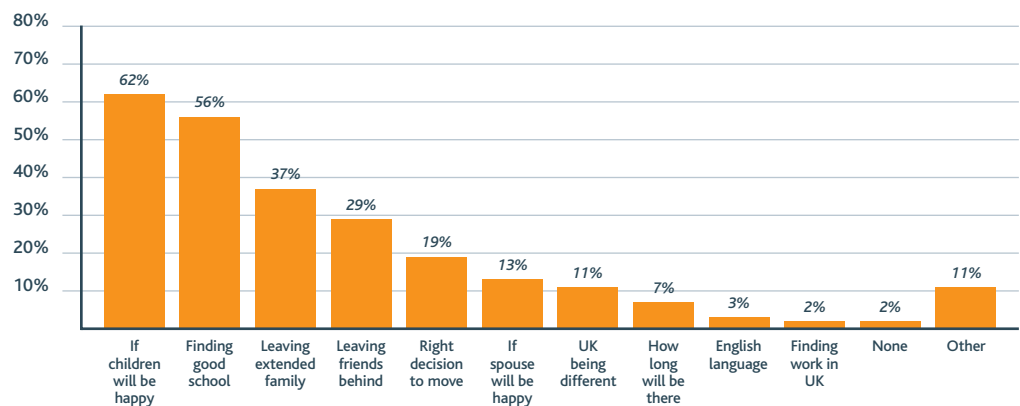


"I've had a hard time leaving my friends behind, but I'm okay now."

Parents

When prompted to list their top three worries when relocating to England, parents were most concerned about their children being happy; 62% were worried about this at the time of relocating. The next biggest worry was finding a good school where their children would be happy. Two other significant worries were leaving behind extended family, and leaving friends. 19% also said they were concerned about making the right decision to move to the UK. Of those parents for whom English is not the first language, 11% said that learning the language was one of their top three worries.

What were the top three concerns facing parents at the time they relocated to England? (multiple choice responses given)



"A parent is only as happy as his/her unhappiest child."

Since arriving...

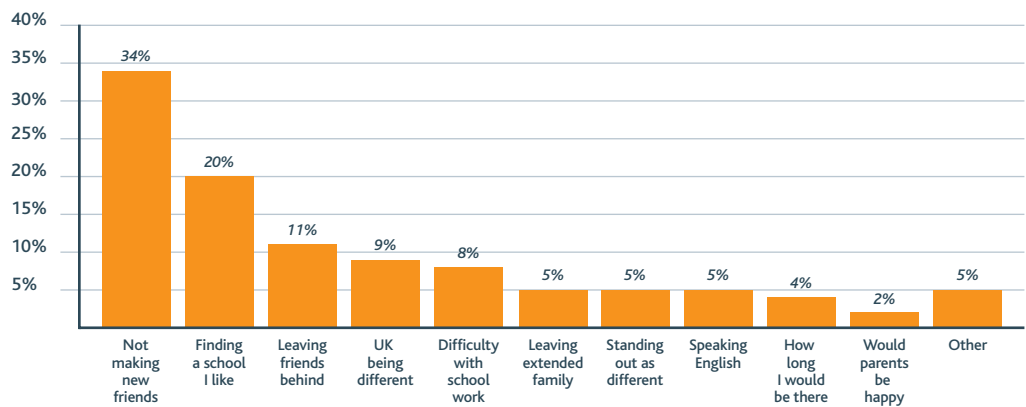
4. Which single issue turned out to be the easiest to deal with?

Students

34% said not making new friends, while 20% said that finding a school they liked turned out to be the single easiest issue to deal with. In 2006 a similar question was asked and again, 'making friends' and 'finding a school I like', came out as the top issues which were easiest to deal with for ACS students.

"Don't be afraid to introduce yourself and if you are a boarder don't hide in your room."

Which single issue turned out to be the easiest for students to deal with?



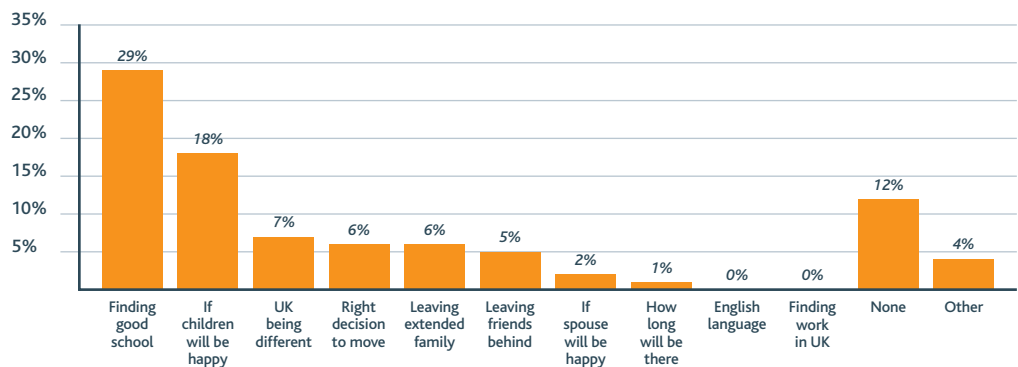
Parents

29% said that finding a school they liked turned out to be the single easiest issue to deal with. Of the parents who said that finding a new school their children would like was one of their three greatest concerns when relocating, 36% said that this turned out to be the easiest single issue to deal with.

18% overall found that the single easiest issue to deal with turned out to be that their children were happy in the new country.

"Our relocation has been very smooth. We have our occasional 'sad' days, but the school has been great and we have already had some amazing adventures."

Which single issue turned out to be the easiest for parents to deal with?



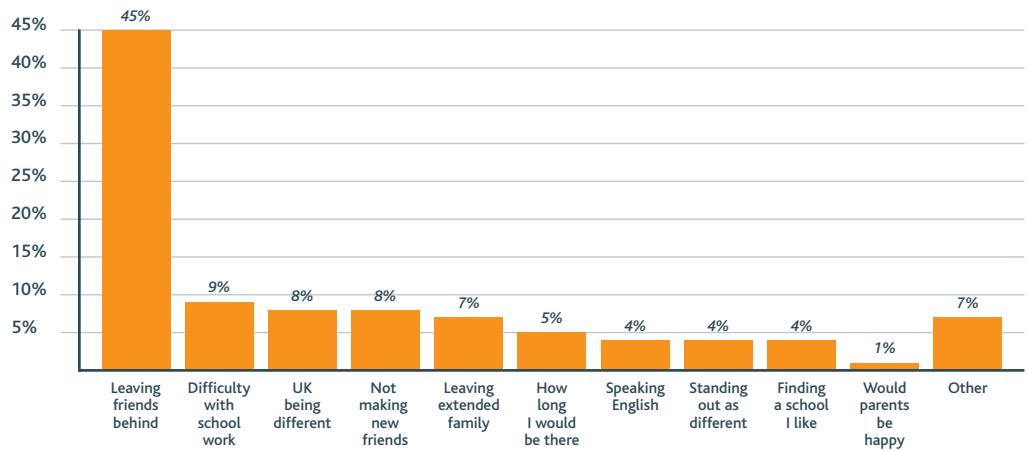
5. Which single issue turned out to be the most difficult to deal with?

Students

Leaving friends behind; 45% mentioned this as the single most difficult issue, particularly for girls. From being an issue which students were concerned about when moving, finding a school they liked actually turned out to be the single most difficult issue for only 4% – much lower than they anticipated. Among those whose first language was not English, 13% said that learning the language was the most difficult issue to deal with.

“When I first got to London I found it difficult because I really missed my friends, my school and Moscow. But as time went by it got better and now I love it here.”

Which single issue turned out to be the most difficult to deal with?

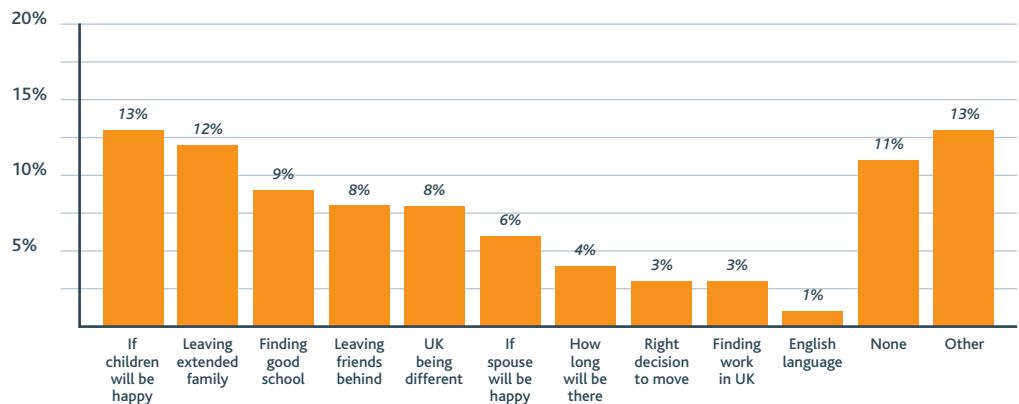


Parents

There were no single factors which really stood out above the rest, however, 13% said worrying if their children were happy. When asked why, this tended to be because the children were homesick. Fewer parents mentioned other concerns such as leaving extended family behind and cultural differences in the UK.

“One of the beauties of international schools is that most of the kids understand what it’s like to move and are very open to welcoming your children in.”

Which single issue turned out to be the most difficult for parents to deal with?



6. Since arriving in England, what factors have helped you settle in?

Students

Making new friends most helped students to settle in. The second most important factor in helping relocating students to settle in is 'going to a good school'. Keeping in touch with old friends and family remains an important factor, as does support from a buddy or classmate.

Of those students for whom English is not their first language, language support is very important – 60% said that it helped a lot or a little.

"I was very impressed at how easy it was to make friends. I have relocated several times before and it has never been this easy."

Factors that have helped	Helped a little	Helped a lot	Total helped
Making new friends	17%	78%	95%
Going to a good school	34%	55%	89%
Keeping in contact with old friends/family	26%	56%	82%
Support from a buddy or classmate	35%	42%	77%
Successful completion of school work	42%	30%	72%
My parents are happy and settled	36%	34%	70%
Joining community groups/clubs	39%	31%	70%
Trips back home	17%	50%	67%
Support from my teachers	37%	27%	64%
Classmates from my country/nationality	29%	32%	61%
Support from my brother/sister	28%	20%	48%
Language support/learning the language	17%	15%	32%
Language support/learning the language among students for whom English was not the main language	26%	34%	60%

Parents

For parents, knowing that their children are happy and settled is the factor which has most helped them to settle in. 82% mention this as one of the most important factors and 70% say it has helped a lot.

The second most helpful factor in helping relocating parents to settle in is keeping in touch with old friends and family, mentioned as a helpful factor by 76% overall. Another very important factor for parents is making new friends who are from their own country or nationality, mentioned by 73% overall.

While still vital to many parents, support from specific organisations when settling in such as the school, relocation companies and parent-teacher bodies, is understandably thought to be less important overall than the top 'family and community' factors.

"This is a fabulous community to be a part of, but it does take time and commitment to reap the rewards of amazing friendships with families from all over the world."

"Include your children in all decisions so that they feel part of the move. It is ultimately your decision but the kids get a vote. Have them visit the school, help pick out the house, etc."

Factors that have helped	Helped a little	Helped a lot	Total helped
My children are happy and settled	12%	70%	82%
Contact with old friends/family	29%	47%	76%
New friends from home country/nationality	30%	43%	73%
Good social/community through school	34%	25%	59%
Joining community groups/clubs	30%	27%	57%
Transition support from school	33%	17%	50%
Support from parent/student/teacher groups	31%	18%	49%
Trips back home	21%	25%	46%
Experience from previous relocation	13%	29%	42%
Joining nationality groups	17%	18%	35%
Assistance from relocation company	23%	11%	34%
Working in the UK	12%	11%	23%
Learning the language	3%	6%	9%

7. What have you enjoyed most about relocating?

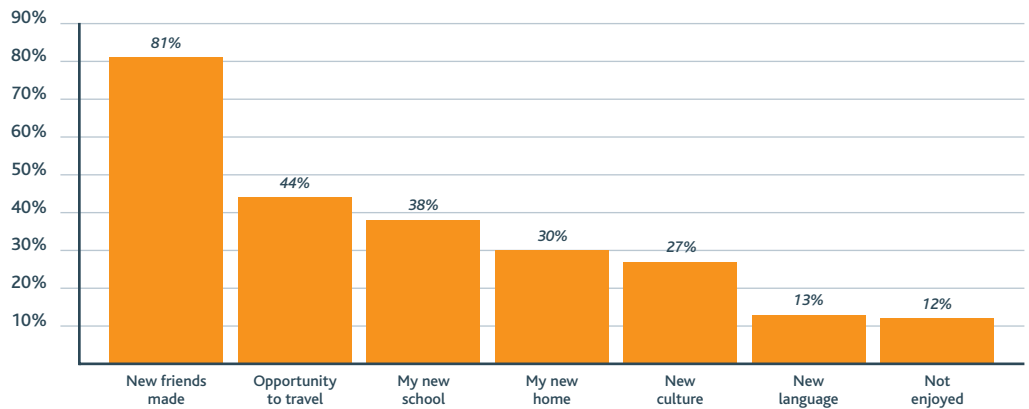
Students

Again, making new friends is mentioned by 81%. The next two things enjoyed most are the opportunity for travel, and going to their new school – which, perhaps surprisingly, gets mentioned more than their new home.

There are also differences between the age groups. Making new friends is more often mentioned by girls and children under 14; the opportunity to travel is mentioned more by girls than boys, and also more by ages 14-18; and finally going to a new school is mentioned more by boys and those under 14.

“ACS was good because everyone I know has been through a similar thing I’ve been through.”

What have students enjoyed most about relocating?

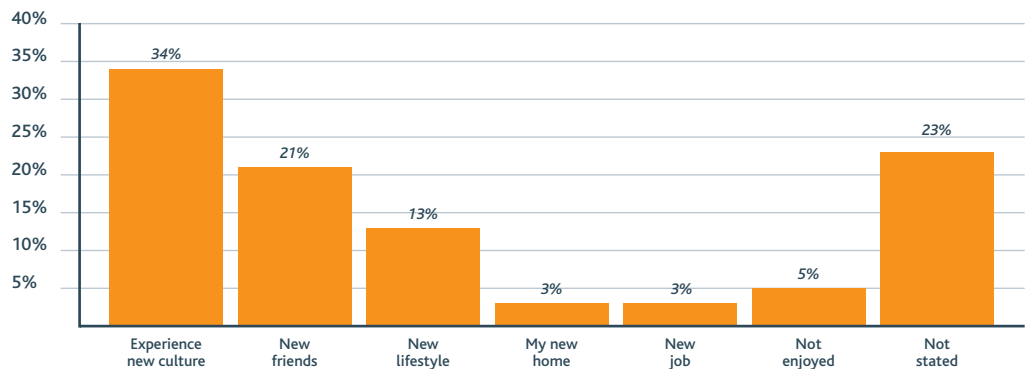


Parents

Experiencing a new culture is the thing parents say they have enjoyed most about relocating. Again, making new friends is mentioned by 21% as being one of the things they have enjoyed most about relocating. The next thing enjoyed most is the new lifestyle.

“Be open to learning new cultures and appreciate the change. Enjoy the difference while it lasts.”

What have parents most enjoyed about relocating?



8. Based on your experiences, what tips would you give to other children/parents who are relocating?

"Always be yourself and try to make new friends."

"Don't be scared that your English might not be perfect. Just talk a lot and you will learn it. Always think 'how many words do they speak in my language?'"

"Be open to new experiences and get involved with community activities which will allow you to meet people and make new friends. Look for the positive and explore the different."

Students

92% of students made some comment or tip and the most frequently suggested tips were:

- 24% said 'don't worry – don't be scared: there is nothing to be scared about'
- 23% said 'you should make new friends quickly'
- 15% said 'be positive, have confidence'
- 11% simply said 'you should be yourself'
- 9% gave assurances about making new friends
- 8% suggested keeping in touch with friends/family by phone or email
- 4% suggested joining clubs or teams.

Other comments included 'just have fun', 'work hard', and 'ACS is a good school'.

Parents

95% of parents made some comment or tip and the most frequently suggested tips were:

- 17% said to 'get involved with or join groups'
- 9% said 'it's fine in the end – you get used to it'
- 9% said 'you need to be open to new things, and don't make it like home'
- 7% said to 'make new friends quickly'
- 7% suggested enjoying the country and the culture
- 6% suggested that you should do your homework in advance
- 5% stressed that you should be positive, confident.

Other comments included bringing a few things from home as keepsakes, making the effort to regularly keep in touch with old friends, and using technology to stay connected. Specific comments included the importance of broadband and how useful Skype has been 'cheap calls'. Technology, when regulated, is an important tool to help children keep in contact too.

9. Additional comments

This was an opportunity for students and parents to make any additional comments about their relocation experience.

"I was a little sad at first, but now I love my new school. I have friends and a great family to support me."

"My email buddy was really helpful. I didn't feel so completely alone."

"Travel opportunities around the UK and Europe are endless from this location. Take advantage of school breaks to travel."

Students

42% did make some additional comment, although they tended to be very diverse. The most frequent additional spontaneous comments were:

- 9% commented that initially it was hard
- 8% said that overall it had been a good or pleasant experience
- 7% said they were happy at ACS
- 6% made further comments about having made new friends
- 4% said the school and other students were friendly
- 4% said they hated leaving friends – that was the worst part
- 4% commented that it wasn't as bad as expected, and to just enjoy it
- 3% said they didn't want to be here.

Parents

26% did make some additional comment although, as with the student responses, they tended to be very diverse. The most frequent additional spontaneous comments were:

- 5% thought that more relocation/welcome advice from the school and the parent body would have been useful
- 3% said that overall it had been a good or pleasant experience
- 3% said that it was good in the end although initially it was hard.

Conclusions

The survey has provided valuable insight into the main concerns facing students and parents when relocating to England.

“Relocating takes time and effort. It does not end with unpacking the boxes, but may take up to a year. Opportunities are all around but it may take time to spot them. Don't worry, be happy! And enjoy the experience.”

“Ride the wave and hold on tight! There will be good days and bad days, but as the months go by, everything settles down nicely.”

- Overall, relocation has been a positive experience for both students and parents, although slightly more for parents than for students.
- At the time of relocating, students' biggest concerns are in relation to friends: leaving old ones behind and making new ones. Broadly the concern about making new friends is quickly dispelled once they start school, meet people in the same position, and join clubs and groups. Finding new friends turns out to be the easiest issue to deal with, as was finding a school they like. This may be due to the international environment found at ACS where students are able to find friends with a similar experience to them, and they are welcomed into the community, not treated as an 'outsider'.
- For parents the biggest worries are that their children should be happy, and finding a good school. Again, these concerns are generally quickly set aside as their children make new friends and settle into the new school – both are listed as the easiest issues to deal with in the event.
- For both students and parents the most difficult issue to deal with after relocation becomes leaving old friends and family, and this is particularly so for students. This issue seems to be dealt with by both students and parents by keeping in touch with old friends and family regularly and visits back home.
- For students the three things most enjoyed about relocating turn out to be making new friends, the opportunity to travel, and their new school. The perspective for parents is somewhat different – they enjoy most experiencing a new culture, making new friends, and the new lifestyle.
- The most useful student tips relate to making friends quickly, joining groups, whilst not losing touch with old friends, being confident and open-minded, ready to try new things, and not expecting things to be the same as 'home'.

Research Details

The survey was undertaken in November and December 2008. Middle School and High School students from ACS Cobham, ACS Egham and ACS Hillingdon were invited to take part as well as parents of all students (including Lower School parents). Only families who had joined the school since August 2007 were surveyed to ensure that their relocation experience was still relatively fresh.

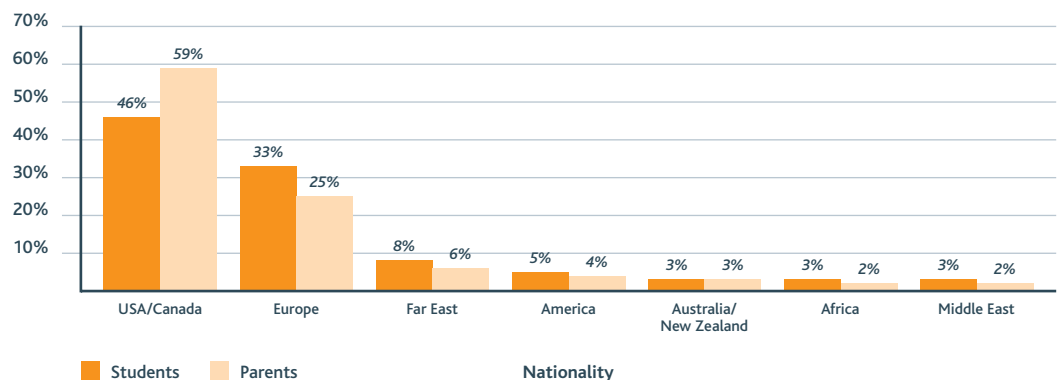
The survey was carried out using hard copy forms (for the students) and online surveys (for the parents). The questionnaires were sent to the IDA research agency for analysis on an anonymous basis. The research was conducted according to the Market Research Society code of conduct. Throughout the tabulations and this report, all percentages are based on all respondents.

Profile of Respondents

There were over 800 completed questionnaires of which two-thirds were students (from the Middle and High Schools – aged 10-18) and one third were parents.

Student responses were split fairly evenly between boys (54%) and girls (46%), whilst the parents who answered were mainly mothers (88%).

53 nationalities were represented in the survey responses. Nearly half the respondents were North American, with a diverse range of nationalities comprising the other half.



Most students and parents who took part in this survey have a previous relocation experience, having lived in two or more countries (not including England).

40% of parents surveyed have relocated internationally with children two times or more, whilst 47% have just one experience of relocating with children.

Just under a third of students and parents in the survey said English was not their first language when they moved to England. The most common first languages were Dutch, Japanese, Spanish and German.



Cobham Egham Hillingdon

ACS International Schools enrolls a total of 2,600 students aged between 2 and 18, from over 70 nationalities, at three London area campuses in England. The schools are non-sectarian and co-educational, with both day and boarding available. Based on international and American research, principles, and educational practices, ACS is committed to maintaining the highest standards of scholarship and citizenship.

Our academic programme

All ACS campuses are International Baccalaureate (IB) World Schools, offering the IB Diploma Programme (IBDP). In addition, ACS Egham is one of only three schools in the UK to also offer the IB Middle Years Programme (IBMYP), and the IB Primary Years Programme (IBPYP).

All ACS campuses offer an American High School Diploma, with ACS Cobham and ACS Hillingdon also teaching prestigious Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

ACS graduates attend leading universities around the world including: Cambridge, Imperial College London, London School of Economics, and Oxford in the UK; Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale in the US; and McGill, Stockholm School of Economics, University of Oslo, Delft University of Technology, University of Tokyo, and Keio from the rest of the world.

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