

Go to university abroad, Britain's top comprehensive tells its pupils

By Richard Garner
Education Editor

ONE OF the country's top-performing state schools is urging its pupils to go university overseas next year to avoid the rise in tuition fees.

Hockerill Anglo-European College in Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire, has appointed a student counsellor with the sole aim of helping pupils to apply for universities overseas because their fees will be cheaper than those in England from next year.

The 830-pupil school, which has been the top comprehensive school in exam league tables for several years, has also appointed a marketing company to scour the top 40 overseas universities for details of all the courses they teach in English.

Its decision prompted claims from a university lecturers' leader that it was a "source of shame" for the UK if bright youngsters were forced to study abroad.

Simon Dennis, the school's principal, believes universities in England, will be hit by a "double whammy" when tuition fees rise to up to £9,000 a year from September 2012.

He says many of the most talented youngsters will be put off studying in home universities by the increase and that his school's overseas drive will avoid some of his brightest pupils dropping out of university altogether.

In addition, restrictions on visas will mean a massive reduction in the number of overseas students universities can recruit. "The incredibly difficult visa requirements will make it more difficult to get students to come here to study," he said.

"We need to encourage our students to look beyond the UK boundaries. A lot of overseas institutions are converting their courses into English to attract that market."

The school, which offers the International Baccalaureate to all its pupils and was the top comprehensive in the new league table devised by Michael Gove, the Education Secretary, to show how many pupils would be eligible for his flagship English Baccalaureate, has already been inundated by brochures from overseas universities in Europe and even Beijing, that plan to run courses in English.

Many of them are already charging lower fees than English universities -



SO, WHERE WOULD BE THE BEST OVERSEAS OPTIONS?

■ **Maastricht University** is leading the way in the battle to recruit UK students in the wake of the rising tuition fees, writes Richard Garner. The number of applicants to the Dutch university has almost doubled to 100 following an advertising campaign geared at the UK market. With fees set to rise to up to £9,000 a year from next September, its charge of around £1,500 a year for UK undergraduates look eminently reasonable.

■ **Beijing University** is another with an eye on the UK market that is offering courses in English. Under a deal signed with the Government it is also waiving its £1,500 fee for its Mandarin course.

■ **The Technical University of Munich** with fees of just over £540 a year is



another option. German students at Hockerill said the costs of a degree course in their home country were just a tenth of those in the UK. An added advantage is the proximity of the renowned Munich Beer Festival.

■ **The Ecole Normale Supérieure** in Paris, which has been ranked as high as 28th in the world for its courses, is a snip at just £160 a year. With the Eurostar, of course, it is not difficult to

make return trips to the UK.

■ **The San Raffaele Medical School** in Milan, a private university which also offers courses taught in English. An added attraction for those wanting to study here is two top flight European football teams within close proximity of the university.

■ **With prices rising in the UK**, the University of Central Florida with its fee of \$19,000 (£12,000) for overseas students no longer looks prohibitive. One of its courses in travel and tourism includes a visit to Disneyland.

■ **Finally, there is always Scotland.** Fees are set to rise substantially for English students but - at £6,000 - will still be on a par with the minimum charge at English universities.

a gap that will be exacerbated once the fee increase comes into force. Some German universities offer courses for a tenth of the cost of those in England. In Finland, the cost is a third less.

"We're already starting to see a drift away from home universities [in students' options]," Mr Dennis said. Many of the students opting to go abroad will be among the brightest of their year group. The school's pupils are also being helped to cope with studying abroad by a scheme that sees all students being offered a two-week exchange during which they live with families abroad and have to speak in their hosts' language during their stay.

Hockerill College, which is set to become one of the Coalition Government's flagship academies today, offers at least seven foreign languages to its pupils - French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Japanese and Mandarin.

Sally Hunt, general secretary of the University and College Union (UCU), said: "A real issue that the millionaires in the cabinet fail to understand is why cost will play such a major role in students and their families deciding what and where to study. 'I understand why students are now looking abroad to study, but it will be real source of shame for this country, as well as economically foolish, if we end up forcing our

Simon Dennis



The principal of Hockerill Anglo-European College said his school's overseas drive

will avoid some of his brightest pupils dropping out of university

brightest students abroad because they cannot afford to study in England." Research by the UCU showed that even if fees rose to only £5,000 a year; English universities would still be the costliest in the world: Only Iceland, the United States and Norway currently charge more than England for state-financed universities. The highest fees are in Iceland where it costs \$4,072 a year, according to the research.

Dr Chris Ingate, who chairs the higher education steering group at the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, added: "In my school, Year 13 [taking their A-levels this summer] are all desperately trying to get into university this year and no one is taking a gap year. In year 12, they're adopting a wait and see approach - looking at the costs. They're saying 'I need to consider whether I want to live at home and go to a local university or study in Scotland or Wales' [where fees will be lower]."

He added: "I think there may be a growing interest in going overseas when the pressure is on students to make their minds up."