



Lord Lexden with Dr Sally Powell

An international welcome



Lord Lexden, President of CIFE, discusses how international students benefit from a CIFE education

Year by year excellent examination results are consistently achieved by British and international students at the thriving 25 independent sixth-form colleges which comprise the Council for Independent Education (CIFE), founded 45 years ago with rigorous external inspection as one of its conditions of membership.

Success at CIFE colleges is rewarded with the university place for which a CIFE education has been the demanding preparation—and at a top

been among both British and international students. A CIFE education is never focused exclusively on academic excellence, crucial though that is.

At these annual awards ceremonies I meet CIFE principals and teachers who tell me of the joy and satisfaction they derive from bringing together students from a wide variety of different countries, and watching friendships develop between them, assisted by the sporting and cultural activities that thrive alongside intense study.

I also meet proud parents, many of whom have

travelled from other continents to applaud the successes of their sons and daughters. They tell me how much it means to them that their children have not only benefited greatly from a CIFE education

but have also been enriched by experience of British life, as well as by the friendships they have formed with fellow students from different cultures.

At Bosworth Independent College in Northampton international students account for 65 per cent of the total and come from 35 different countries. This appeals to British students. “They often comment on how much they appreciate the global feel of our community,” →

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university for some 50 per cent of those who have benefited from the CIFE experience.

Every spring I present special CIFE awards, some 40 altogether, at the House of Lords to the most outstanding students of all, bristling with A*s and As at A-level in a diverse range of arts and scientific subjects. There are awards too for contributions to college and wider community life for which competition is



said Fiona Pocock, the College's Principal.

Over the last 10 years more than 15,000 international students have passed successfully through CIFE colleges on their way to British universities. It is of course an understatement to say that the government in general—and Mrs May in particular—could do more to help strengthen international recruitment by Britain's academic institutions of which CIFE forms part.

In both Houses of Parliament there is overwhelming opposition to the inclusion of overseas students in the official immigration figures. In the Lords, members of all parties denounce the present arrangements whenever they are discussed and call for the revision of entry requirements to end the existing complexity. Major changes are needed, particularly at a time when Brexit is adding to the challenges. On a visit to Nigeria a CIFE college principal was told that Canada was beginning to be seen as more attractive than the UK.

CIFE colleges adopt no single, common approach to international students. As Dr Sally Powell, Principal of Collingham College in London, puts it, "CIFE colleges all have their own personalities. They have different combinations of international and domestic students, different kinds of facilities and different types of building that affect their characters. What they have in common is a dedication to individualised learning made possible by the very small groups within which students are taught."

This concern for individual wellbeing is to be seen prominently in the way CIFE colleges respond to applications from overseas. Dedicated staff provide as much initial advice and guidance as families require. At MPW College in London, the Principal, John

Southworth, "has an experienced international team fluent in most languages to respond to parents' enquiries." He also has "full-time compliance officers to oversee the visa application process and check documentation before submission".

Such services are widespread. Mike Kirby, Principal of Ashbourne College in London, arranges "detailed Tier 4 visa advice; it is rare for a visa to be refused. We also organise a tour of London at the beginning of the academic year and a comprehensive induction day."

At Bosworth College nothing is left to chance. Fiona puts the families of prospective students in touch with current or past students. Before they arrive, "we encourage them to visit our virtual learning environment and to use our college email". No conceivable requirement is neglected. A new student who needs "his or her dental brace tightened" will immediately be told what to do; "a caring college team thinks in advance of such concerns." The CIFE objective, she added, is to ensure "a collaborative and caring relationship between home and college." No wonder the families of international students make such appreciative comments when I meet them at the Lords. **IE**

Alistair Lexden is a Conservative peer and historian. He has been President of CIFE since 2014. He writes regularly about independent education, his work in the Lords and historical topics, putting all that he publishes on his website, www.alistairlexden.org.uk. Further information about CIFE Colleges can be found at www.cife.org.uk.

