



Transnational Education

Overview of trends affecting international student pathways and how universities are responding

April 2026



EducationInvestor
Awards WINNER 

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Cairneagle focuses exclusively on the education sector, delivering high-quality support to operators and investors through an innovative, evidence-based approach

Our Mission

At Cairneagle, we help operators and investors in **education** be more effective by applying an innovative, commercial, and evidence-based lens to solving their issues

Our Vision

A world where the best ideas in education cross every border – and the enterprises behind them thrive



What We Do

We support the strategic decisions that Chief Executives, Boards and private equity investors must make, working to re-think strategies and propositions.

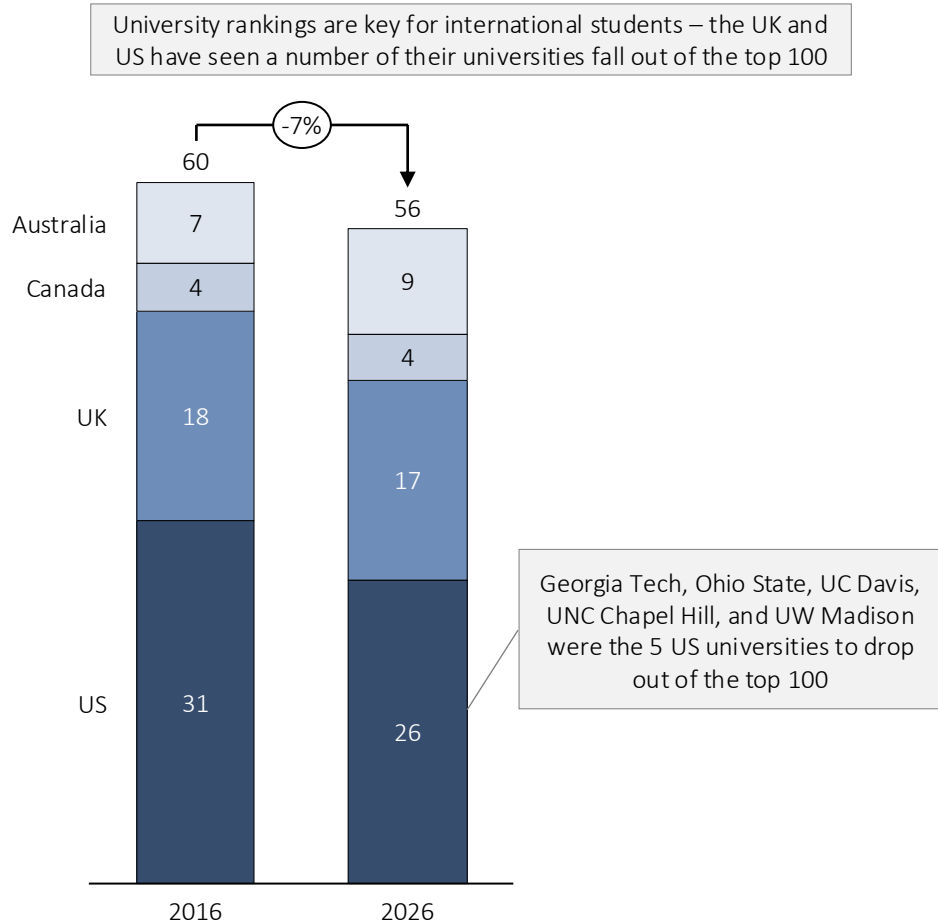
Our work spans strategy development, commercial due diligence, portfolio review and investment decision support

The Cairneagle Difference

Our 100% education focus gives depth of expertise, faster deployability and the ability to really challenge our clients' assumptions. It also allows clients to benefit from our extensive global network and experience, underpinned by our insight-driven primary research capabilities

Access to “Big 4” student destinations is tightening as policies change and post-study outcomes become less certain, but they remain desirable locations for study

Number of top 100 ranked universities, by country (2016-2026)



Drivers of changing international student demand



1) Policy and visa restrictions are tightening across key destinations

The UK restricted the majority of international students from bringing dependents from January 2024
The US saw a 36% decline in F-1 student visas issued between May and August 2025, or around 97,000 fewer student visas



2) Cost of study and living has increased materially

Tuition fees and living costs in the target countries have risen significantly post-Covid, with UK international student living costs increasing by >20% per ONS
Currency depreciation in key source markets (such as Nigeria) has made study abroad less affordable



3) Post-study outcomes are becoming less certain

The UK has proposed shortening graduate visas from two years to 18 months, from 2027 onwards
There is increasing competition for skilled jobs and sponsorship across all “Big 4” target countries



4) Political rhetoric is becoming less favourable

There is an increasing political focus on reducing net migration across all target Big 4 markets
International students are increasingly impacted by broader migration narratives, per THE

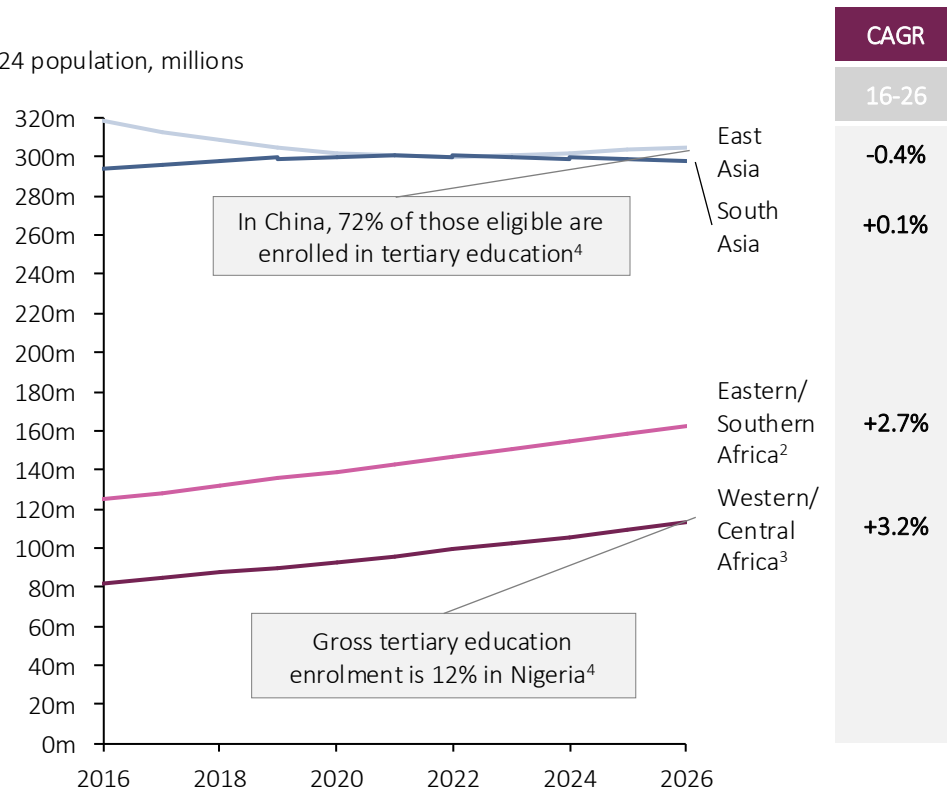
Some universities in traditional source countries are becoming more globally prestigious (see overleaf)
International brands are becoming more available on a TNE basis (as discussed in later slides)

Demand for higher education is continuing to grow, but an increasing share is being captured by local systems

Breakdown of 15-24 population, key target 'source' markets (2016-2026)¹

- Demographic growth, particularly in Africa, will continue to expand the pool of prospective students
- The rising middle-class proportion in developing countries is increasing the ability to access higher education

15-24 population, millions

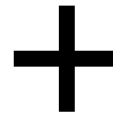


Local university systems are improving rapidly



1) China & Hong Kong increase their presence in global rankings:

Since 2016, China has gone from 4 to 5 universities in the global top 100, whilst Hong Kong has increased its representation from 3 to 4



2) India is rapidly expanding the quality and depth of institutions:

India's highest ranked university has increased from 147 to 123 (IITD), while their number of universities in the top 900 has increased from 14 to 54, since 2016



3) Emerging markets are beginning to enter global rankings:

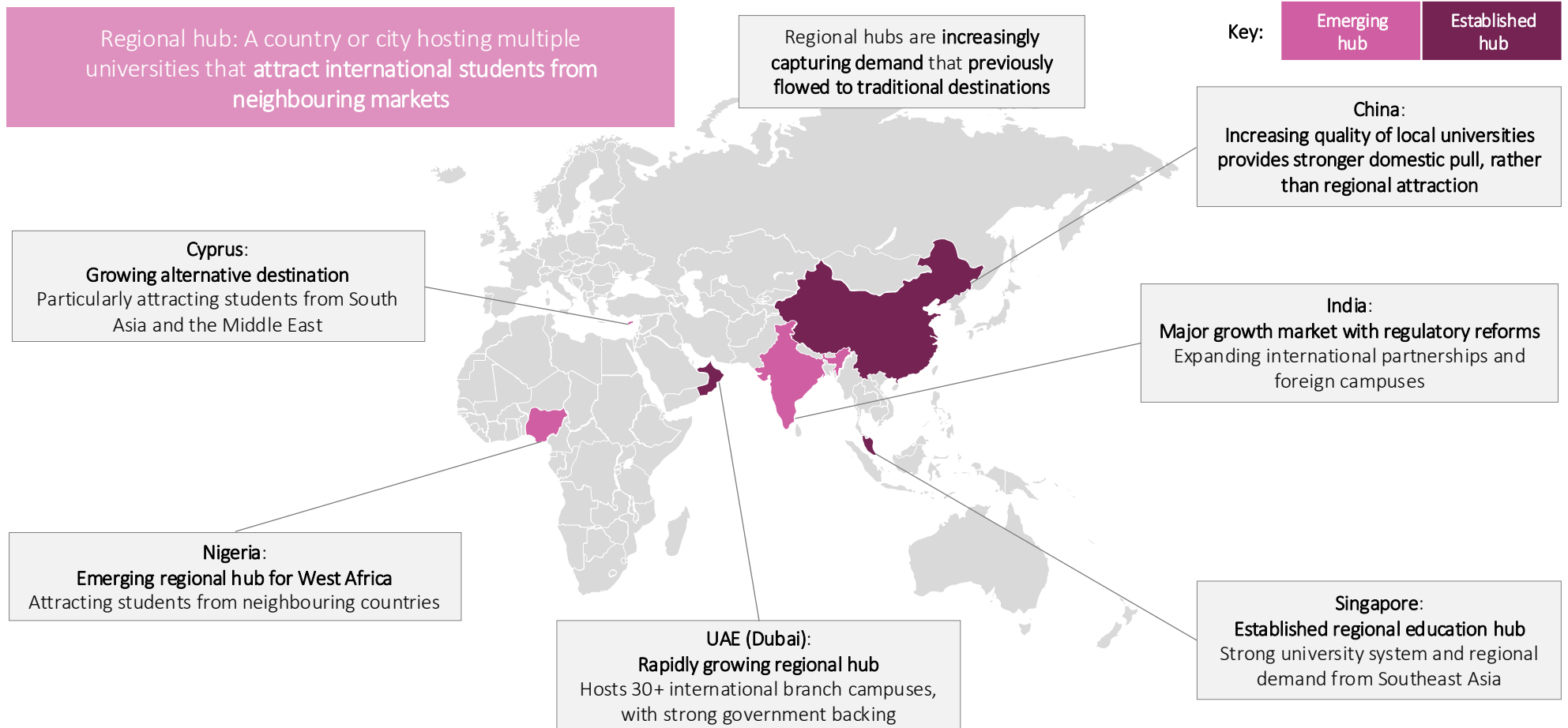
In 2016, Nigeria had no universities placed on the QS World Rankings, but had 3 ranked universities in 2026

Students are increasingly able to access quality education without leaving their home markets

1. Data from World Bank estimates 2. 26 countries (such as Tanzania and South Africa), stretching from the Red Sea in the North to the Cape of Good Hope in the South 3. 22 countries (such as Nigeria and Senegal), stretching from the westernmost point of Africa, across the equator, and partly along the Atlantic Ocean till the Republic of Congo in the South 4. Gross tertiary enrolment is defined as the ratio of total enrolment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown
Source: World Bank, Cairneagle research and analysis

New regional education hubs are capturing demand that previously flowed to traditional destinations

Selected key regional education hub countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa, with international student enrolments (2016-2023)



Dubai and Singapore show how policy, infrastructure and international partnerships can rapidly establish regional education hubs

Dubai



Region	International students in Dubai		2012-2023 CAGR
	2012	2023	
Middle East	49k	237k	+14.4%

- **Government-led investment** has rapidly established Dubai as a regional education hub
- **Hosts 30+ international branch campuses**, including UK, US, and Australian universities
- **Government-led development of dedicated education zones** (such as Dubai Knowledge Park)
- **Strategic geographic position** connecting Europe, Asia and Africa
- **Attractive visa and work policies** for international students
- **Dubai aims to expand its education sector significantly** as part of its **D33 economic strategy**, positioning the city as a global education hub

Singapore

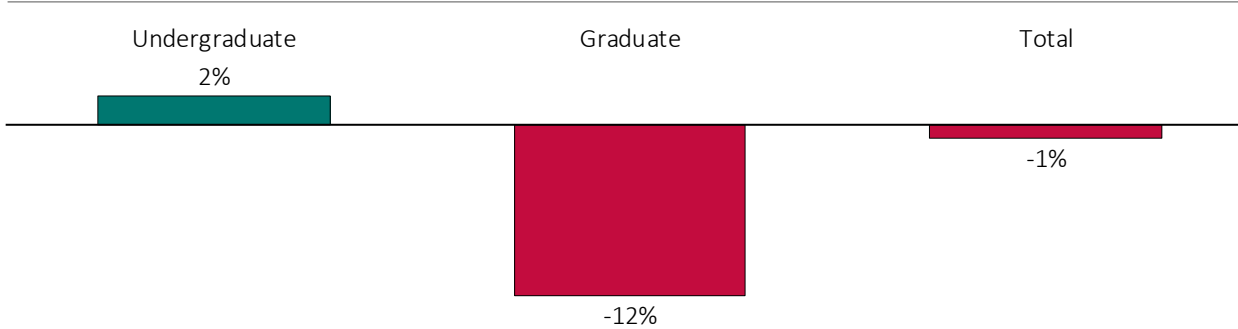


Region	International students in Singapore		2012-2023 CAGR
	2012	2023	
Southeast Asia	49k	71k	+3.5%

- **Established regional education hub** with strong domestic universities and international partnerships
- Strong reputation for quality, safety and employability
- **Supplies to large regional demand** from Southeast Asia
- **Long-term government strategy** positions Singapore as a regional education and research hub
- **Globally recognised universities** (e.g. National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University)
- NUS and NTU are consistently ranked among the **world's top universities, placing 8th and 12th respectively** in the QS World University Rankings 2026

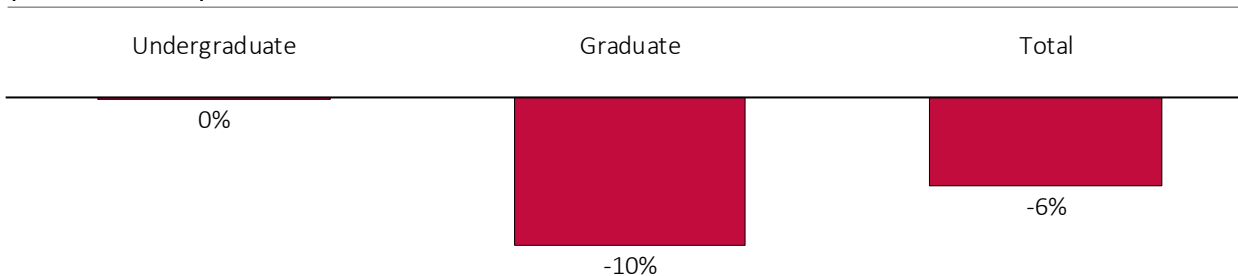
Declines in international student recruitment are placing material financial pressures on UK and US universities

Change in international student enrolment, United States, by study phase (AY25 – AY26)¹



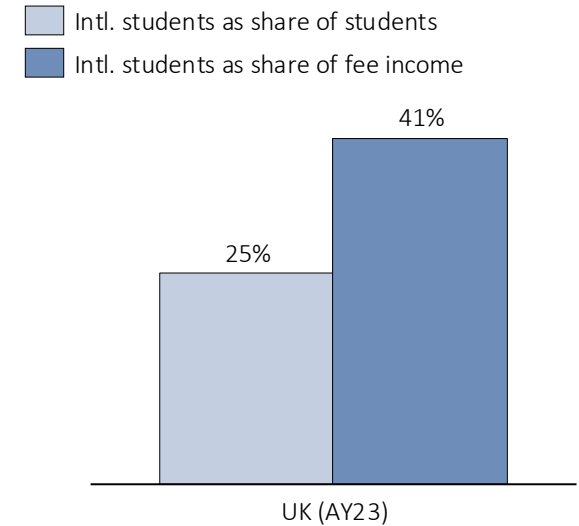
- Prior to the Trump administration’s month-long freeze on new visa applications in May 2025, there were an estimated **1.2million international students in the US**, or roughly **6% of the US higher education population**

Change in international student enrolment, United Kingdom, by study phase (AY24 – AY25)



- **Institutional dependence** on international students can be significant, with **71% of tuition fee revenue coming from international students** at Imperial College London, and **70% at University College London (AY23)**

Financial impact on institutions



- The proposed UK levy of **£925 per international student** could cost universities **£330m annually**
- **International students contributed \$55bn** to the US economy in AY25
- Declines in enrolment are projected to **reduce US economic output by \$1.1bn**

International recruitment has shifted from a growth driver to a financial risk factor for many universities

1. Fall 2025 Snapshot based on 825 participating US Higher Education institutions
Source: CNBC, Migration Observatory, ICEF Monitor, HESA, Open Doors, Cairneagle research and analysis

Many universities are seeking to respond to shifts in student pathways by delivering education in-market, often with local partners

Transnational education (TNE)



Delivery of higher education programmes in a country different from the awarding institution

Core delivery models:

- Branch campuses
- Academic partnerships/franchising
- Dual/joint degrees
- Flying faculty
- Online and blended provision

TNE is now a major global delivery model

- c.670k students enrolled in UK TNE programmes globally (AY25)
- UK TNE enrolment **grew 8% in the latest year** (AY25)
- US universities have 97 overseas campuses, more than any other country (per C-BERT)

Responding to demand



Universities are exporting provision, rather than importing students

Institutions are:

- **Establishing branch campuses** in high-demand markets
- **Expanding partnerships** with local institutions
- Entering markets where **governments support international provision**

TNE drivers:

- Rapid **growth in domestic demand** for higher education
- **Restrictions** on student mobility
- **Capacity constraints** in local university systems
- Government focus on **retaining talent**

What this means for the sector



TNE is becoming a core channel for international growth

Key outcomes:

- Demand is **increasingly captured in-market**, rather than through cross-border student mobility
- Institutions can **grow with international students without being hampered** by visa policies
- Competitive advantage is shifting from recruitment capability to a new **delivery capability**

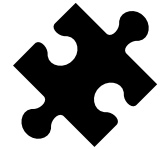
TNE allows institutions to **diversify revenue and reduce exposure to visa and migration policy risk**

Transnational delivery will be a core driver of international growth for universities: to succeed, they need a deliberate and well-timed strategy

Key takeaways

1 TNE is becoming a structural component of international strategy

- International demand is increasingly being captured 'in-market' rather than through cross-border mobility
- UK Government policy is actively encouraging universities to expand overseas delivery, such as the UK Government's 2025 White Paper focus on exporting education, or the inclusion of international education in the US National Export Strategy



Institutions that rely solely on recruitment face growing exposure to policy and demand volatility

2 Institutions need a defined operating model for international delivery

- Successful providers are selecting priority markets based on demand, regulation and partnership feasibility
- Delivery models (branch campus, partnership, hybrid provision) require clear governance and investment decisions
- Programme portfolios must be aligned to local employability and industry demand



TNE requires institutional capability and clear direction

3 Early investment will determine long-term market position

- Regulatory approvals and partnerships create structural barriers to entry
- Market leaders are securing first-mover advantages in high-growth regions
- Delayed entry increases cost and reduces access to strategic markets



Institutions that postpone decisions risk losing first-mover advantage



Appendix

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In the run up to our 25th anniversary, we have undergone continuous growth and development to become the leading strategic adviser to the education sector



2001

Cairneagle founded

A team drawing on experience from LEK and Roland Berger set up a new consulting practice



2004-2015

Start of education practice

First major education mandate, advising Apax on their acquisition of Promethean (2004)

Partnership strengthened: Jorge Amirola returns and Arun Kanwar joins (2015)

First **Education Investor Award** (2015)



2016-2021

Established sector leader

Average of 15 strategy projects per year

UK and global **leader in Early Years and K12 advisory**

Creation of the **Childcare COVID-19 group** for Early Year operators to help them navigate through uncertainty

Second, third and fourth **Education Investor Awards**



2022-2024

Foundations for growth

Average of 25 strategy projects per year

Senior bench strengthened, with Sam Lecacheur promoted to Partner

Subsector specialisms formalized across Senior Consultants and Managers

We **join forces with VVW** in May 2022

Launched 5-year expansion plan to **grow 3x in size** by 2029

Fifth and sixth **Education Investor Award**



2025-2026

Realized Momentum

37 strategy projects delivered in 2025

Partnership strengthened by Ian Koxvold and Fionnuala Duggan

+15 FTE team expansion enables delivery of larger, multi-phase strategy engagements across sector

Arun Kanwar named Best Consultant in Education Investor Power List 2025

Hosted **320 senior leaders** across 4 Cairneagle events

Expansion into US market, delivering 13 projects, up from 3 the year before

Seventh **Education Investor Award**

Cairneagle's education-only focus, bespoke approach and 360° global perspective make it the natural partner for US clients who demand more than the standard consulting playbook



20+ years proven

Award-winning education consultancy with over two decades of experience navigating an ever-evolving sector — from policy shifts to market disruption



Education is all we do

From early childhood through to lifelong learning — B2C, B2B, B2B2C and beyond. We cover the full education landscape, including investors into the sector



Insight that actually works

The right answer starts with asking the right questions — not opening the right playbook. We bring robust primary research, actionable insights, and a fully integrated team with partner involvement



Global perspective, US fluency

We bring an international perspective to answer your most important US questions — drawing on global benchmarks and cross-market expertise



Hired once. Trusted forever

Clients come back repeatedly — we've done 80 projects for one of our clients. It's because we tune in to their specific situation and deliver consulting that fits them, not an off-the-shelf template

Strategy and Commercial Due Diligence projects in the UK and internationally

Our services – strategy and deal-making support



We look for opportunities to build new revenue streams and enter new markets



We help you review your portfolio, business unit or institutional strategy



We screen and evaluate acquisitions



We assist you, providing commercial due diligence



We help you design digital strategy, tailored to your business

Examples of projects we undertake

Corporate
Strategy

Business
Planning

Commercial
Due Diligence

Growth
Strategy

Acquisition
Screening

Portfolio
Review

Pricing
Strategy

Go-to-market
strategy

Market
Assessment



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