

The impact of **UK**  
***immigration policies***  
on students and staff  
in further and higher  
education



# The impact of **UK** ***immigration policies*** on students and staff in further and higher education

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## Introduction

UCU produced this report to not only articulate the positive impact of immigration on the post-16 education sector but to demonstrate how the Government's points-based immigration system is damaging the international reputation of our education system.

UCU supports an end to the government's points-based immigration system and calls for the removal of:

- ▶ international students from the net migration figures
- ▶ UKBA 'quotas' which affect institutions ability to choose staff according to their academic and research priorities and restricting their academic freedom
- ▶ the monitoring of attendance of non EEA students which impacts on the workload of academic staff, the relationship between staff and students and is potentially discriminatory and unlawful under the Equality Act.

This pamphlet provides the facts about our sectors and as educators it is our responsibility to ensure the true social, economic and cultural picture is painted. This is a sister booklet to *Why immigration is good for all of us* which outlines the myths relating to immigration and why immigration has a positive impact in the UK.



## Benefits of international students and staff

The UK higher education sector benefits significantly from the presence of international students and staff. They increase the cultural diversity of campuses and classrooms, and thus enable all students to develop their inter-cultural skills and understanding of other cultures.<sup>1</sup>

International students also help to support some courses (particularly in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics – *STEM*) which may not be viable if they recruited only from ‘home’ markets.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, they make a very considerable economic contribution, both to individual educational institutions, through the fees they pay, and to the wider community in which they live whilst in the UK. Indeed, it is estimated that, in 2011–12, international students studying at higher education institutions in the UK paid £3.9bn in tuition fees (net of scholarships) and £6.3bn in living expenses.<sup>3</sup>

Benefits are also derived in the longer term: through the political and economic links that are forged between the UK and the home nation of those who are internationally mobile.<sup>4</sup>



Universities UK has been running a campaign [www.backuniversities.org.uk](http://www.backuniversities.org.uk) asking an incoming Government to work with universities to attract qualified international students to the UK.

Universities UK conducted a number of focus groups with Britain Thinks and British Future, and a national poll with ICM to gauge the views of the public towards international students.

- ▶ 64% are in favour of maintaining or increasing the number of international students coming to the UK.
- ▶ 75% think that international students should be allowed to stay and work in Britain after graduating.
- ▶ 60% of people think that international students bring money into their local economy: only 12% think they take money out.
- ▶ In the focus groups people responded well to any messages around the high fees international students spend in the UK, off-campus expenditure in the local economy and staying on to work and filling skills gaps in the local area.

This is supported by the findings of a report for the University of Sheffield by Oxford Economics 'The Economic costs and benefits



of international students' (January 2013). It is impossible to say whether international students staying to work displaced the resident workforce but as half of international students in Sheffield studied STEM subjects which is where the UK has an acknowledged skills gap.

Long-term benefits identified were the boost to local demand as a consequence of familiarity with locally produced goods, the potential for the UK's international relations to be boosted by international students attaining positions of influence abroad and increased tourism revenues if international students return to visit.



## The ‘immigration debate’ and recent changes to immigration policy

Numerous changes have been made to UK immigration policy over recent years, as part of an attempt to cut immigration from hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands. International students who remain in the UK for longer than twelve months are counted as long-term migrants in official statistics. Thus, reducing their numbers has come to be seen by some policy makers as an effective means of reducing numbers overall.

Immigration policies that have had a specific impact on international students include the following:

- ▮ changes to the visa application process (eg applicants must have sufficient funds available to them to cover their maintenance in the UK; international students have to provide evidence that their stay in the UK is ‘genuine’; dependents cannot accompany students for courses of less than 12 months in duration)
- ▮ removal of appeal rights for students and staff applying for further leave to remain in the UK
- ▮ removal of visa-holders’ rights to free NHS treatment (to be implemented from April 2015)
- ▮ reduction in rights to work in the UK (eg there is now no automatic entitlement to work in the UK for two years after the end of a course; instead, those wishing to remain in the UK have to secure a graduate-level job that pays at least



£20,500; entitlements to work during a course of study have been capped at 20 hours for higher education students and 10 hours for further education students)

- ▶ stricter criteria for educational providers (eg requirement to secure a licence from the Home Office, implement accurate immigration checks and monitoring of international students, and agree to inspection by an educational oversight body specified by the Home Office)
- ▶ limited number of 'certificates of sponsorship' to educational providers for the recruitment of international staff
- ▶ requirement for landlords to check the immigration status of all tenants and lodgers, with fines of up to £3,000 for anyone found not to have permission to be in the UK (rolled out from December 2014).





## Deterrents to international students and staff

Such policy changes have been widely covered in the overseas media,<sup>5</sup> particularly in India,<sup>6</sup> and have deterred some international students from coming to the UK. They have also had an impact on those already in the UK: over 50% believe that the UK Government is not welcoming towards international students and 19% would not recommend the UK as a place to study to a friend or relative.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, current international students believe that government reforms are sending the ‘wrong message’ to potential applicants, and that ‘word of mouth’ is giving the UK a bad reputation amongst potential applicants in terms of both immigration policy and ease of visa application.<sup>8</sup> Those working with prospective international students – as advisers or agents – share similar views, believing that the UK has become a less popular destination because of recent policy changes.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, according to education agents, there has been a sharp decline since 2008 in the UK’s perceived attractiveness.<sup>10</sup> Indian students, in particular, appear very sensitive to changes in both labour markets and migration policies.<sup>11</sup>

There are strong indications that, as a result of such perceptions, international students are choosing to study in other countries. This trend is evident within both further and higher education. Indeed, the principal of a further college in Cambridge has noted that: ‘Students and their families are nervous about the market in the UK and are starting to choose other locations where they feel welcome and the process is easier, such as Australia and the USA’.<sup>12</sup>



## Impediments to recruitment

Restrictions placed upon UK educational institutions have made it harder for even those international students and staff who want to come to the UK to gain a place or be offered a job. Within further education, a significant number of colleges (450 – about a fifth of the entire sector) had their sponsorship licences revoked in 2011, making it impossible for them to accept international students.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, within the higher education sector, quotas imposed on the number of international staff that can be employed by a single institution have had a significant impact on recruitment practices. Some institutions have issued guidance recommending that applicants from within the European Economic Area (EEA) should be chosen over those from outside the EEA, even if the latter are better qualified.<sup>14</sup>



## Declining numbers

Over recent years, the UK has witnessed considerable growth in its international student market. Indeed, from 2007-08 to 2011-12, the average annual growth rate in international entrants to higher education was 6.3%<sup>15</sup> However, this has changed more recently: the number of enrolments remained broadly flat in 2012-2013 and recovered to only 3% in 2013-14<sup>16</sup> – in a context, globally, in which increasing numbers of students are choosing to move abroad for their tertiary education.<sup>17</sup> The UK's competitor countries are experiencing greater year on year increases in the UK.

These overall figures mask important differences by both country and subject area. For example, an increase in the number of students from South East Asia (and particularly China) has offset a significant reduction in the number of students coming to the UK from India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. Indeed, with respect to students from India, there was an 8% drop between 2012-13 and 2013-14 in the number of first year enrolments, and a 12% drop in overall student numbers.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, Australia and the United States have both experienced a substantial increase in the number of students from India.<sup>19</sup>

These variations by country map on to differences by subject: STEM courses are popular with students from India, Pakistan and Nigeria, and so have been particularly affected by the decreasing



number of students from these nations. Indeed, the number of entrants on to STEM courses within higher education institutions fell by 10% between 2010 and 2013, and the number of computer science entrants by one third.<sup>20</sup>

Within further education the decline in numbers has been even starker. Between 2011 and 2012, the number of visas issued to students taking up places in the sector fell by 46%.<sup>21</sup> This is partially due to the increased competition from universities, which the government consider to be more trustworthy sponsors.<sup>22</sup>



## Impact of fewer international students and staff

Educational institutions, and their local communities, are likely to be adversely affected in a wide variety of ways from a decline in the number of international students and staff. Not only will they become less diverse spaces, with fewer opportunities for UK students to develop inter-cultural skills,<sup>23</sup> but income to both institutions and their surrounding areas (through tuition fees and subsistence) is likely to drop.<sup>24</sup> In the longer-term, the UK may suffer from loss of ‘soft power’ (such as trading links and political influence) through ties with overseas graduates.<sup>25</sup>

The range and quality of academic provision within UK educational institutions is also likely to decline. The London School of Economics, for example, has expressed concern about the impact of current immigration on its ability to recruit the best ‘global talent’ to its staff.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, some areas of academic activity are dependent on international students for their viability. Within the further education sector, for example, some colleges have had to reduce the number of courses they offer at Level 6 as a result of a decline in the number of international students.<sup>27</sup> This clearly affects provision for all students, including those from the local area. Within higher education, some postgraduate courses (particularly in STEM subjects) are heavily reliant on international students; their viability in some institutions will come under threat without sustained demand from overseas.<sup>28</sup> Again, this has implications for UK students as well as those from further afield.



## The experiences of those who do come to the UK

The experiences of current international students in the UK have also been affected by recent immigration policy. Some have been confused by the frequently-changing policy in this area, and have felt that it has been hard to find accurate advice within their educational institutions about how they are likely to be affected (often because staff themselves have found it hard to keep up with changing policy).<sup>29</sup> This has similarly affected international staff in UK institutions who are on permanent contracts but short term visas. Anxiety and confusion have both been reported.<sup>30</sup>

There is also concern that international students may come to see themselves as ‘second class citizens’, if they are subject to monitoring that is not applied to students from within the EEA. This may exacerbate problems already faced by some international students, such as a greater likelihood (than other students) of experiencing hate-related incidents on campus.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the difficulty, for international students, of working during their course of study, and (for those on one-year master’s courses) of bringing dependent children with them, may both serve to increase social isolation. There is also some evidence that a concern to do nothing to jeopardise the judgement of ‘good character’ required for visa applications may deter international students from becoming involved in social and political action within their educational institutions.<sup>32</sup>



The difficulty of gaining a job in the UK after graduation is also likely to have an impact on international students' all-round experiences, particularly since opportunities to remain in the host country to gain work experience are considered important by many students.<sup>33</sup>



## Changing role of the educational institution?

As part of wider changes to immigration policy, UK educational institutions have had to take on a new role – monitoring the immigration status of the students they admit, as well as their educational qualifications. This had had financial implications in some colleges and universities, as staff have had to be recruited into new roles associated with ensuring compliance with immigration policy.<sup>34</sup> In other institutions, the workload of existing staff has increased, as they have had to take on additional responsibilities for ensuring compliance.<sup>35</sup>

The development of institutional policies and practices in this area has presented challenges to some educational providers – because of the rapid and frequent changes to immigration policy.<sup>36</sup>

Some have argued that such changes have fundamentally altered the role of educational institutions and their staff, and their relationships with their students. No longer are they solely concerned with the educational progress and pastoral care of international students; they also have to act as immigration monitors.<sup>37</sup> As the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Kingston University has argued, ‘In effect, our universities are now acting in conjunction with the UK’s Border Agency to manage immigration’.<sup>38</sup>





## Should international students be seen as migrants?

Many international students who come to the UK intend to stay only for their degree, or leave after a few additional years of work experience.<sup>39</sup> This reflects more general patterns about the increasingly temporary nature of skilled and highly skilled migration, where entry often does not lead to permanent settlement.<sup>40</sup>

Politicians have drawn on this evidence to argue that international students should not be seen as migrants at all, and thus should not be included in the statistics on immigration, nor subject to the range of policies introduced over the past decade intended to reduce immigration. The Home Affairs Select Committee, for example, concluded its 2011 investigation into the criteria for admitting international students by reporting that its members ‘were not persuaded that students are in fact migrants’.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, in January 2013, the chairs of five parliamentary committees wrote to the Prime Minister, David Cameron, to recommend that the government remove international students from the migration target<sup>42</sup> while two years later, in January 2015, an Early Day Motion was tabled by a cross-party group of MPs, calling for university students to be excluded from ‘efforts to bear down on immigration’. Such views are shared by many members of the public. Indeed, only 22% of the public thinks that international students should count as migrants, and 59% believes that the government should not reduce international student numbers, even if that limits its ability to reduce immigration numbers overall.<sup>43</sup>



## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>Universities UK (2014) *International Students in Higher Education: the UK and its Competition* London, UUK. Available online at:

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/InternationalStudentsInUKHE.aspx>

<sup>3</sup>Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) *International Education: Global Growth and Prosperity* London, BIS. Available online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-education-strategy-global-growth-and-prosperity>

<sup>4</sup>Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) *The Wider Benefits of International Higher Education in the UK* (Research Paper Number 128) London, BIS. Available online at:

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<sup>5</sup>Universities UK (2014) *International Students in Higher Education: the UK and its Competition* London, UUK. Available online at:

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/InternationalStudentsInUKHE.aspx>

<sup>6</sup>Institute for Public Policy Research (2013) *Britain Wants You! Why the UK should commit to increasing international student numbers* London, IPPR.

Available online at: <http://www.ippr.org/publications/britain-wants-you-why-the-uk-should-commit-to-increasing-international-student-numbers>

<sup>7</sup>National Union of Students (2014) *NUS briefing: NUS Survey of International Students' Perceptions towards the Immigration Bill* London, NUS.

<sup>8</sup>Mavroudi, E. and Warren, A. (2013) *Highly skilled migration and the negotiation of immigration policy: Non-EEA postgraduate students and academic staff at English universities*, *Geoforum*, 44, 261-270.



<sup>9</sup>Mavroudi, E. and Warren, A. (2013) Highly skilled migration and the negotiation of immigration policy: Non-EEA postgraduate students and academic staff at English universities, *Geoforum*, 44, 261-270.

<sup>10</sup>Universities UK (2014) *International Students in Higher Education: the UK and its Competition* London, UUK. Available online at: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/InternationalStudentsInUKHE.aspx>

<sup>11</sup>Rafi, B. and Lewis, P. (2012) Indian higher education students in Australia: their patterns and motivations, *Australian Journal of Education*, 57, 2, 157-173.

<sup>12</sup>Institute for Public Policy Research (2013) *Britain Wants You! Why the UK should commit to increasing international student numbers* London, IPPR. Available online at: <http://www.ippr.org/publications/britain-wants-you-why-the-uk-should-commit-to-increasing-international-student-numbers>

<sup>13</sup>University and College Union (2012) *Impact of Points Based Immigration* London, UCU.

<sup>14</sup>University and College Union (2012) *Impact of Points Based Immigration* London, UCU.

<sup>15</sup>Institute for Public Policy Research (2013) *Britain Wants You! Why the UK should commit to increasing international student numbers* London, IPPR. Available online at: <http://www.ippr.org/publications/britain-wants-you-why-the-uk-should-commit-to-increasing-international-student-numbers>

<sup>16</sup>Higher Education Statistical Agency (2015) *Higher Education Student Enrolments and Qualifications Obtained at Higher Education Providers in the United Kingdom 2013/14* Available online at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/sfr210>

<sup>17</sup>Brooks, R. and Waters, J. (2011) *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education* Basingstoke, Palgrave.

<sup>18</sup>Waters, J. (2015) *Hard Evidence: is immigration policy discouraging foreign students?* *The Conversation*, 23 January 2015. Available online at: <https://theconversation.com/hard-evidence-is-immigration-policy-discouraging-for-foreign-students-36539>



<sup>19</sup>Universities UK (2014) International Students in Higher Education: the UK and its Competition London, UUK. Available online at:

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<sup>20</sup>Universities UK (2014) International Students in Higher Education: the UK and its Competition London, UUK. Available online at:

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<sup>22</sup>Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) Evaluation of the Value of Tier 4 International Students to FE Colleges and the UK Economy London, BIS. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/value-of-tier-4-international-students-to-further-education-colleges-and-the-uk-economy-evaluation>

<sup>23</sup>British Council (2013) Influence and Attraction. Culture and the race for soft power in the 21st century Available online at:

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<sup>24</sup>Universities UK (2014) International Students in Higher Education: the UK and its Competition London, UUK. Available online at:

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<sup>26</sup>University and College Union (2012) Impact of Points Based Immigration London, UCU.



<sup>27</sup>Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) Evaluation of the Value of Tier 4 International Students to FE Colleges and the UK Economy London, BIS. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/value-of-tier-4-international-students-to-further-education-colleges-and-the-uk-economy-evaluation>

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<sup>29</sup>University and College Union (2012) Impact of Points Based Immigration London, UCU.

<sup>30</sup>Mavroudi, E. and Warren, A. (2013) Highly skilled migration and the negotiation of immigration policy: Non-EEA postgraduate students and academic staff at English universities, *Geoforum*, 44, 261-270.

<sup>31</sup>National Union of Students (2012) No Place for Hate. Hate crimes and incidents in further and higher education: race and ethnicity London, NUS. Available online at: <http://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/research-publications/>

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<sup>34</sup>Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) Evaluation of the Value of Tier 4 International Students to FE Colleges and the UK Economy London, BIS. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/value-of-tier-4-international-students-to-further-education-colleges-and-the-uk-economy-evaluation>

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<sup>38</sup>University and College Union (2012) Impact of Points Based Immigration London, UCU.

<sup>39</sup>Mavroudi, E. and Warren, A. (2013) Highly skilled migration and the negotiation of immigration policy: Non-EEA postgraduate students and academic staff at English universities, *Geoforum*, 44, 261-270.

<sup>40</sup>Smetherham, C., Fenton, S. and Modood, T. (2010) How global is the UK academic labour market? *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 8, 3, 411-428.

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