

UKCISA Briefing on international students

May 2017

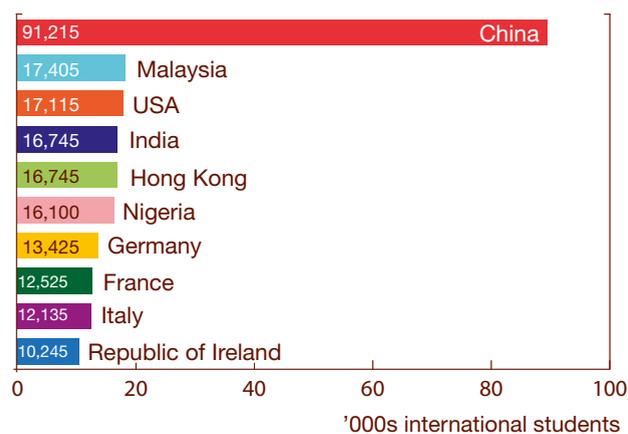


How many international students are there in the UK?

International students make up 19% of all students in UK higher education (19% in England, 9% in Northern Ireland, 22% in Scotland and 17% in Wales), 69% of full-time taught postgraduates and 48% of full-time research degree students.

In 2015-16 there was a total of 438,010 international students in UK higher education, of which 127,440 were from EU countries and 310,575 from non-EU countries.

Figures for HE (the figures for FE are not centrally collected) show that the top 10 sending countries in 2015-16 (source: HESA) were as follows:



**UK Council
for International
Student Affairs**

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The universities with the largest numbers of international students are:

Institution	Postgraduate students	Undergraduate students	Total no of international students
University College London	7,860	7,115	14,975
The University of Manchester	5,950	6,970	12,920
The University of Edinburgh	5,085	5,695	10,780
Coventry University	3,540	6,175	9,715
Kings College London	4,115	4,785	8,900
The University of Sheffield	4,595	3,930	8,525
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	4,550	3,970	8,520
University of the Arts, London	2,035	6,425	8,460
The University of Warwick	4,520	3,920	8,440
The University of Oxford	5,760	2,300	8,060

(For full details on the numbers of international students, by level and mode of study, visa statistics and other reference sources visit www.ukcisa.org/statistics.)

There are various estimates of the economic value of international students to the UK (in HE, FE, English language colleges and independent schools) but the government's International Education Industrial Strategy published in 2013 gave a figure, for 2011, of £13.6bn making it the UK's fifth largest export industry within the services sector. A more recent study has now given a figure of £25.8bn in gross output supporting 206,000 jobs.

Satisfaction rates

Numbers of surveys tend to agree that the vast majority of international students (usually at least 85%) are largely 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their institutional experience in the UK although there is often some sensitivity over fees, living costs and, more recently, the ability to work part-time during studies or full-time afterwards.

Many large institutions now use the same survey (the International Student Barometer) to assess satisfaction ratings amongst their international students so that they can compare performance with other institutions both in the UK and overseas. This goes into very considerable detail on all aspects of life and studying in the UK and the last analysis, published by the HE International Unit in a 'Competitiveness Report' in January 2016 showed that international students in the UK were, in fact, more satisfied with their living and learning experience than in any other country.

Recent trends

The number of international students coming to the UK for higher education had, until 2011, been growing by some 3-4% annually but this has reduced in recent years to firstly marginal increases and then virtual stagnation, largely as a result of much tighter visa policies. Visa statistics in August 2016 showed a reduction of 2% for higher education (and very significant declines in other areas). Those published in May 2017 showed a 2% increase for higher education although International Passenger Survey estimates for both EU and non EU students showed a 19% decrease overall.

The UK remains however (quite easily) the second most popular destination for international students in the world, after the USA, but ahead of Australia, New Zealand and Canada although all of those countries are now seeing significant increases as are European countries who are increasingly offering courses in English.

What policies are affecting numbers?

One of the reasons for the slowdown in 'growth' is, of course, the UK government's concern that net migration (the difference between those who come to the UK for periods of at least 12 months and those who leave) is currently too high and that students, who they categorise as 'migrants' under the UN's definition, contribute to this overall figure.

Various Parliamentary Select Committees have, however, challenged this approach and recommended that students be taken out of the net migration target and there has been extensive discussion and support for this in the House of Lords. However, the government has not, as yet, agreed to any change in policy. In fact, the Conservative party 2017 election manifesto pledged to keep students in the immigration statistics and also 'toughen visa requirements for students'.

The abolition of Post-Study Work has continued to cause concern – especially when other countries offer more generous schemes - and there is a concern that this, and a general tightening of the rules, may have made the UK a 'less welcoming' destination.

The published policy remains however that 'there is no limit' to the number of student visas which can be issued; and UK institutions continue to give 'internationalisation' (including international student recruitment) very high priority. The timing of, and degree to which Brexit may affect either EU or non-EU students is, however, yet to be determined but there are, without doubt, very extensive fears that unless special measures are taken, this could lead to a further reduction in recruitment numbers.

What have been the most significant recent changes to the rules for international students?

The Rules and Guidance for Tier 4 students are extremely complex and it is vitally important that only those who are qualified to do so, give any detailed immigration advice to individuals. As general background however:

- The Post-Study Work (PSW) scheme which allowed any Tier 4 student to stay on and work (at anything) for two years after their studies has been abolished. Instead there are a number of much more limited schemes, for example Tier 2 for those who have an offer of a 'graduate job' at a 'graduate salary' with a licensed sponsor; the Doctorate Extension Scheme, for those with PhDs, etc, who can apply to stay on to work for 12 months; and limited provisions for graduate entrepreneurs.
- Minimum levels of English have been defined by the Home Office, Secure English Language Tests (SELTs) have been introduced and only two providers authorised to undertake them in a much reduced network of centres.
- Tier 4 sponsors must now ensure that no more than 10% of those to whom they give offers (or CASs) have their visas refused – or risk losing their licences.
- All students are now interviewed as part of the visa process and can have their applications refused on general 'credibility' grounds.
- All Tier 4 students must now show, when applying to extend their visas in the UK, that the new course represents 'academic progression' from one level to a higher one (with some minor exceptions for some university students in exceptional circumstances).
- No Tier 4 student over the age of 18 may stay in the UK for longer than 2 years at sub degree level or 5 years at degree level and above, again with certain exceptions.
- Any student who has completed a sub-degree level course at a college and wishes to extend their visa for further studies at a higher level can no longer do so in the UK and must return home to apply for a new visa.
- In general, only students at publicly-funded higher education institutions may work part-time in term time or full-time in vacations and for all others, in public or private sector colleges regardless of level of study, all work is banned.
- Only certain Tier 4 students are allowed to have their family members in the UK as dependants. For example, postgraduate students on courses of 12 months or more.
- All Tier 4 students must now pay an Immigration Health Charge (currently £150) for each year of study.
- Landlords must now check the immigration status of tenants (although students in university-owned, managed or nominated accommodation

are exempt).

- Appeals against visa refusals have been abolished and replaced with 'administrative reviews'.
- Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs) have been introduced for newly arriving students, who are now merely granted a 30 day visa, during which time they must arrive in the UK and collect (or have collected on their behalf) their BRP (showing the full length of their visa) either from a Post Office or from their university, college or school.
- The amount of money required by all students when applying for – or to extend – a visa has been increased by some 20% and the 'established presence' concession (allowing those already in the UK to show reduced amounts) has been abolished.

What will be the key issues facing international students in the future?

For non-EU students it is possible that the system of exit checks – which apparently provides data on which students have left the UK once their visas have expired – may lead to action against institutions where they have studied who may be held accountable. There is also a concern that Tier 4 sponsors' visa refusal rates might be reduced still further or CASs capped in some ways restricting the numbers of students which institutions are allowed to recruit.

For EU students it has not yet been decided whether those arriving in 2019 or later will be eligible for student loans and whether their fee status might alter – although assurances have now been given for those arriving in 2017 and 2018 for the full length of their courses – and nor, of course, whether they will be able to work in the UK after their studies or be subject to any new immigration restrictions.

There have also been survey reports suggesting that numbers of EU and non-EU students may be discouraged from applying to the UK in the future, concerned that the changing rules and general climate, during and post Brexit, may prove to be less welcoming.

If any or all of these factors were to combine, and the numbers of international students coming to the UK declined significantly, there would obviously be substantial consequences for universities (and colleges) throughout the UK, for local economies and jobs and the viability of a wide range of courses.

Myths and misconceptions

A number of common misunderstandings, often perpetuated in news articles, can hinder sensible debate on international student policies. Here are six

1. *“Any organisation calling itself a college can recruit non-EEA students”*
No. Any college wishing to recruit non-EEA students must first be inspected and accredited by an Education Oversight body approved by the Home Office and demonstrate they meet various other assessment criteria. Only then can they apply to be included in the Home Office’s Register of Tier 4 Sponsors, making their students eligible for visas.
2. *“Once students obtain visas, no-one knows where they are and if they even register at universities or colleges”*
No. Visas are tied to the institution which issued the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) (and compulsory for all Tier 4 applications). Those institutions are then required to report to the Home Office any students who do not arrive and register. If they do not do so adequately, they can lose their licence and no longer recruit non-EEA students.
3. *“Once students have arrived and registered, they then don’t turn up to study”*
No. Institutions now have to monitor attendance and progress and report any students to the Home Office who are not participating adequately. If they do not do so, they can lose their licence and no longer accept non-EEA students.
4. *“Students take housing and/or other UK state benefits”*
No. A non-EEA student has, by law, ‘no recourse to public funds’, and therefore no entitlements to any public sector housing or state benefits.
5. *“Students often work rather than studying, taking permanent British jobs”*
No. Non-EEA students have limited work entitlements, if any. Only those in publicly-funded higher education institutions on degree level courses can work for 20 hours per week during term time and full-time in holidays, and those in public or private colleges may not work at all. No Tier 4 student may work for themselves or fill a full-time permanent vacancy.

Students who wish to stay on to work under the main work route (Tier 2), can only do so if they meet a number of strict criteria in addition to having received sponsorship from a Home-Office licenced Tier 2 sponsor. This includes having to meet the required salary for the relevant profession.
6. *“Students do not, as they should, go home after their studies have been completed”*
No. Research released by the Home Office in February 2016 (‘Migrant Journey’) showed that of those who arrived as students in 2009, only 17% still had valid leave to be in the UK after five

years (were still studying or had, quite legally, married a UK citizen or moved into a work category) and only 1% had achieved settlement.

How does UKCISA support students, students unions and staff ?

The UKCISA website is recognised as having the most comprehensive collection of advice and information for international students on all aspects of coming to the UK to study - with particular emphasis on the rules and regulations covering for instance fee status, student support and, for non EEA students, visas. It also covers work, during or after study, health service and accommodation issues, rules governing partners and families, driving licences, etc.

The students’ section can now be accessed on mobiles and tablets and amongst a range of new features now has an international student guest blog, a NewsWall with all the latest developments and, of course, continually updated sections on any new visa rules and the implications of Brexit – www.ukcisa.org.uk.

Students, students unions or staff can also sign up (free) for our monthly e-news service and any student can phone our free advice line to check how the rules might affect their visa or fee status or a range of other issues or difficulties.

For members (either institutions or students’ unions) we provide an additional range of advice and training. This includes:

- Access to our members’ only online manual with the latest updates on immigration, fees and student support
- Access at reduced rates to our Annual Conference and schedule of 50 training events
- Free access to our online learning toolkit, “Understanding International”
- Access to our monthly legal advice line service provided free of charge to members by Pennington Manches LLP
- Access to the members’ area of our website
- A dedicated members advice line typically answering some 3,000 queries per year
- A weekly e-news service on all aspects of international student policy and good practice and
- Eligibility to apply for one of our research or pilot project grants designed to innovate and improve some aspect of the international student experience

For further information or enquiries see www.ukcisa.org.uk

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