



International Students

International Students: MW 431

1. After the United States, the UK is the second most popular destination for international students studying outside their home country, attracted by the English language and by the reputation of the UK for education of outstanding quality.

2. International students pay considerable amounts in tuition fees and are a much needed revenue stream for universities. Also, by spending their money in the local community, they create and sustain jobs. We estimated that in 2010/11 non-EU students were worth £6 billion to the UK economy. [Read our assessment of the economic value of international students here](#). In 2014, Universities UK estimated this contribution at £7 billion (See [here](#)).

3. On return to their home countries, students are more likely to do business with Britain and are often 'ambassadors' for this country making them an important source of 'soft power'. A very significant number of Heads of State and other notable persons have been educated in Britain. [See this list of notable alumni of British Universities](#).

4. There is no limit on the number of genuine students who can come to the UK to study. The UK has a very competitive offer compared to the USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, our competitor countries. ([Read our guide to the student visa conditions across the English speaking world here](#)) Students from the EU are, of course, free to come and go and we would like to see free movement retained for European students when the UK leaves the EU in March 2019.

5. The benefits of students are maximised when the majority go home at the end of their studies. If they stay on they add to the population and add to the pressure on housing and public services. Of course, the brightest and best students should be able to stay on for work, to start a business or conduct pioneering research. There are arrangements in place to permit all of these outcomes but the majority of students should be going home once they complete their studies.

6. However, the statistics are unclear on the extent to which students are contributing to net migration. This is because the International Passenger Survey is not adequately capturing students departing the country. (For more on this see [here](#)) We do know, however, that between 2009 and 2015 an average of 27,000 non-EU migrants who originally arrived as students or the dependants of students were granted permanent settlement each year. ([Read our summary of student settlement here](#))

7. In April 2015, the government introduced exit checks for those departing the country. The exit check data is now showing that of those who should have left the country when their visa expired 97% did so on time. However the same analysis is also showing a large cohort – just under 60,000 in 2015/16 – extending their visa for further study, work or family reasons.

8. The student system has been seriously abused in recent years. In 2008, the then Labour government introduced a new Points Based System for all migrants, including students. The system was a paper based system with no contact with an immigration officer and was therefore wide open to abuse. Applications around the world soared and visa sections in parts of India, China, Bangladesh and Nepal were closed to new applicants for up to six months amid concerns over fraudulent applications. The National Audit Office (NAO) subsequently concluded that in 2010, the first year of operation of the Points Based System 50,000 'students' came to work rather than study. You can read a summary of the NAO report [here](#).

9. In 2012 the government reformed the student route in an attempt to eliminate this abuse. It introduced tougher language requirements and, importantly, interviews. It also restricted working rights and ensured that only legitimate education establishments could sponsor students. Almost 900 colleges have now lost the right to recruit international students.

10. As might be expected, the number of students fell as bogus students were refused or withdrew their applications. Some might have been deterred by negative press coverage but this should now have settled. The exit check data suggest that reforms to the student route has weeded out those whose intention was to remain permanently in the UK.

11. While the number of student visa grants to non-EU students has fallen since 2010, visa applications to study at university have increased by 17% over the same period and visa applications for study at Russell Group universities have increased by 47%. It is therefore clear that the government were successful in their efforts to eradicate abuse of the route while protecting Britain's vital university sector.

12. The UK remains a very attractive country in which to live and the student route remains one of the easier ways of getting to the UK now that work migration has been restricted to those offered highly skilled jobs. The government must therefore remain vigilant to emerging patterns of abuse.

13. It remains essential that students continue to be included in the net migration statistics. A proportion of them stay on entirely legally and add to population growth, just like others such as work and family migrants. This is no doubt the reason that all of Britain's competitor countries include students in net migration statistics.

14. The public agree (by a margin of 50% to 34%) that students should remain part of net migration calculations. (See [September 2016 YouGov poll reported here](#))

December 2017