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Tier 4 Pilot Evaluation second edition

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Amendment

Page 2 : Pilot students in compliance with their visas by leaving the UK percentage amended from 82% to 81%.

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Key findings

- Half (50%) of the 2017 to 2018 academic year pilot students surveyed were aware of the pilot before deciding whether to accept an offer.
- Having extra time to stay in the UK had an impact on almost half (47%) of the accepters' decisions to apply or accept an offer.
- Nearly all pilot students (99%) from the 2016 to 2017 academic year cohort were compliant with their visas, with the majority (81%) leaving the UK.
- Those students that stayed in the UK (18%) either extended their leave (e.g. continue to study) or were granted a new type of leave (e.g. work).
- For the 2016 to 2017 students, comparing their intentions with their actual behaviour, less than one-fifth of those who said that they wanted to stay and work in the UK were doing so (16%), with the majority leaving the UK (71%).
- For those who continue their stay in the UK, over half (57%) of the 2016 to 2017 cohort are in the UK on a Tier 2 visa on a sponsored skilled job and one-third (36%) hold a Tier 4 visa for further study.

1. Introduction

The Tier 4 visa pilot provided one-year taught masters students at four institutions¹ the opportunity to remain in the UK for 6 months opposed to the usual 2 to 4-month post-study leave period. Students were also subject to fewer documentary checks on application for a visa. Home Office Analysis and Insight conducted an evaluation of the pilot to explore awareness of it and its attractiveness to students, as well as the impact it had with regard to immigration system compliance.

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¹ University of Cambridge, University of Oxford, University of Bath and Imperial College London, the institutions which had the lowest visa refusal rates for the four years prior to the pilot starting in the academic year starting September 2016.

2. Methodology

A range of methods were used to assess the pilot:

- Online surveys, with the 2016 to 2017 and 2017 to 2018 cohort of students from the pilot universities. A survey ran for students who accepted their place and one with those who declined their place for both academic years.
- Compliance and visa data for the 2016 to 2017 pilot students was analysed and a control group of similar universities used to compare the findings. A baseline group of masters students at the pilot universities in 2015 to 2016 academic year was also used as a comparison.
- Focus groups with representatives from the pilot universities.
- Interviews with key Home Office (HO) staff implementing the pilot.

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3. Does the pilot increase the attractiveness of the UK to international students?

The pilot was implemented after most of the 2016 to 2017 intake had accepted an offer from a pilot university. Of the following year cohort, around half (50%) of the students surveyed online were aware of the pilot before deciding whether to accept an offer.

Of those who knew about the pilot before applying, having extra time to stay in the UK as part of the pilot had an impact on almost half of their decisions to apply (43%) or accept an offer (47%). Having a shorter visa process as part of the pilot impacted less than a third (30%) of respondents' decision making.

The pilot universities also viewed additional leave to remain as the key benefit to the pilot for students and were optimistic that the pilot would increase attractiveness of study in the UK.

However, other factors appear to have a greater influence on decisions on where to study (which university and which country). Students who responded to the online survey reported that course content, quality of teaching and the reputation of the specific university, and British universities in general, were the most influential factors when deciding where to study.

Those who declined their offer at a pilot university appeared to be more sensitive to cost (cost of living, fees etc.) compared to accepters, especially those who ended up studying in another country, rather than another university in the UK.

Three-quarters (76%) of offers received by accepters came from other UK universities, compared to just over a third (37%) received by decliners. This suggests that those who accepted an offer from a pilot university were more focused on studying in the UK than decliners, regardless of the pilot.

In terms of perceptions, the additional time at the end of the course contributed to students feeling welcome in the UK (as reported in the surveys of students and directly to the higher education institutions) and led students to report being more likely to recommend the UK as a place to study.

4. Is the compliance of pilot students affected by the post-study leave period?

Nearly all pilot students (99%) from the cohort in the 2016 to 2017 academic year were compliant with their visas, with the majority (81%) leaving the UK. **Figure 1** shows the compliance outcomes for 2016 to 2017 pilot students. Compliance refers only to whether individuals appear to have departed before or on the date their visa expired – and not other aspects of compliance with the immigration rules.²

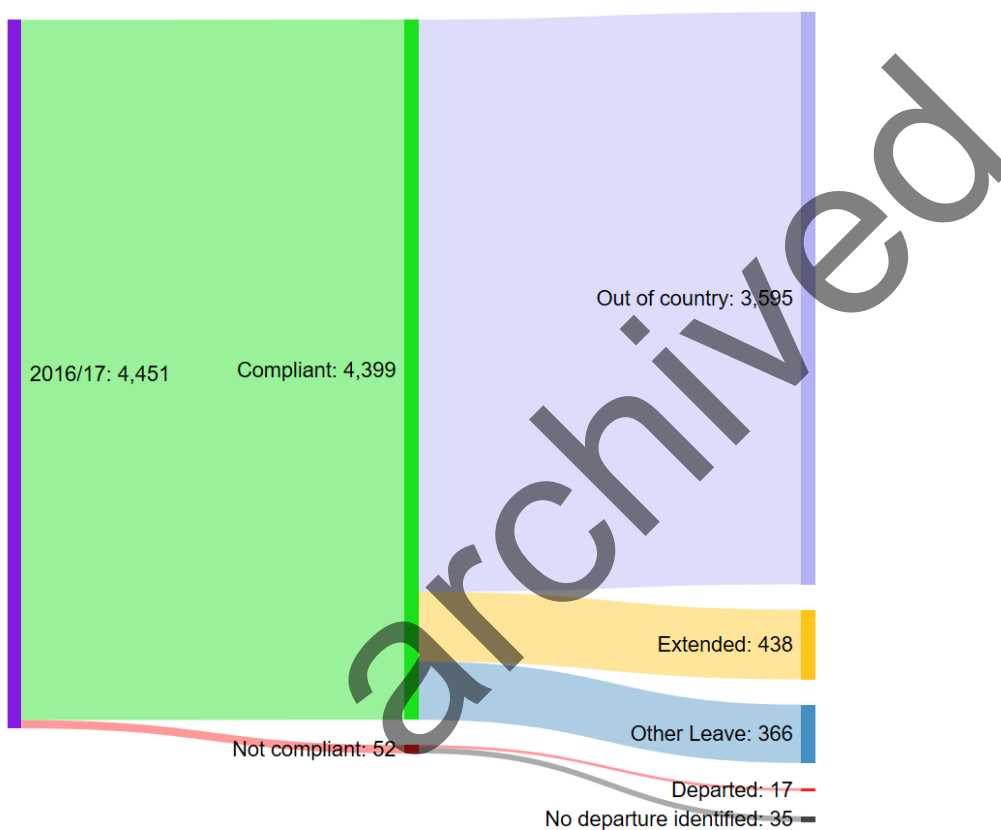


Figure 1: Compliance outcomes for 2016 to 2017 academic year pilot students

This follows similar patterns to the baseline 2015 to 2016 student cohort with 99% compliant and 85% leaving the UK. This contrasts with research undertaken on students in the earlier part of the decade which found large numbers remaining in the UK and working in low-skilled jobs.³

² For more details see latest Exit Check report, 2018 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/735224/third-report-on-statistics-being-collected-under-exit-checks.pdf [accessed 14/12/2018]

³ See Home Office report, 'Points Based System Tier 1: An operational assessment', October 2010. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/115913/occ91.pdf [accessed 14/12/2018]

Around one in five (18%) students stayed in the UK, either by extending their leave (e.g. continuing their studies) or being granted a new type of leave (e.g. work). For the baseline 2015 to 2016 students, 14% stayed in the UK. This compares to 30% of students from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) research⁴ around outcomes for non-EU students.

To compare the compliance findings, a control group of students at similar universities⁵ was used. For the 2016 to 2017 control group, 99% of students were compliant with their visa (same as the pilot group), although the proportion who left the UK after their studies was ten percentage points higher compared to the pilot group (91% vs. 81%). Looking at the 2015 to 2016 baseline comparison group, 99% were compliant with 90% leaving the UK.

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⁴ See <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/internationalstudentmigrationresearchupdate/august2017> [accessed 14/12/2018]

⁵ London School of Economics, University of Bristol, University of Exeter and University of East Anglia.

5. Does the pilot lead to any increase in the uptake of Tier 2 visas?

From the universities there were suggestions (before the extra leave came into place) that the extra leave would make it easier for students to look for jobs or undertake further study, particularly those on courses lasting less than 12 months (e.g. at Cambridge and Oxford). This was reflected in the findings from the online surveys, with two-thirds of the 2016 to 2017 pilot students more likely to want to look for a job in the UK (67%), which increased to 71% for students in the 2017 to 2018 academic year.

For the 2016 to 2017 cohort of students, their intentions post study, as recorded in the online surveys, were compared against their actual behaviour six months after their course had ended. Students were asked if HO could match their responses to internal management information. The intentions and behaviours of 515 students⁶ are presented in **Figure 2**.

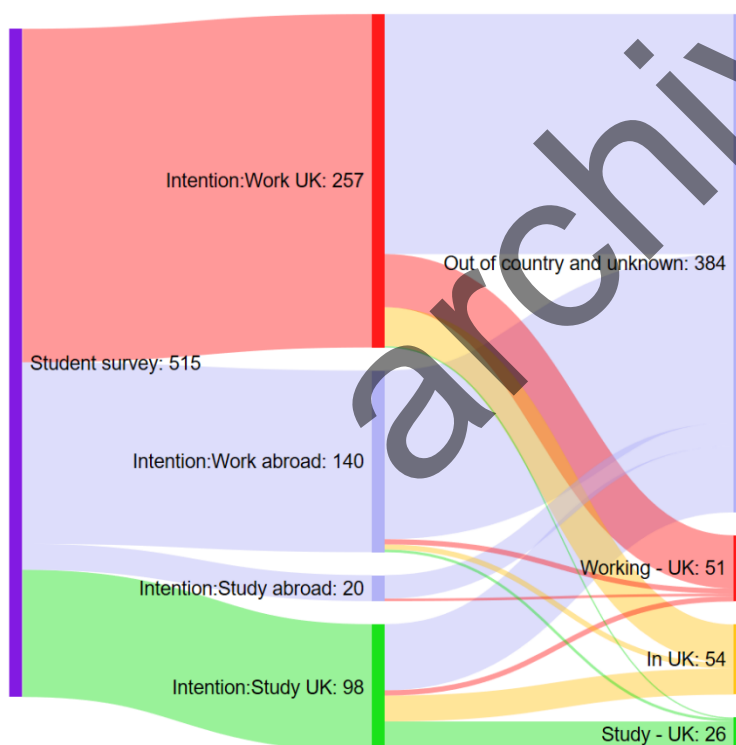


Figure 2: Student survey: post-course intentions and behaviours

Of the 257 students who said they wanted to stay and work in the UK, less than one-fifth (16%) were doing so (41 students), with the majority (71%) recorded as out of the country (183). 10 students who had other intentions were also recorded as working in the UK, bringing the total number working in the UK to 51.

⁶ This included five students where their status is unknown.

Just under a quarter (23%) of those who wanted to stay in the UK to study were doing so (23), as well as 3 other students who had stated different intentions, creating a total number of 26 staying in the UK to study.

For those who continued their stay in the UK, over half (57%) of the 2016 to 2017 cohort of pilot students were in the UK on a Tier 2 visa and one-third (36%) held a Tier 4 visa. This was similar for the baseline 2015 to 2016 students (59% Tier 2 and 32% Tier 4).

The analysis shows that student intentions and subsequent actions often do not match when it comes to their plans post study. This echoes findings from ONS's 2017 update on international students, which found that students may overstate their intentions to return to the UK compared with actual behaviour.⁷ However, whilst the pilot evaluation also shows this mismatch, we are unable to determine whether this is predominantly because students changed their minds about what to do next, or because they were unable find a job or faced barriers in finding work and subsequently did not meet the criteria to stay beyond six months. This has implications for future policy on post-study work. Extending the post-study period to six months for taught masters students, however, as evidenced by the 2016 to 2017 pilot cohort, does not appear to impact on compliance.

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⁷ ONS article, August 2017 "What's happening with international student migration?", Section 5, available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/whats happeningwithinternationalstudentmigration/2017-08-24#international-student-journeys-are-complex-and-their-migration-intentions-at-the-end-of-their-studies-may-change> [accessed 14/12/2018]

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