



MIGRATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

# Impact of international students in the UK: Call for evidence responses (3 of 3)



September 2018

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**Impact of international students in the UK: Call for  
evidence responses (3 of 3)**

**Migration Advisory Committee**

**September 2018**

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# National Union of Students

# **Response to the Migration Advisory Committee's Call for Evidence into the Impact of International Students in the United Kingdom from the National Union of Students.**

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# 1.Introduction

**Yinbo Yu (NUS International Students' Officer):** Without **international study** in the UK, I wouldn't be here today, nor would I be the person I've become. As an elected officer for the National Union of Students that represents over **7 million students**, my education and personal development have benefited greatly from the **huge diversity of cultures** present in the UK education sector. I feel incredibly privileged to have the opportunity – not only to study in an environment with an impeccable reputation and a long prestigious history of quality education, but also to be able to use these transformative experiences to work and contribute back to the UK by building **global student communities** on and off campuses. I want as many students as possible to have such opportunities that I have had, so that together, we can build a true "**Global Britain**".



1.1: This document forms the response of the National Union of Students in the United Kingdom (NUSUK) to the Migration Advisory Committee's "Call for Evidence" issued in August 2017. NUSUK welcomes the MAC initiative coming as it does at a time when there is great of uncertainty for international students, both EU/EEA and non-EU/EEA about the future approach of the UK Government towards international students. This enquiry provides, we trust, an opportunity to look objectively at the issue and to develop recommendations that strengthen the UK's reputation as a high-quality provider of tertiary education and as an outward looking and globally engaged country.

1.2: NUSUK is a confederation of nearly 600 students' unions representing 7 million students in tertiary education, the organisations mission is to promote, defend and extend the rights of students as well as championing and building strong students' unions. Within its' structures NUSUK has a section devoted to the needs and aspirations of international students studying in the UK. The International Students' Campaign is led by a full-time officer working alongside an elected committee elected by international students at an annual conference. This structure is replicated within our devolved national structures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland whose role it is to represent student views to decision makers in those legislative areas. NUSUK and its nations works closely with sector organisations who will be able to articulate many of the financial, educational and employability contributions made by international students to the UK tertiary education system. We want to ensure that the voices of international students join those of academics and sector professionals in articulating the benefits international students bring to the UK's economy and educational experience.

1.3: The students' union members of NUSUK exist to represent and support all students and as such are focused on making sure that international students can shape policies and processes and engage in a wide range of inclusive activities that help to build a truly global student community. It is these interactions at a co-curricular level that forms an important value-added element to the student experience in the UK.

1.4: Our focus for this response will be on the "international student journey" looking at what it is like to come and study in the UK outlining both the support and the barriers students may face during that journey. This will be illustrated by reference to our own research, sector reports, international comparisons, individual case studies and an overall summary of what students tell us. We note that whilst the deadline for evidence is the 26<sup>th</sup> January, the process of developing a considered view will continue until the autumn, we are keen to support that process through supporting focus groups, providing oral evidence and submitting additional evidence from our primary research. Furthermore, we appreciate the willingness of members of the MAC team to meet with and listen to international students and hear their stories.

1.5: We are mindful of the UK Governments stated intention to publish an Immigration Bill at some point this year as part of the legislative developments required by the decision to leave the European Union. We would hope that the evidence presented by NUSUK on behalf of its international student members, in addition to submissions by Universities UK, The Russell Group, Million Plus, UKISA, the British Council and others will be taken into account when drafting or amending legislation. Creating a positive and welcoming environment for international students is integrally linked to the UK's approach towards immigration. A negative approach, or perception, will, in the long run, be detrimental to the UK going forward.



## 2.Context

**Imane Tiahe:** Being an international student in a UK university is an amazing and challenging experience. It's amazing because I've learnt a lot about being independent in a country which is culturally, politically and educationally different. The first challenge is financial. It is very hard to work alongside your studies but at the same time you have fees to pay and living costs to cover. There is huge pressure on international students to pay their **enormous fees** and funding is limited. Another challenge is **visa restrictions**. I believe that we all belong to the world. It doesn't really matter where I'm from, what matters is to feel I am human. I believe that choosing where you stay and live is a right. Hopefully the UK government will take this into consideration. Thank you for having us in your beautiful country.



2.1: The enquiry comes at a time when the Government and Sector are thinking through the implications for the UK of leaving the European Union. All stakeholders are having to rethink strategies that will maximise UK influence and benefit both the financial and knowledge economies as the UK forges a new path which will include academic and research partnerships for the future.

2.2: The proposed immigration bill to be released in early to mid-2018 will aim to redefine the UK's immigration policy to take account of the ending of free movement and the Government's stated objective of reducing immigration to the "tens of thousands".

2.3: According to the OECD the UK is a highly attractive academic destination for international students, with 18.5% of tertiary enrolments in 2015, just behind Luxembourg and New Zealand

and significantly ahead of the OECD average. The percentages rise with the level of qualification, with 13% studying at level one Bachelors, 37% studying at level two Masters rising to 43% at level three Doctoral. The OECD point out that by contrast UK students are amongst the least likely to study abroad, for every 16 international students that come to study in the UK only 1 UK student will be outwardly mobile<sup>1</sup>. Figures from UNESCO paint a similar picture confirming that the UK is the second most popular academic destination after the United States<sup>2</sup>.

2.4: Figures for international students studying in publicly funded FE colleges suggest there were around 10,000 in 2013.<sup>2</sup> Currently around 30% of international students are from the EU, 20.5% from China, 19% from the rest of Asia, 8% from Africa, around 6.5% for the Middle East and North America and 4.2% from India and relatively small numbers from South America and Australasia.<sup>4</sup>

2.5: These countries represent significant markets, vital if the UK is to forge new partnerships and trade deals in the future. NUSUK would suggest that the percentage of international students' needs to increase if we are to reach out to students in countries that have not traditionally seen the UK as an academic destination. NUSUK also takes the view that both Government and the Sector should put in place a national strategy to ensure a higher level of participation of UK students in outward mobility opportunities. As such this is an approach the UK needs to build upon and enhance for the benefit of students, our colleges and universities and the country. **Appendix Two** summarises the key goals of Higher Education in Finland "Better Together for a Better World", an outward looking approach that we believe there is much to learn from<sup>3</sup>.

2.6: For the first time in 30 years International student numbers overall have been falling at a time when the international education market is experiencing growth of around 8% per annum<sup>4</sup>. A report from Exporting Education UK and Parthenon – EY "Supporting international education in the UK" published in 2016, estimated that the UK was losing as much as £9m because of declining numbers of international students, with approaches to the UK student visa system being a key barrier. One of the key growth areas in international recruitment are below-degree pathways and vocational training and it is precisely these programmes that have been hardest hit. The EdExUK report calls for a strong, consistent and clear offer for international students if government ambitions to increase education exports to £30Bn by 2020 are to be realised.

2.7: Whilst declining numbers is due to a complex set of factors, there is no doubt to us that current immigration policy together with an obsession to reduce net migration figures has created a hostile environment for international students. For EU students there is uncertainty as to their

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oced/education/education-at-a-glance-2017/unitedkingdom\\_eag-2017-71-en#.Wmhsr6hl9PY#page5](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oced/education/education-at-a-glance-2017/unitedkingdom_eag-2017-71-en#.Wmhsr6hl9PY#page5) (Accessed 25 January 2018) <sup>2</sup> <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow> (accessed 21 December 2017)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/182049/13-767-evaluation-of-value-of-tier-4-international-students-to-fe-colleges-and-uk-economy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182049/13-767-evaluation-of-value-of-tier-4-international-students-to-fe-colleges-and-uk-economy.pdf) (Accessed 18 January 2018) <sup>4</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/facts-and-stats/data-and-analysis/Documents/facts-and-figures-2016.pdf> (Accessed 18 January 2018)

<sup>3</sup> <http://minedu.fi/documents/1410845/4154572/YMP-en-net.pdf/ab74d6b2-a48f-49ee-9563-6313f87198ae> (Accessed 2 February 2018)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.exeduk.com/resources/publications/supporting-international-education-in-the-uk> (Accessed 25 January 2018)

rights to study and work in a post Brexit UK. For non- EEA students these changes have made it harder for genuine students to come to study in the UK and when here to have an equal student experience to that of home students. An NUSUK survey in 2014 found that: *51% of respondents said that they did not feel the UK government was welcoming to international students. A further 38% would not recommend studying in the UK to a friend or family member. Many of the responses to the survey referred to the perceived instability in the UK education system, with regular changes to the Immigration Rules and the sponsorship system being identified as sources of concern.* In 2012-13, there was a 25% reduction in the number of Indian students recruited to the UK compared with 2011-12, with many choosing Canada and Australia instead.

2.8: NUSUK believes that keeping our universities competitive is intrinsically linked to keeping the UK competitive. Highly effective graduates who have experience of living and working abroad are much prized by employers. Making it easier for students to do this within Europe and beyond can only benefit the UK in the future as our country forges a new set of global relationships and partnerships. By the same token encouraging and not deterring international students from studying within the UK would seem to be a better strategy to develop strong international partnerships for the future. The debate on the future direction for the UK and on future academic relationships and partnerships is an opportunity to reframe our approach to the recruitment of international students, especially as in all likelihood any new regime will treat EU and non-EU students in the same way, unless, of course a different status is agreed as part of wider negotiations between the UK Government and the EU Commission.

2.9: NUSUK campaigned for the UK retain our membership of the European Union, indeed 75% of voters under 24 voted to remain<sup>5</sup>. Our role is to make the case for the retention of the educational benefits derived from our EU membership most notably Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 funding, we believe that students should be free to study where they wish, visa free. Welcome reassurances have been given to EU students studying in the UK that they can complete their courses and the “deal” around phase one of the withdrawal negotiations ensures that such funding will be available during any transition period up to December 2020<sup>6</sup>. The Scottish Government have gone further by guaranteeing funding for EU students starting in 2019 – 2020, support that will take them beyond the transition period<sup>7</sup>. The implications of leaving the EU is that it is likely that the status of EU students seeking to study in the UK will change so that they are treated and charged fees in the same way as non-EU international students, and the same will be true for UK students seeking to study in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). We take the view that unless some form of funding arrangement is retained with the EU then the result will be less EU students studying in the UK (preferring other English-speaking destinations) and less UK students studying in other European countries. Neither outcome is good for the future of the HE sector in the UK, not for our long term international partnerships.

2.10: The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) on “The costs and benefits of international students by parliamentary constituency” demonstrates that the total net impact of international

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/24/meet-the-75-young-people-who-voted-to-remain-in-eu>

(Accessed 21 December 2017)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-42277040> (Accessed 21 December 2017)

<sup>7</sup> <https://news.gov.scot/speeches-and-briefings/ministerial-statement-supporting-people-to-study-in-scotland> (Accessed 2 February 2018)

students on the UK economy was estimated to be 20.3bn, with 4.06bn of this net impact generated by EU-domiciled students, and £16.3bn of net impact generated by non-EU domiciled students<sup>10</sup>.

**Appendix Three** outlines a summary of a similar study from Denmark.

2.11: It is clear that the way in which the UK welcomes and monitors international students from arrival to departure will, we believe, have a profound effect on future international research projects, educational and trade relationships. Our response is based on debate, discussion and feedback we have received directly from international students, we would suggest:

- International students should not form part of the calculation of **net migration target**. We take the view that there should be no overall target to reduce immigration based on net migration figures and think it would be a more helpful policy to calculate the net migration of international students separately as the tertiary education sector relies on growth in these areas and it makes sense to track it separately. Outside of universities, the arrival and departure of international students is very difficult to monitor as the International Passenger Survey is not aimed at their arrival and departure periods and no one, other than HESA, collects a central database of enrolments and graduations. We benefit from the contribution made to academic life in the UK; we also, of course, benefit from the large fees that universities can charge, but ultimately, we benefit in terms of our international reputation and the potential this carries for future partnerships.
- A **post-study work visa** should be reinstated, focused on facilitating graduates to work across different businesses and regions of the UK. This would create a clear and understandable opportunity for international students to contribute their skills to the UK economy and where applicable, attain professional recognition linked to their academic achievement.
- International students should **not be disadvantaged by immigration rules** which limit access to work and transferring courses based on the institution they study at. We note with concern suggestions that the ability to recruit international students could be linked to TEF ratings or some similar grading process<sup>11</sup>. We do not feel the current system where further education students face much greater restrictions in the UK is fair or justified and we would want this to be rectified and not extended.
- The **costs** for international students are very high and we would invite the UK government to reflect on the extent to which this acts as a deterrent to an international student's motivation to study here, given the growth of other international HE providers. We have come across situations where fees have risen mid-course and where hidden costs have not been made explicit. NUSUK take the view that international fees should be capped. We would also suggest that fees be **payable in instalments** wherever possible.
- International students should have the same **access to NHS facilities** as home students and should not have to pay a surcharge. The recent Higher Education Policy Institute report

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/01/11/new-figures-show-international-students-worth-22-7-billion-uk-cost-2-3-billion-net-gain-31-million-per-constituency-310-per-uk-resident/> (Accessed 2 February 2018) <sup>11</sup> <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/10/full-text-amber-rudds-conference-speech/> (Accessed 17 December 2017)



on the costs and benefits of international students demonstrates that the net impact of hosting international students is £22.6 Billion<sup>8</sup>.

- **Refugee and Asylum Seeking students** who have been displaced by conflict and government instability or failure will often not meet immigration rules as a Tier 4 student. Allowing them to access education as a domestic student would ensure they are able to continue their studies and make the most of their temporary residence here. It will ensure that when they return to their country of origin they have the qualifications to support critical moments in their national future. Alongside universities and colleges who develop scholarship schemes, the government should look at policy changes which can alleviate the hardship faced by students who may suddenly find their source of income cut off due to circumstances beyond their control in their home country.
- Programmes for international students to **study English** (ESOL for example) should be adequately supported to ensure that international students can fully engage in UK study programmes and can be empowered to integrate within local communities. Allowing students to study academic subjects alongside ESOL will broaden their learning and application of language.
- NUSUK also believes that the **tone of some government announcements** concerning migration and linking it to international study could have the impact of making the UK appear to not be a welcoming and supportive environment in which to study and we would suggest that the atmosphere in the post referendum environment has exacerbated such feelings. NUSUK suggests that there needs to be a clear government international education strategy that prevents a conflation between government approaches to abuse of the migration system, and international students who come to the UK through the Tier 4 or short-term study system. There is currently not a balance in the governments approach. Without a clear strategy to support international education, messages will continue to be negative.

2.11: NUSUK agrees with the **Russell Group** that international students play an essential role in UK universities and can in particular help to fill skills gaps (especially in STEM subjects) where they occur in our economy, allowing flexibility for continued study and simplified access to post study work benefits the sector and the student<sup>1910</sup>.

2.12: As student representatives we know that our campuses, our courses, our communal life is made considerably more relevant and positive through the experience of sharing it with people from all over the world.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/01/11/new-figures-show-international-students-worth-22-7-billion-uk-cost-2->

<sup>9</sup> [-billion-net-gain-31-million-per-constituency-310-per-uk-resident/](http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/01/11/new-figures-show-international-students-worth-22-7-billion-uk-cost-2-billion-net-gain-31-million-per-constituency-310-per-uk-resident/) (Accessed 1 February 2018)

<sup>10</sup> <http://russellgroup.ac.uk/news/international-students-report/> (Accessed 22 January 2018)

### 3.Choosing a course, fees and arrival

**Dew Uwadia:** Being exposed to a variety of people from different cultures has enabled me to develop a global outlook on things. It has taught me how to interact and work with people with diverse backgrounds – putting me at an advantage on a political scale. However, being international always comes with challenges. Finances are the biggest struggle. With no access to funding I’m stuck paying high fees which becomes even worse when converted into my currency. So, to help, I decided to work part time. But international students are only allowed to work 20 hours a week which is an obstacle as employers often look for people who can work more hours. I also struggled to get a guarantor for housing. It was stressful to try to figure out how to rent a house without having to pay half my rent upfront. I am just one of many international students dealing with these issues. I am tired of feeling like my nationality determines access to basic stuff that would make my life better. I am a bright and talented student like most international students and have contributed to the growth and development of other students around me, it’s time we were treated more like people who were here to give and not just take.



3.1: The sector clearly welcomes international students, however this can, at times, be at odds with Government statements and with the direct experience of students themselves. Government Ministers seek to attract the “brightest and the best”, but by contrast government restrictions on allocating international student visas (CAS numbers) to institutions has had a significant impact on recruitment for some universities. According to the University of Sheffield international students choose to come to the UK because of its high educational standards, its approach to teaching, the UK’s reputation for research and innovation which of course attracts funding, its multi-cultural

society and the recognition that UK qualifications receive. University of Sheffield is a good example of an institution that is proud of the welcome afforded to international students *"The UK has a long tradition of welcoming international students into its schools, universities and colleges. It's reassuring to know that you're coming to a country that fully understands the unique dreams, hopes, needs and worries of students from overseas, and has support mechanisms in place to help you when you need it most. It's why universities like the University of Sheffield have an International College, to specifically help international students get the best British education possible and have a great time in the UK while they're here"*<sup>11</sup>.

3.2: This approach is borne out by the "International Students Survey 2017 – welcoming the world maintaining the UK's status as a top global study destination" published by Hobsons<sup>15</sup>, they conclude that 26.7% of students who choose the UK said their number one reason was because it has universities who offer high quality teaching. The research also notes that the perceived welcome a student might receive by a host country also has a strong bearing on choice. The UK has an opportunity to develop a more welcoming approach to maintain the UK's position and possibly overtake the United States given recent hostile comments concerning the status of nonwhite citizens. Data issued by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) since 2010 shows that many universities have experienced a reduction of international students of 40% or more<sup>12</sup>. Evidence presented to the Higher Education Commission by i-graduate showed clear evidence that the attractiveness of the UK is diminished for education agents, the number one issue being UK visa arrangements, it's a lot easier to go to Australia. Significantly the Australians have detached international student numbers from their net migration figures<sup>13</sup>.

3.3: The current immigration system means that non-EEA international students are subject to different entry requirements from UK or EU students. EU students may well, in the future, be treated in the same way as non-EU students. Before even coming to the UK many international students will have had to apply for a visa (if they come from outside the EU). Throughout their stay in the UK their immigration status will have an impact on their UK student experience. It will dictate what course they can take and if they can switch courses to something more suitable. It can even dictate where they study, and will certainly dictate how long they can study for (there is a maximum number of years to study at each level). It will affect their right to rent and open a bank account, whether they can work, whether they can be accompanied by family or dependents and whether they can stay in the case of illness or other unforeseen circumstances. Coming to study in the UK as an international student is for many a major challenge as they have to be able to do this in a different language and academic culture. The experience for some students is that they face expensive and inappropriate English language tests. Most are not able to gain access to a course when they have studied at the same level before, with very few exceptions to this rule. This stops many students from transferring to their course of choice, when a domestic student can do so. It also impacts academic judgement on what is the right course for a student, something we believe the Home Office should not have the right to do.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://usjc.sheffield.ac.uk/blog/2015/may/why-do-international-students-choose-the-uk> (accessed 19 December 2017) <sup>15</sup> [https://www.hobsons.com/res/Whitepapers/Hobsons\\_ISS2017\\_UK\\_Welcoming\\_the\\_World.pdf](https://www.hobsons.com/res/Whitepapers/Hobsons_ISS2017_UK_Welcoming_the_World.pdf) (Accessed 25 January 2015)

<sup>12</sup> HESA 2015 - 2016

<sup>13</sup> i-graduate evidence for the Higher Education Commission presented by Sir Drummond Bone and Jessica Howlett 30 January 2018.

3.4: UK students were asked for their views on entry requirements for international students<sup>14</sup>. 78% of UK students agreed or strong agreed that entry requirements to a course should be the same for both UK and International students. There was strong support for having a good command of the English language

3.5: International students tell us that they need access to impartial immigration advice given the complexity of the rules and regulations. They find that they are not fully aware of some of the implications in pursuing a course of study and do not always have the full information they require to make an informed choice. There have been examples over the last decade of students being put at risk of their course being terminated through no fault of their own, with errors being found in the activities of agencies that recruit international students and some fraudulent activity in the English language testing sector<sup>15</sup>. The UK needs to do more to present clear and transparent immigration routes to study and graduate employment to ensure that students are not taken advantage of by unscrupulous practices.

3.6: The fees that international students are charged are too high, and they struggle to access help through the CMA who explicitly restrict uncontrolled fee rises in-course. The Government needs to ensure that fees are fair and transparent to avoid risking the UK's reputation. International students are charged up to four times as much as UK and EU students, £35,000 per annum and in some cases fees can often rise part way through a course<sup>16</sup>.

3.7: There is no clear safety net for international students who pay fees and then are not able to continue because their institution is no longer able to teach them. The UK needs a strategy to support international students if it is going to have an immigration rule that can place them and the fees they have paid at such high risk as the consequences of a revocation of a Tier 4 license.

3.8: There is no safety net for international students who find themselves in difficulty through no fault of their own, these situations include governmental collapse, civil war or natural disasters. Students in this situation need institutional support that will not fall foul of rigid immigration regulations. Immigration rules should encourage institutions to support these students but should also ensure that exemptions can be made. The government should reinstate the Responding to International Students in Crisis (RISC) Committee and ensure it has the tools to work across government to support the increasing number of students facing conflict and natural disaster at home. For example, the RISC committee was instrumental in helping government create the

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<sup>14</sup> NUSUK. "Student Perspectives in International Students – NUS research into UK students views on their international peers" (2016).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-38236852> (Accessed 21 December 2017) see also <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/theresa-may-wrongly-deported-48000-students-after-bbcpanorama-exposes-toeic-scam-a6958286.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/press-releases/international-students-feel-unwelcome-in-uk-asimmigration-bill-set-to-create-new-barriers-to-study/> (Accessed 18 January 2018)



concession of Syrian nationals to apply in country to remain under various immigration routes, including refugee status<sup>21</sup>.

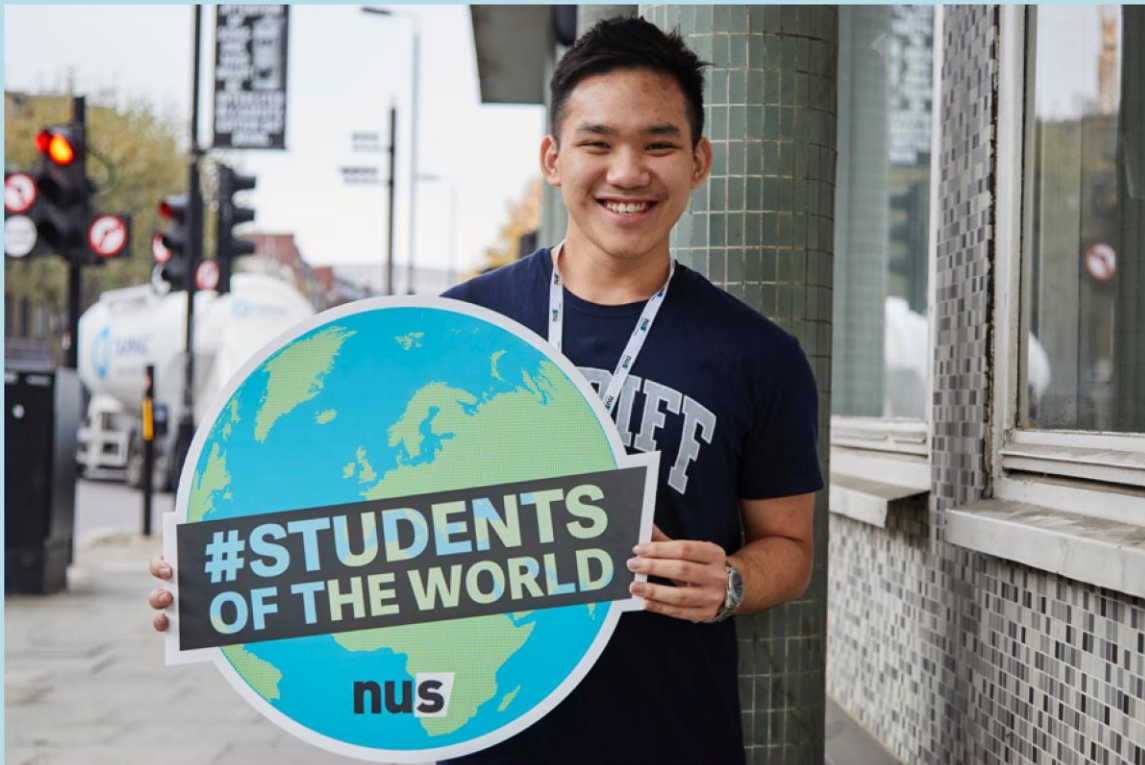
3.9: People who have sought refugee protection in the UK do not have equal access to university, most are classed as international students which mean they are charged higher fees than domestic students and in almost all cases they are the least able to pay. On top of this most cannot get a student loan and do not have the right to earn money to pay their fees and living costs. It makes sense to maximise opportunities for refugee students whilst they are in the UK, they can contribute to the UK economy and of course their countries once it is safe for them to return, it makes no sense to create multiple barriers to this highly vulnerable group<sup>22</sup>. We would urge the committee to take a look at the experience of Shrouk El-Attar an Egyptian Student studying at Cardiff University. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2vMdX631yk>

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/595762/concessions-to-the-immigration-rules-for-syrian-nationals\\_v3.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/595762/concessions-to-the-immigration-rules-for-syrian-nationals_v3.pdf) (Accessed 25 January 2018)

<sup>22</sup> Student Action for Refugees/NUSUK Equal Access Campaign Toolkit (2016)

## 4. Education Experience

**Jo Win Tan:** The education style in my country is different from the UK. We from Malaysia are so used to spoon feeding. Having had just a slight exposure to the UK education system in the past wasn't enough to gap the so-called culture shock! I managed to get through this though, with help from other international students and students from my home country who had had the same experience. One of the biggest challenges for me was approaching strangers and stepping out of my comfort zone, as in Malaysia we are always taught to stick to the status quo. Coming here was like a boost to change myself and who I want to be. It was difficult at first but I listened to a lot of TEDx talks and talks from inspirational speakers which helped me challenge myself! Friendship is everything. With friendship you can literally go anywhere and do whatever you want as there are people who accepted you. We may be of different races, colour, gender, religion and age but we are still all humans.



4.1: Concerns were raised about future Government policy towards international students that appeared to suggest that the numbers of international students should be reduced and that in future entry would be based on institutional quality linked based on a proposed new ranking system with only those attending Russell Group universities being afforded the right to work after

graduation<sup>17</sup>. More recent reports suggest a retreat from this position<sup>18</sup>, indeed we would see the MAC enquiry as an attempt to develop policy based on evidence rather than perception. We would welcome further research by MAC to explore why there is such a drastic reduction in numbers from specific institutions, and in particular regions. We note that MAC has an interest in the regional benefits and impact derived from international students and suggest strongly that there are factors limiting benefit of international students to areas outside of London and the South East.

4.2: Any suggestion on reducing numbers is of concern to NUSUK and its international student members. We asked UK students (there were 4,600 respondents) what they felt the impact would be if such a policy was pursued, specifically the impact of reducing numbers to 50% or zero.

4.3: Students on postgraduate courses are significantly more likely to be concerned that if their course were to half number of international students attending the course would have insufficient students to go ahead. They also felt that the quality and value of the course would decrease and almost half felt there would be less money available for course resources.

4.4: Both undergraduate and postgraduate students felt strongly that they would have less diverse cultural experience if there was a 50% reduction in international students.

4.5: Students on postgraduate courses in STEM subjects were more likely to be concerned about a 50% reduction than their peers on other courses. Over half felt there would be less money for their courses to run on and a quarter felt their course would no longer run if half of the international students were no longer there.

4.6: Students expressed stronger feelings when we asked what the impact would be if there were no international students on their course. Students across subjects and levels had significant concerns about the viability and quality of their course if all international students were removed. A quarter of students also felt that their course might not run in the future if this was the situation. Students felt strongly that fewer or no international students would diminish the cultural diversity of their course. The impact of this is, we feel, highly significant, the report "Student perspectives on International Students" is attached as **supplementary evidence** to this submission.

4.7: We have already noted HESA figures showing a drop in international student numbers. Universities often rely on international students to run key courses in Engineering, Maths, Computing and Business. According to a report by Universities UK (UUK) more than 50% of students on postgraduate taught courses in Computer Science, Engineering and Technology and Mathematical Science are from outside the EU. These international students play a clear role in supporting the availability of courses at universities across the UK for domestic students<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> [https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/oct/04/rudd-announces-crackdown-on-overseas-students-and-](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/oct/04/rudd-announces-crackdown-on-overseas-students-and-new-work-visas)

[new-work-visas](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/oct/04/rudd-announces-crackdown-on-overseas-students-and-new-work-visas) (accessed 19 December 2017)

<sup>18</sup> <http://uk.businessinsider.com/amber-rudd-set-to-back-down-on-planned-crackdown-on-foreign-students2016-11> (accessed 19 December 2017)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/international-students-uk-heritage-competition.aspx> (Accessed 19 December 2017)

4.8: International students tell us they find it hard to change courses and are often required to apply for a new visa. NUSUK takes the view that a single visa should suffice and that international students should have the same rights as domestic students to change their programmes of study based on their experience and judgement.

**Sophie Howells:** Studying in a different country gave me the chance to study my subject from a completely different perspective. It also completely **changed me as a person**. I'm now more outgoing, confident and am more likely to take up opportunities by myself. I found adjusting to a new place hard, especially as I didn't expect the culture shock as I moved from Wales to Canada. I got over this with the help of my amazing new friends I made and the international staff at the university both here and in Canada. I love working with other international students, what's not to love about having friends all over the world, sharing cultures, learning new things and just in general having lots of fun, and creating so many precious memories!





## 5. Student Experience

**Isabelle Casgrain:** I have learnt that open mindedness, kindness and respect can bring you a long way and help you towards inclusivity and friendships. I really struggled with culture shock when I came here. Arriving at University in the Gloucester countryside taught me many things, including how different life was here compared to my home city of Montreal. It took a little time, but I grew to love the little villages surrounding the university, the people, the culture and obviously, the Wednesday University Rugby matches. They were good fun. The friendships I have built here are so strong. I consider them my family away from home. They are one of a kind.



5.1: International students tell us that they find it hard to get to know UK students. Many feel isolated and believe that institutions are only interested in the fees they attract, this is backed up by research carried out in 2013 by YouthSight showing that 20% of international students feel isolated, and 32% felt that income fees were the prime motivation of their chosen university<sup>26</sup>.

5.2: NUSUK research published in 2017<sup>27</sup> examined UK students' views on their international peers. As part of the research we were interested in the extent to which UK students have opportunities to engage and interact with their international counterparts. The data showed that 82% of UK students engage with international students as part of their educational and social experience. Looking more closely at the data we concluded that those studying STEM subjects are significantly more likely than those studying other subjects to have the opportunity to study and

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.youthsight.com/foreign-students-feel-isolated-and-unwelcome/> (Accessed 17 December 2017)

<sup>27</sup> NUSUK "Student perspectives on international students" (2017)

socialise with international students. Undergraduates are significantly more likely than postgraduates to study and socialise with international students at sports clubs and societies, in halls of residences and on campus. Whereas postgraduate students are significantly more likely to study and socialise with international students off campus.

5.3: The main interaction that UK students experienced with international students was on their course, enabling not just an academic exchange but a cultural one as well. Indeed, cultural exchange is most likely to occur through the medium of education. Over 30% felt it would lower the quality and value of their course, which also rose to 43% for postgraduate students. Most worrying was that 53% of postgraduate students felt there would be less money for course resources. This rose to 57% for postgraduate students studying STEM subjects

5.4: International students often find themselves housed together in university accommodation which further limits the opportunity to develop friendships and social links with UK students. Where social activity does take place UK students believe that it enhances cultural understanding. In some cases, international students have their own halls, others they are mixed. Over 40% of students from survey said they interacted with international students in halls. UK students feel that overall mixing is a good thing. Postgraduate students most often meet students off campus, which suggests that they interact in the community, perhaps through housing, much more than undergraduate students do.

5.5: The All Party Parliamentary Group on the Chinese in Britain published in 2017 notes that 30% of all international students in the UK come from China. Many of the students interviewed were disappointed by the experience of student support services, the lack of culturally sensitive orientation programmes, the restrictions placed on gaining work experience in the UK. 90% of those interviewed said that they would consider looking to study in other English-speaking countries. 95% of those asked thought that the UK immigration system should be changed to encourage rather than deter students. The lack of opportunity to work in the UK reduces any incentive to more fully integrate with students from the UK. The cohort also expressed concern about xenophobia and racism following the EU referendum<sup>20</sup>. In a post – Brexit environment it is vital that the UK maintains and extends its attraction for Chinese and other non-EU students. The report argues that the approach taken towards international students through more restrictive immigration rules have the potential to damage the UK’s reputation as a destination for Chinese and other non-EU students.

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<sup>20</sup> “Chinese International Students in the UK – Everyday challenges and policy recommendations” A report by the All-Party Parliamentary Chinese in Britain Group. (2017)

**Maria Lopez-Forner:** I come from Spain, pure Spain. Right now, I'm a maths Erasmus student at the University of Warwick. Warwick is one of the best universities in the world for maths and I'm so glad I got the opportunity to study what I love in an awesome university. I could say this is the best decision I made in my life. The quality of lectures and professors here is amazing, and very different to my home country. And the university itself has so many societies and events and opportunities to really experience life away from my country. I've met so many people from different places in the world and I really think it's making me grow as a person. It makes me think about other ways of living and other cultures that I never really knew about before, and that I love knowing about. I'm sad that Erasmus in England may stop because of **Brexit**. Because this is an amazing country. I would like more people to live this like I do.





## 6. Graduation, Work and Departure

**Danje Zhong:** It's been a golden opportunity for me to study in one of the most **diverse and robust countries in the world**. I've gained academic and language skills and living alone in a foreign country plays a vital role in developing my independence. Even though I have spent huge amount of time learning English, I have found it's still different how people speak and pronounce in the real world. The discrepancy of culture and customs can also hinder the process of making friends or opening up conversation

Despite that, making friends has been the most valuable experience I have had during my studies in the U.K. Gaining friendships and **building a network** with students is an intangible asset for me.



6.1: On graduation, international students have a number of options open to them for gaining work experience in the UK. The most prominent is the Tier 2 visa route, to which international students are exempt from the Resident Labour Market Test (RLMT) and from the monthly cap which would prevent many in graduate level jobs from accessing the labour market as their salaries would not place them high enough in the priority order to gain a visa in months where the cap would be met. Additionally, international students also tend to apply during the same month, as visa rules require them to apply when their leave ends and in time to ensure they have leave to remain. If in the cap, international students would compete with each other for a small number of visas which might be remaining at their salary position.



6.2: Another route is through Tier 5, which has a number of schemes to support graduates in short term work experience. This scheme is useful in that it does not require the employer to have a license, granting access to a much wider group of companies and in particular charities than the Tier 2 route. This route limits students to one or two years depending on the route and cannot be used to transfer into a Tier 2 visa. International PhD students can also access a post-study work option under the Tier 4 route which is designed to give access to post-doctoral and other early researcher schemes and act as a bridge between Tier 4 and Tier 2 for those students seeking to work longer in the UK. In these cases, the university remains the sponsor.

6.3: Finally, international students can access the Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa which allows international students to start a business after graduation, and work alongside this activity for up to two years before switching to another entrepreneur visa. This recognises the limited funds international students are likely to have upon graduation compared with other entrepreneurs' route for which the other Tier 1 options are more suited. This visa must be 'endorsed' by a university which qualifies for the scheme through application to the Home Office. The multiple routes to postgraduation work are not well known to international students and can be confusing to navigate and apply for.

6.4: NUS believes that although the UK has some of the best academic institutions in the world, the incentives the UK offered has deteriorated significantly in recent years. In 2011, the Post-Study Work route was closed. The UK has replaced this with a Tier 2 route which has experienced numerous difficulties and has been found to be both inaccessible and less competitive than the offer provided by competitor countries.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, the United States allows STEM graduates to work for 29 months after their studies and is currently looking at legislation to provide permanent visas. Canada allows students access to work experience of up to a maximum of three years and is looking to promise 10,000 permanent residency visas. Australia and New Zealand have similarly attractive work routes for students after their studies have completed.

6.5: In 2011 NUSUK surveyed 7,878 international students, of which 2,598 studied STEM subjects and 781 medicine and related subjects, on the closure of the post study work visa. The majority of these students were either Postgraduate Taught or Postgraduate Research student. If we take the results specifically for STEM students we found that:

- STEM students were more likely to find the availability of the post-study work visa as important in their decision to study in the UK. 77% stated it was very important and 16% stated it was fairly important.
- This was significantly higher for PGT students. 80% stated it was very important and 15% stated it was fairly important.

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<sup>21</sup> A study by the British Council (2012) into the impact of similar policy changes by the US and Australian governments during the previous decade indicated that comparable initiatives resulted in a decline in international student enrolments. In our view, recent visa reforms place the UK in an equally vulnerable position.

- 84% of STEM students stated they were planning on using the post-study work option in the UK.
- STEM students were more likely to say that they would not have chosen to study in the UK if the post-study work option was removed. 75% stated they would not. This was again higher for PGT students.

6.6: In 2012 NUSUK surveyed 1010 students of which 198 studied STEM subjects at Higher Education students. Of these students, STEM students responded with the following to the NUS survey:

- 62.3% came to the UK for opportunities to work after their studies. 71.3% to improve their job prospects back home. 75.4% because of the quality of UK education.
- 95.5% felt gaining work experience during their studies was important to them. However only 59.2% felt that gaining work experience relevant to their chosen career was easy to achieve.
- Only 20.7% of students felt that they were very confident that they would be able to find employment in the UK after completion of their studies. 50.7% were a little confident and 28.6% were not at all confident.
- However, 33.9% expected their starting salary to be less than £20,000 which is the current Tier 2 threshold.
- 88.8% felt that STEM graduates should be able to seek work in the UK after a period of time without having to find immediate employment.
- 74.1% felt that they should be able to find employment without having any salary threshold imposed.
- 45.3% would not recommend the UK to a friend because of the work experience and employment opportunities available.

6.7: In 2013 Loughborough University surveyed 585 international students between October 2012 and 2012 with a good sample of STEM students. It found that overall:

- Almost 50% felt post study work opportunities were either the most important or important to their decision to study in the UK.
- 55% did not feel the visa application represented good value for money.
- 40% said the difficulty they experienced getting a visa to remain in the UK made either an extremely important or an important impact on their reason for leaving.

- While 70% would recommend the UK to study, only 33% would recommend it for skilled work and only 11% would recommend it for a business start-up.

6.8: The report recommended modifying the rhetoric on immigration as survey respondents were well aware of the opportunities available in countries such as the US, Canada and Australia. From our 2012 survey one student commented:

*"Students pursue international studies in the hope of getting a quality education, improving job prospects, and in the process, make some money. It's a two-way process as the international students contribute high economic benefits to UK in the form of taxes and the huge amounts of tuition fees and moreover they also form a reasonable chunk of labour force in UK. With many other countries, such as Germany, offering great work options I would not recommend UK to any my friends as a study destination"* (Student 23, South Asia, Biological Sciences)

another said:

*"I'm just disappointed with the removal of post study visa. I'm finishing my studies this May 2012 and they closed it on April 2012. I had I hopes and dreams and now, it is just things that won't happen. I stayed here legally and obeyed all the rules. When I applied for placement, I noticed that even though, I was more qualified than the rest of the candidates, they still chose UK citizens. There was even one company that sent me an email that, they will choose UK citizens first before considering my application, not taking into account my qualifications. I'm afraid of what will happen to me after graduation because I don't know how to pay back my sister for the money she lent me for my tuition and going back to my home country and working there will take the rest of my life paying for what I owe."* (28, South East Asia, Mathematics)

and finally, a student from Africa told us;

*"I am of the view that international students should be given the opportunity to gain some experience in the UK after their studies especially those in very technical fields unlikely to obtain that experience in their home countries as graduates. Employers all over the world want to hire people with experience, therefore to find employment in the country where you obtained your certificate to acquire the requisite training and experience will better enhance your prospects back home. Therefore, to curtail this opportunity is a great disincentive not only to prospective students but also to the UK educational institutions that are competing with those in other countries. The idea of giving permit on the basis of salary is quite difficult to comprehend since not all graduates will be fortunate to secure high earning employment. They may earn well below the stated level but nonetheless, gain the experience they desperately need to return to their countries and be competitive in the job market."* (Student 28 Africa, Engineering).

The report "NUS Submission to the Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Inquiry into international STEM students" is attached as **Appendix One**.

6.9: NUS believes that STEM graduates are finding it difficult to find employment in the UK for a variety of reasons. The key reasons identified by the qualitative evidence in the surveys we have conducted are threefold. First, the short time period students are given to identify a job and a sponsor. Second, the fact that most of the employers they encounter do not have Tier 2 licenses and therefore cannot sponsor them (including large companies). Third, the restrictions which link Tier 2 limits to specific salary limits such as £20,000. Students in rural regions and some urban regions outside of London found the salary limitations particularly difficult. Many wanted to stay and work in the area they studied and found finding a job over the salary limit, with a company which held a tier 4 license "impossible." NUS welcomes the changes made in the most recent Immigration rules changes which allow international students to apply for a Tier 2 visa upon completing their course, without having to wait for graduation. This will provide valuable additional time to seek employment as well as enable them to access the support of their institution during their job hunt. NUS also welcomes the expansion of the Tier 4 pilot for Postgraduate Taught students, which grants them, among other benefits, six months additional time to seek work postcompletion. We would encourage the Home Office to roll this system out more widely as soon as possible to maximise the number of highly skilled students who are able to take advantage of it. We would further urge the Home Office and other decision makers to reflect on statements, legislation and actions that are in the long run detrimental to the continued development of tertiary education in the UK.

6.10: Since the removal of the Tier 1 (Post-Study Work) visa in 2012<sup>22</sup>, the number of international students remaining in the UK to contribute to the UK economy has fallen. In 2011, the last full year that the Tier 1 visa was offered, there were 43,319 students granted the visa.<sup>23</sup> In 2013 only 4,175 students access the Tier 2 visa.<sup>24</sup>

The Tier 1 (Post Study Work) visa enabled international students to remain in the UK and work for two years which helped them to build up experience before returning home or possibly extend their time in the UK, all the while contributing to both the knowledge and financial economies. This approach towards international students was pioneered in Scotland through the "Fresh Talent" scheme promoting Scotland as a *"great place to live, work and study"*, the then First Minister, Jack McConnell explained that *"When it comes to attracting the world's brightest and best, Scotland's door is open."*<sup>25</sup> Immigration is not a reserved issue and consequently changes to Tier 1 led to the forced abolition of the Scottish initiative. The UK Government Scottish Affairs Committee produced a report expressing concern at the changes, concluding that the rules on rights to work after graduation were too restrictive and had the effect of preventing businesses from the finding the necessary skilled workers they badly needed especially given different demographics in Scotland. The report stated that the number of non-EU students remaining in the UK after graduating had fallen by 80%<sup>26,27</sup>. International students have access to a Tier 2 Visa; however, this is reliant on

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/apr/23/are-international-students-getting-a-raw-deal> (Accessed 21 December 2017)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/writtenquestion/Commons/2014-11-18/215097/> (Accessed 1 February 2018)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/writtenquestion/Commons/2014-10-10/209961/> (Accessed 1 February 2018)

<sup>25</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/4433742.stm> (Accessed 18 January 2018)

<sup>26</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmsscota/593/59302.htm> (Accessed 18 January

<sup>27</sup> )

the graduate being granted a contract that pays £20,300 per annum. Statistics on average graduate starting salaries vary from 19,000 to 29,000<sup>28</sup>, it is more likely that the higher salaries are possible in the South of England but less likely in the North, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland<sup>29</sup>.

6.11: NUS research conducted in 2015 (with 1,599 international students responding) noted that 32% of those international students surveyed 'expected to earn below the £20,300 threshold [now £20,800] needed' and '38% responded they would need more than four months to find a suitable job after graduation'. Furthermore 'Almost half (48%) of respondents were told they were ineligible to apply for a job because of their visa status<sup>37</sup>. The research also found that 70% of respondents said, 'they would like to seek some form of work experience'. Furthermore, 'almost two thirds (62%) of those who do wish to seek employment in the UK as a graduate, gaining work experience in a particular industry is the main attraction'. Unsurprisingly, 35% of respondents to the NUS survey said that 'because of the work experience and employment opportunities available' they would not recommend to others to study in the UK. This number reached 60% and 55%, for students from India and Pakistan respectively, and 47% for Nigerian students.<sup>30</sup>

6.12: The Tier 4 system has developed a model where students have different immigration rules depending on where they study. With the current immigration rules this means that students studying in further education or in private colleges are at an disadvantage when compared with those at universities even if they study the same course. For example, they are not permitted to work part time during study, they are also required to complete a different English language test and must go home to apply to extend their visa or to apply for work visa after study. These rules represent a deterrent for students choosing to study in FE or in private colleges. The window to find sponsors and suitable employers is too short, there are restrictions on earnings and not all employers have the requisite licenses. NUSUK research has shown that 41% of international students are dissatisfied with the levels of careers support offered to them. Some part time study is permitted provided the HEI offers a full-time course in the same programme. The minimum age for short term students has been reduced to 16 and students on those courses can stay in the UK for up to 30 days. Tier 4 students studying at universities and further education colleges (and private colleges) are still not able to work or bring dependents into the country with the exception of Postgraduate students.

6.13: NUSUK believes that suggestions made by Exporting Education UK (EdExUK) on the use of the Tier 5 visa is worthy of debate. It fulfils the need for students to work following graduation. Several routes within Tier 5 are already designed for graduate internship opportunities; however, when surveyed by NUS over 65% of international students were unaware of any of these offers. The process of applying for one year with the option for renew for another year is a lot easier to grasp. According to EdExUK "The visa would offer solutions to current challenges posed for international students by Tier 2 graduate salary requirements, salary regionalisation and internship programmes that do not offer a salary.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/careers/reality-check-graduate-salary> (Accessed 18 January 2018)

<sup>29</sup> <https://thepinews.com/news/uk-international-students-pessimistic-work-opportunities/> (Accessed 1 February 2018) <sup>37</sup>

NUSUK/The Entrepreneurs Network: "Made in the UK – Unlocking the Door to International Entrepreneurs" (2015)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

6.14: In November 2014, NUS released a report in partnership with The Entrepreneurs Network, which surveyed almost 1600 graduate international students. Forty two percent of respondents said that they would like to start up a business once they graduate but less than a quarter want to start one up in the UK. Impossible visa restrictions were a major deterrent. The report “Made in the UK – Unlocking the Door to International Entrepreneurs” is attached as **supplementary evidence** to this submission<sup>31</sup>. The key recommendations of the report were:

- The UK government should increase opportunities for international graduates who wish to stay in Britain to develop a business during study by removing the Tier 4 ban on selfemployment for those working within an institutional programme (curricular or cocurricular) or another accelerator.
- Increased guidance and support at an institutional and governmental level should be directed toward those studying creative subjects and skilled trades. These are the areas where students encounter the greatest difficulty obtaining a Tier 2 visa due to the close link between their working patterns and self-employment.
- Many students would benefit from more time and experience prior to starting a business. To this end, the UK government should reinstate a post-study work visa, de-coupled from the sponsor system, to allow international students to explore markets and industry before finalising their business idea for the Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) application. This will go a long way to ensuring students’ business ideas meet the requirement of being “credible and innovative”.

6.15: We asked UK students to reflect on current UK immigration policy and sought their views on, different visa requirements, the right to work whilst studying and rights to remain to work after graduating. 83% of students agreed that all international students should have the immigration rights. 75% agreed or strongly agreed that international students have the right to work in the UK after graduation.

6.16: NUSUK research conducted in 2012 found that 62.3% of international students were attracted by the opportunity to gain work experience in the UK, and 71% felt that this improved their job prospects when returning to their home country.

6.17: NUSUK would echo suggestions in the MAC Briefing note on international students relating to developing more robust data, as the UK develops new partnerships after leaving the EU, knowing what international students valued and gained from their time in the UK will be critical in enhancing the overall offer in the future. Maintaining contact with international students who have studied in the UK and investigating their subsequent career paths not only provides vital information it also enables the country develop networks of individuals who, it is hoped, will have received a positive

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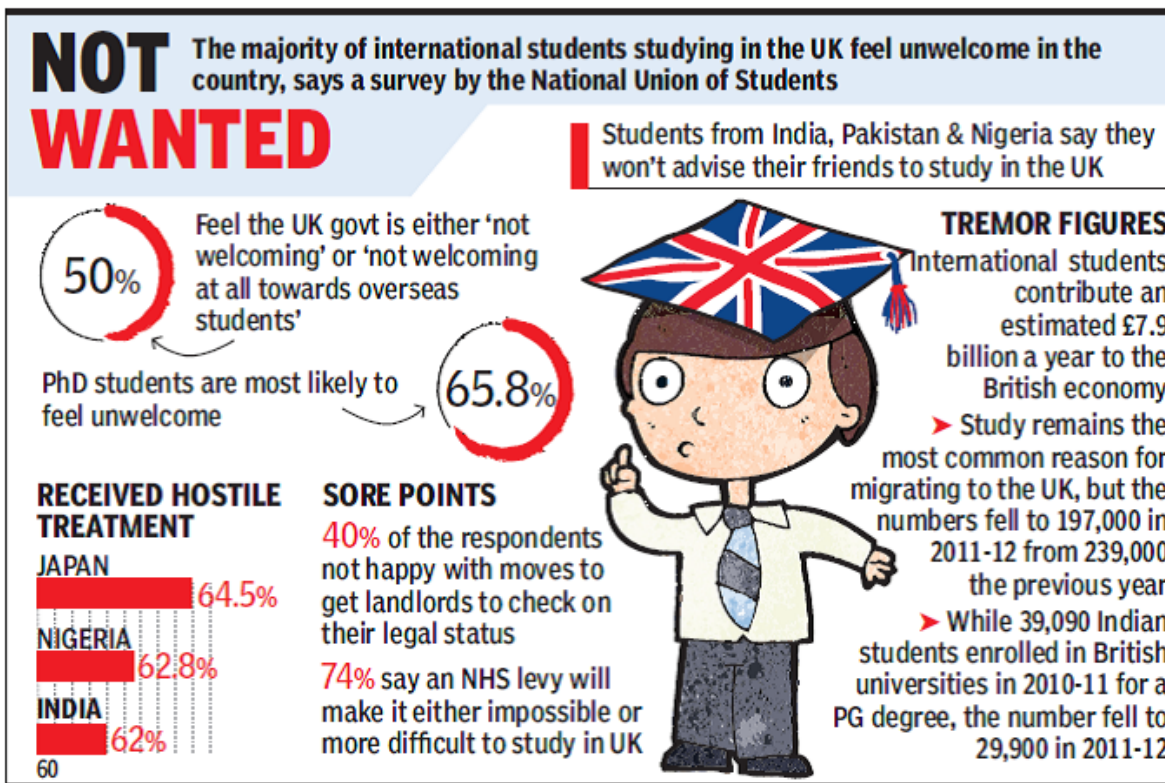
<sup>31</sup> [https://www.nus.org.uk/Global/Made%20in%20UK\\_Final.pdf](https://www.nus.org.uk/Global/Made%20in%20UK_Final.pdf) (Accessed 1 February 2018)

view of the UK and its values. It is these graduates who will be involved in developing new partnerships in the future.





## 7. Conclusions<sup>40</sup>



7.1: The overall approach taken towards immigration will have a major bearing on how the UK is perceived abroad, there is already a narrative that suggests in a post-Brexit environment the UK provides a less welcoming environment for international students studying in the UK. This is why the conclusions of the Migration Advisory Committee and any subsequent legislation are of critical interest to NUSUK, the students' unions we work with and the students we collectively represent.

7.2: In summary we recommend strategies that:

- Create a more welcoming environment that will attract international students to study in the UK
- Develop a simpler visa system that is easy to navigate and does not deter international students
- Remove international students from net migration target, failure to do this can only perpetuate feelings of hostility that international students tell us they feel.

<sup>40</sup> The image at the head of the section is taken from <http://www.jamshedsiddiqui.com/2014/02/> (Accessed 2 February 2018)



- Reinststate the Post Study Work Visa and facilitate the ability to work during and after study as part of an overall package to attract international students to the UK
- Consider how fees might impact on the competitiveness of UK higher education and how the UK can maintain its status as a preferred destination
- Recognise the net financial benefits derived from international students when considering the use of facilities and services such as the NHS.
- Allow international students to change courses and make adjustments to their arrangements in the same way that domestic students can.
- Reclassify refugee and asylum-seeking students as domestic students
- Increase orientation programmes and the range of options to learn English as part of a support package for international students.
- Develop a national strategy that sets increased targets for both inward and outward student mobility.

7.3: In preparing this submission NUSUK has been struck by the level of agreement throughout the sector for developing a more welcoming environment for international students. It is to be hoped that the submissions and vast range of evidence that is being presented to MAC amongst other initiatives will be heeded by decision makers over the next few months. As the UK puts in place the legislative framework that will lead the country out of the EU it is critical that we invest in a higher education and research strategy that values students and academic mobility and maximises the benefits to be derived from international collaboration. It will be the internationally literate students of tomorrow that will build the global partnerships of the future. The country has a choice, we trust, that based on the evidence the right decision will be made.

# Appendix One

## NUS Submission to the Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Inquiry into international STEM students.

### Background

1. The National Union of Students (NUS) is a voluntary membership organisation which makes a real difference to the lives of students and its member Students' Unions. We are a confederation of 600 Students' Unions, amounting to more than 95 per cent of all higher and further education unions in the UK.
2. Through our member Students' Unions, we represent the interests of more than seven million students of which over 500,000 are international students. Our mission is to promote, defend and extend the rights of student and to develop and champion strong students' unions, including those in higher education institutions to ensure learners' interests are represented.

### Executive summary

3. NUS has conducted several and some of the only existing surveys of international student opinion on recent immigration policies. Between 2010 and 2014, NUS and NUS Scotland have conducted six surveys which focus on immigration policies and advice. Despite the limited monitoring of the impacts of immigration policies on international students more widely, NUS will provide evidence where possible from these surveys.
4. International student numbers have already fallen significantly. Since 2011, the number of Tier 4 visas issued has fallen by over 36%. This year HESA reported the first ever decline of international students studying at UK institutions of 1% following a downward trajectory since 2010. When international students from China and Hong Kong are removed from the latest statistics, the actual fall in international student numbers is closer to 4.5%.
5. Current immigration policy has made the UK appear unwelcoming to international students in comparison to other competitor countries. It has had a negative impact on both the international student experience and international student numbers.
6. The current immigration rules and requirements for sponsor compliance has not only been identified by the NAO and HEBRG as expensive and disruptive, but the necessary risk management has been severely detrimental to the international student experience.

### NUS Survey Data

7. In January 2014, NUS surveyed over 2000 international students about their perceptions of the immigration bill. 50% of non-EU students surveyed found the current UK government unwelcoming. 18% would not recommend the UK to a friend or relative, as a place to study.

8. 74% of non-EU students stated that access to free healthcare was important to them and 73% identified the proposed health levy as a detriment to studying in the UK.
9. PhD students in particular were more likely to state that the Immigration Bill would impact them negatively.
10. A NUS survey in 2011 of 3,379 STEM students found that the availability to work or a period after their studies was incredibly important in their decision to study in the UK. 75% would not have chosen to study in the UK if the post-study work visa option was removed.
11. A NUS survey of 198 STEM students on employability in 2012 found that 95.5% of students felt gaining work experience during their studies was important to them. However, only 59.2% felt gaining work experience relevant to their chosen career was easy.
12. Of those surveyed, 45.3% would not recommend the UK to a friend because of the work experience and employment opportunities available.

## Conclusion

13. NUS is concerned that with international student numbers dropping and the prominence of STEM students in those numbers there is a considerable threat to STEM in the UK from this decline.
14. With continued negative proposals including the recent policy proposals within the Immigration Bill, it is difficult to see how the UK can either retain international students effectively or compete for international students with countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States.

## The Impact of Immigration Policies on International Students

15. NUS believes UK immigration policy over recent years has combined perpetual policy changes with inflexible compliance structures to create a confused and complex system for both international students and education institutions. The continuous uncertainty in both Home Office and wider governmental policy has had a significant and negative impact on both the international student experience and perceptions of the UK education sector internationally.
16. Despite indicating in July 2013 that there would be “no future major policy changes” and a “period of stability,” the UK government has introduced yet another set of changes to

immigration policy, many of which will affect international students more so than many other groups (credibility interviews being a prime example).<sup>41</sup>

17. While the UK government's focus since 2010 on short-term political gain from immigration reform created a rapidly changing and confused system, the number of **Tier 4 visas issued between 2010 and 2013 has declined by over 36%**.<sup>42</sup>
18. In January 2014 the first ever decline in international student numbers studying at higher education institutions in the UK was announced. **There was a fall of one per cent, the first of its kind since the records began, which rises to a fall of 4.5% when the contribution of China and Hong Kong are removed from statistics.**<sup>43</sup>
19. NUS is deeply concerned that projections of growth in higher education institutions by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 2009 and in 2013, predicated on substantial increases in student numbers, will now no longer be accurate. Many of these projections were contributions to research, intellectual property, facilities and equipment, which are fundamental to STEM subjects in our institutions.

### International Students in STEM

20. The HESA statistics for 2009/10 suggest that overall, non-EU international students were 10.6% of the STEM student population. By 2011/12 that number was 11.75%.
21. However, this tends to be concentrated at the postgraduate level. Non-EU students are prominent on full-time research degree programmes and even more so on full-time taught higher degree programmes. In 2011/12 non-EU international students made up 43% of the full-time postgraduate research body (HESA 2011/12) and are particularly concentrated in STEM-related disciplines.
22. The impacts of immigration policies specifically on STEM students are difficult to monitor. Organisations such as Universities UK (UUK), the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA), and i-graduate through the International Student Barometer<sup>44</sup> monitor both numbers and international student opinion in different ways. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) gathers data on international students each year, which it shares with institutions, relevant stakeholders and in some cases, publically. The last comprehensive survey of how international students feel about their experience holistically was in 2004 by UKOSA (now UKCISA). This survey, the *Broadening Our Horizons* report,

<sup>41</sup> Final Report: Cost and benefit analysis project on immigration regulation: Higher Education Regulation Group (11 July

<sup>42</sup> ONS.

<sup>43</sup> HESA.

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.i-graduate.org/services/international-student-barometer-and-student-barometer/> (Accessed 25 January 2018)

was undertaken with largely public sector higher education students and has been the only major report to address immigration advice for international students.

23. NUS has undertaken six surveys of international student opinion on the changing elements of immigration policy since 2010. Our most recent survey, which is currently ongoing, reveals international student opinion is not favourable to current immigration policy. For the purposes of this call for evidence we pulled survey data for 2057 responses from EU and Non-EU students. Our survey to date reveals that over 50% of non-EU students surveyed found the current UK government unwelcoming. 18% would not recommend the UK to a friend or relative, as a place to study.
  
24. Immigration and visa issues have considerable impact on an international students' choice of study destination. Research by Hobson's in May 2013 looked at the perceptions of over 70,000 prospective international students. They identified the ease of getting a visa to as a clear influencing factor over the ability to get permanent residency after study. The top three influencing factors for students in selecting their destination country were ease of getting a visa to study, the ability to work during study, and the ability to work in a country post-university. 88% of respondents indicated they may switch destination country if visa regulations are tightened. What the Hobson's research was also able to clearly identify was that "students who choose not to come to the UK did so largely because of their *perceptions* of visa restrictions including post-study work options (24%), ease of obtaining a visa (24%) and ability to work whilst studying."<sup>45</sup>
  
25. NUS surveys asked international students to specify their subject area and as such we are able to provide evidence of their views on specific policies and also on the attractiveness of the UK for STEM respondents. The overall trend from the surveys is that international STEM students are very sensitive to immigration policy changes.
  
26. NUS surveys suggest international students have chosen the UK for the opportunities it provides, and given the significant emotional and financial investment they have made want to feel welcome and respected when they arrive. Changes to immigration policies mid-way through their studies which alter the benefits they believed they were entitled to for choosing the UK, can create a negative view of both their studies and the UK and impact greatly on their student experience.

## Immigration Policy

27. *"I want the best and brightest entrepreneurs, scientists and students from around the world to get the red-carpet treatment."* - David Cameron, Conservative Party Conference, 5 October 2011

<sup>45</sup> Hobsons. (2013) Competing Globally: Understanding the decision-making processes of prospective international students. May 2013

"The aim is to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration," - Theresa May, interview with *The Telegraph*, 25 May 2012

The NUS survey of recent proposals from the immigration bill suggests that unfortunately, these two statements by the same government are incompatible.

28. Reflecting on research from the British Council on the evaluation of the Prime Ministers Initiative, NUS agrees with the Council that the key to attracting and retaining international students is to make them feel welcome, and not simply for their fees. Indeed, we would like to see the UK give "the red-carpet treatment" to quote David Cameron. However, successive inquiries into international student opinion suggest international students do not feel welcome:

- a) 2009/10 - Institute of International Education (IIE) with the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and Education USA indicated "over two-thirds (69%) of respondents worldwide felt that the United States welcomes international students, as compared with 42 per cent for Canada, 34 per cent for Australia, and 33 per cent for the United Kingdom."<sup>46</sup> (9000 responses)
- b) 2013 – UK Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. "many in the international HE sector (in the UK and elsewhere) view these as new 'restrictions' on international study in the UK, including reduced rights to employment in the UK after study.
- c) In a modern inter-connected world where students, prospective students and their influencers are involved in many social networks, perceptions of tighter immigration controls may for some paint a picture of an unwelcoming student destination. Such perceptions have been linked with recent significant declines in student enrolments in the UK from certain source countries."<sup>47</sup>
- d) 2014 - NUS survey of 2057 international students (to date) indicates over 50% of non-EU students surveyed found the current UK government unwelcoming.

29. NUS feels the successive changes to UK immigration policy, those which both directly and indirectly impact international students, have had a predictable negative impact on the international student experience and on international student numbers.

30. The UK government is aware of the negative impact from many of the policies as not only the BIS research above suggests. The National Audit Office found the implementation of the

<sup>46</sup> Institute for International Education, *Project Atlas: Trends and Global Data, 2011*  
[http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/~media/Files/Services/ProjectAtlas/Project-Atlas-Trends-and-Global-Data-2011.ashx](http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/~/media/Files/Services/ProjectAtlas/Project-Atlas-Trends-and-Global-Data-2011.ashx)

<sup>47</sup> BIS RESEARCH PAPER NUMBER 128. *The Wider Benefits of International Higher Education in the UK*.  
SEPTEMBER 2013

Tier 4 Points Based system not value for money, not supporting economic progress and non-compliant in many of their assessments.<sup>32</sup>

## Immigration Rules and Sponsor Compliance

31. Both the National Audit Report and a report by the Higher Education Better Regulation Group in July 2013 identified the continuous policy changes as both disruptive and expensive to students and institutions, as well as making it difficult for sponsors to ensure they are compliant.
32. As of March 2012 141 sponsors have had their license revoked and NUS has been involved in assisting the students in at least three other sponsor revocations. Not only is this resulting in the potential financial and emotional loss for several thousand genuine students, through no fault of their own, but it is creating a culture of fear regarding compliance rules.
33. The nature of compliance actions has been identified as a cause for concern by the National Audit Report, which estimates by March 2012 there were over 5000 students who were unable to find another place to study after their college lost its sponsor license due to the agencies inflexibility and sponsors confusion over what the UKBA at the time required.
34. The result of this confusion and inflexibility has another impact on the international student experience. Risks are being managed in extreme ways with the issue of attendance monitoring becoming a deterrent for students. NUS has received complaints from PhD students who, despite accessing their labs daily with their university IDs, have to travel 25 minutes by bus to another campus to have their passport photocopied by an administrator each week. Other students are asked to take time out from industrial placements to do the same at another institution despite no concerns from the placement of non-attendance. The most disturbing concerns have come from London campuses of two major public institutions where international students have found themselves subject to fingerprinting at each lesson to ensure attendance monitoring was being undertaken. These two campuses are almost exclusively international students and the same practice has not been introduced for any other campus of either of these institutions.
35. NUS expressed concern in 2012 when the UK introduced limitations on the maximum number of years visa holders could study on courses at degree level and above. Regardless of the length of their degree, Tier 4 visa holders were restricted to maximum five years of study with exceptions for some courses and PhD students. This significantly impacted students on courses in Scotland as their undergraduate courses are 4 years long, limiting access to many combined masters and postgraduate study.
36. NUS surveyed students in Scotland ahead of this change (January-March 2012) and received 381 responses, 215 of which were from STEM subjects. While only 15% of the students surveyed would not recommend Scotland as a place to study before the change,

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<sup>32</sup> Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General. *Immigration – The Points Based System – Student Route*. National Audit Office. March 2012.

this rose to 38% after the visa length change was introduced. In addition, the removal of the post-study work visa at the same time made 69% of students less likely to recommend Scotland as a place to study.

## Immigration bill 2013/14

37. NUS's survey of international student perceptions on proposals of the immigration bill, which closed on January 31<sup>st</sup>, shows the new proposals could have a considerable impact on international student numbers and experience. While the received over 3000 responses, 2057 responses were pulled mid-January in response to this call for evidence. This included 1587 non-EU student responses and 470 EU student responses from a wide range of institutions. Of those surveyed:
- a) 64% of non-EU international students said an increase of £150 per year of study to their upfront visa imposed by the proposed NHS levy would make it more difficult for them to study in the UK. 9% said they would not be able to study at all.
  - b) 74% of non-EU international students said free access to healthcare was either very important (44%) or important (30%) to their decision to study in the UK.
  - c) 18% of non-EU international Students would not recommend the UK to a friend or relative as a place to study.
  - d) 25% of non-EU international students and 28% of EU international students felt their international background has had a negative impact on their ability to find quality accommodation while they study.
  - e) 40% of non-EU students and 44% of EU students indicated that a policy which required landlords to check immigration status would negatively impact their choice to study in the UK if it was in place when they were applying to college or university.
38. The immigration bill proposals, according to our survey, would disproportionately impact students studying at the PhD level:
- a) 70% of non-EU PhD students said an increase of £150 per year of study to their upfront visa would make it more difficult for them to study in the UK. 10% would not be able to study at all. 80% of the PhD students in our survey indicated they would be directly impacted by an introduction of such a fee.
  - b) PhD students are one of the only non-EU international students permitted to bring dependents into the country the increase in fees would have a more significant financial impact on these students. 67% of those who brought dependents said an increase of £150



per year of study to their upfront visa would make it more difficult for them to study in the UK. 12% said they would not be able to study if such a fee was introduced.

- c) In addition, 47% of students with dependents indicated that a policy which required landlords to check immigration status would negatively impact their choice to study in the UK if it was in place when they were applying to college or university.

39. NUS is concerned that as international students make up 43% of the full-time postgraduate research body (HESA 2011/12) and are particularly concentrated in STEM-related disciplines, these proposals will have an even more disproportionate impact on STEM PhD students.

### **STEM International Students and Immigration Policies Related to Employment**

40. NUS believes that although the UK has some of the best academic institutions in the world, the incentives the UK offered has deteriorated significantly in recent years. In 2011, the Post-Study Work route was closed. The UK has replaced this with a Tier 2 route which has experienced numerous difficulties and has been found to be both inaccessible and less competitive than the offer provided by competitor countries.<sup>49</sup>

41. In contrast, the United States allows STEM graduates to work for 29 months after their studies and is currently looking at legislation to provide permanent visas. Canada allows students access to work experience of up to a maximum of three years and is looking to promise 10,000 permanent residency visas. Australia and New Zealand have similarly attractive work routes for students after their studies have completed.

42. NUS (2011) surveyed 7,878 international students, of which 2,598 studied STEM subjects and 781 medicine and related subjects, on the closure of the post study work visa. The majority of these students were either Postgraduate Taught or Postgraduate Research student. The results specifically for STEM students were:

- a) STEM students were more likely to find the availability of the post-study work visa as important in their decision to study in the UK. 77% stated it was very important and 16% stated it was fairly important.
- b) This was significantly higher for PGT students. 80% stated it was very important and 15% stated it was fairly important.

<sup>49</sup> A study by the British Council (2012) into the impact of similar policy changes by the US and Australian governments during the previous decade indicated that comparable initiatives resulted in a decline in international student enrolments. In our view, recent visa reforms place the UK in an equally vulnerable position.

- c) 84% of STEM students stated they were planning on using the post-study work option in the UK.
  - d) STEM students were more likely to say that they would not have chosen to study in the UK if the post-study work option was removed. 75% stated they would not. This was again higher for PGT students.
43. NUS (2012) surveyed 1010 students of which 198 studied STEM subjects at Higher Education students. Of these students, STEM students responded with the following to the NUS survey:
- a) 62.3% came to the UK for opportunities to work after their studies. 71.3% to improve their job prospects back home. 75.4% because of the quality of UK education.
  - b) 95.5% felt gaining work experience during their studies was important to them. However only 59.2% felt that gaining work experience relevant to their chosen career was easy to achieve.
  - c) Only 20.7% of students felt that they were very confident that they would be able to find employment in the UK after completion of their studies. 50.7% were a little confident and 28.6% were not at all confident.
  - d) However, 33.9% expected their starting salary to be less than £20,000 which is the current Tier 2 threshold.
  - e) 88.8% felt that STEM graduates should be able to seek work in the UK after a period of time without having to find immediate employment.
  - f) 74.1% felt that they should be able to find employment without having any salary threshold imposed.
  - g) 45.3% would not recommend the UK to a friend because of the work experience and employment opportunities available.
44. Loughborough University (2013) surveyed 585 international students between October 2011 and 2012 with a good sample of STEM students. It found that overall:
- a) Almost 50% felt post study work opportunities were either the most important or important to their decision to study in the UK.
  - b) 55% did not feel the visa application represented good value for money.

- c) 40% said the difficulty they experienced getting a visa to remain in the UK made either an extremely important or an important impact on their reason for leaving.
- d) While 70% would recommend the UK to study, only 33% would recommend it for skilled work and only 11% would recommend it for a business start-up.
45. The report recommended modifying the rhetoric on immigration as survey respondents were well aware of the opportunities available in countries such as the US, Canada and Australia.
46. Many students NUS surveyed in 2012 left comments and case studies that we can share with the committee. Below are a few we feel would provide a greater insight into the impact of immigration policy on international STEM students:
- a) "Students pursue international studies in the hope of getting a quality education, improving job prospects, and in the process make some money. It's a two way process as the international students contribute high economic benefits to UK in the form of taxes and the huge amounts of tuition fees and moreover they also form a reasonable chunk of labour force in UK. With many other countries, such as Germany, offering great work options I would definitely not recommend UK to any my friends as a study destination" 23, *South Asia, Biological Sciences*
- b) "I'm just disappointed with the removal of post study visa. I'm finishing my studies this May 2012 and they closed it on April 2012. I had I hopes and dreams and now, it is just things that won't happen. I stayed here legally and obeyed all the rules. When I applied for placement, I noticed that even though, I was more qualified than the rest of the candidates, they still chose UK citizens. There was even one company that sent me an email that, they will choose UK citizens first before considering my application, not taking into account my qualifications. I'm afraid of what will happen to me after graduation because I don't know how to pay back my sister for the money she lent me for my tuition and going back to my home country and working there will take the rest of my life paying for what I owe." 28, *South East Asia, Mathematics*
- c) "I am of the view that international students should be given the opportunity to gain some experience in the UK after their studies especially those in very technical fields unlikely to obtain that experience in their home countries as graduates. Employers all over the world want to hire people with experience, therefore to find employment in the country where you obtained your certificate to acquire the requisite training and experience will better enhance your prospects back home. Therefore, to curtail this opportunity is a great disincentive not only to prospective students but also to the UK educational institutions that are competing with those in other countries. The idea of giving permit on the basis of salary is quite difficult to comprehend since not all graduates will be fortunate to secure high earning employment. They may earn well below the stated level but nonetheless, gain the experience they desperately need to return to their countries and be competitive in the job market." 28, *Africa, Engineering*

47. NUS believes that STEM graduates are finding it difficult to employment in the UK for a variety of reasons. The key reasons identified by the qualitative evidence in the surveys we have conducted are threefold. First, the short time period students are given to identify a job and a sponsor. Second, the fact that most of the employers they encounter do not have Tier 2 licenses and therefore cannot sponsor them (including large companies). Third, the restrictions which link Tier 2 limits to specific salary limits such as £20,000. Students in rural regions and some urban regions outside of London found the salary limitations particularly difficult. Many wanted to stay and work in the area they studied and found finding a job over the salary limit, with a company which held a tier 4 license “impossible.”

### **Do International Students have enough support and guidance on Immigration Rules?**

48. As identified by the National Audit Office and the Higher Education Better Regulation Group, the changing immigration policy and associated guidance has created confusion for higher education institutions, and a lack of efficiency for the Home Office.

49. Prior to the introduction of Tier 4, most non-EU international students had indicated they had received pre-departure information about immigration, within only 7% saying they had not received any at all.<sup>33</sup> In an NUS Scotland survey of non-EU students studying in Scotland in 2012, only 56.3% of international students said they had information on visas and immigration before coming to Scotland and 33% wanted immigration and visa advice. 20% of students surveyed by NUS Scotland wanted more support with visa and immigration queries.

50. While NUS believes prospective international students need more clarity on immigration rules, and support to access the visa system at various points before and during their study in the UK, we understand the difficult position of many institutions. Guidance for sponsors and students for several years was changing on a weekly or monthly basis. Since the significant changes in 2012 these changes became less frequent.

51. Since the dismantling of the UKBA and the introduction of the UKVI, sponsors and NUS have had better access to civil servants dealing with the confusion of guidance available but information is still not clear enough on several areas.

52. Student Union advice centres are still unsure about volunteering guidance for international students and many HE institutions have expressed concern about their confidence to give accurate information on working rights and transitioning to a Tier 2 visa. Until there is improved clarity and consistency in the immigration rules, it will be difficult for any institution to provide accurate and helpful support to students.

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<sup>33</sup> UKCISA, 2004

## International Students are confused due to the changing reputation of the UK – The Unintended Communication

53. Concerns have been expressed at a variety of forums within government that recent visa changes such as re re-introduction of credibility interviews, have placed the UK in a further vulnerable position in global competition for international students.<sup>51</sup>
54. NUS interprets these concerns over changes such as the post study work route, reduced entitlement of international students to work in the UK and proposals for NHS charges as a further confusion for prospective and current international students. We have already seen private health insurance companies advertising that “soon” international students will be required to have private health insurance, when that was only an option expressed in the consultation process.
55. Similar policy changes by the US and Australian governments in the past 10 years resulted in a decline in international student enrolments. As the Hobson’s research suggests, perception is key for international students, and concerns for student numbers should raise concerns for the information international students are receiving and its impact on their understanding of immigration rules and guidance.

## Conclusions

56. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) suggested the sector is projecting an average real terms increase in non-EU fee income of 24.5% between 2011–12 and 2014–15.<sup>38</sup> With numbers clearly decreasing, these projections will have to be reconsidered.
57. NUS is concerned that with the international student numbers dropping and the prominence of STEM students in those numbers there is a considerable threat to STEM in the UK from this decline. 24% of all student studying engineering and technology are non-EU international students, a further 8% are European Union students, who will be impacted by proposals such as landlords checking immigration status. It is clear that international students are vital for keeping certain university courses running, especially STEM subjects.
58. With Australia, Canada and the US looking like popular choices with excellent reputations, and are taking the initiative to do the opposite of many UK immigration policies and such a significant number of international students suggesting they will switch university if visa regulations are tightened, NUS is greatly concerned for the future of international students in the UK.

<sup>51</sup> APPG Migration, 2012; ONS 2012



## Appendix Two

### “Better Together for a Better World – Policies to Promote Internationalisation in Finnish Higher Education and Research 2017 – 2025”

**Goal One:** Greater international attraction through focusing on the latest science and leading-edge research.

**Action:** We will highlight and strengthen the best in Finnish science.

**Goal Two:** Finland is the home of high quality education

**Action:** We will strengthen the quality and pioneering role of Finnish higher education in learning environments for research, development and innovation activities and in the development of work centered on working life, as part of internationally attractive knowledge eco-systems.

**Goal Three:** Momentum for the export of Finnish competence

**Action:** We will enhance the visibility of Finnish higher education and education services through the use of joint marketing. We will create a new business-based operating model to attract private investment for education export projects and for product development in the sector. This will enhance the visibility of and demand for Finnish higher education and education services globally.

**Goal Four:** A warm welcome to Finland.

**Action:** To facilitate arrival in Finland, we will simplify the processes connected with studying and working. We will issue a service promise: in Finland services will also be available in English.

**Goal Five:** The Finnish message is heard internationally

**Action:** We will initiate a broad national debate on promoting internationalisation in Finnish higher education and research.

**Goal Six:** Bridgeheads in the World

**Action:** We will set up a team Finland Knowledge network to represent Finnish higher education and research in selected countries.

**Goal Seven:** Greater involvement of Finnish experts living abroad and alumni educated in Finland.

**Action:** We will invite Finnish expats with higher education degrees and alumni educated in Finland to out networks.

## Appendix Three

### International Students' contribution to the Economy (a report from the Danish Student Federation – DSF)

Recently, decision makers and other stakeholders are increasingly arguing for limiting the access of international students to the Danish education system. Some of them claim that this is to save the money for upholding a high quality of the education for Danish citizens. This is a paradox. We know from experience that international students benefit our education quality and give Danish students a valuable added perspective. As a students' union, we have always placed a higher value in these aspects of internationalisation than in the "return of investment" of education, because education means so much more to society than simply the money the state will make from having highly skilled workers. However, when examining the impact of international students on the economy, it becomes evident that even when focusing only on the economic cost-benefit of international students, they are a good investment for society. An investment that pays back surprisingly quickly.

An average international student in Denmark has a positive contribution to the Danish economy of more than 100.000 Euros seen over a period from their arrival to Denmark to 8 years after graduation<sup>52</sup>. Approximately 40.000 Euros out of that is the surplus for the state, meaning taxes minus the money the state has spent on them to cover education, grants, and health care. Bear in mind that Denmark is a country with a relatively high public investment in international students, especially students from within the EU. Education is free for EU citizens. Grants of approximately 670 Euros a month are available to EU citizens who have a part time job of minimum 40 hours a month because this gives them the status of mobile workers with the right to equal benefits as Danes. Health care is almost universally free. Free language courses are provided to all international students who wish to learn basic Danish.

The high average contribution of international students to the Danish economy comes primarily from the fact that a certain percentage of the graduates stay and work in Denmark, meaning that they not only cover the cost of those who leave but make a significant surplus. This is remarkable, considering that only 60 % of international graduates are still in Denmark one year after graduation and only 30 % are still here after

<sup>52</sup> Damvad Analytics 2017  
<https://www.altinget.dk/misc/Samfundsokonomisk%20regnskab%20for%20%20internationale%20dimittender.pdf> (Accessed 2 February 2018)

The positive impact of international graduates on the economy means: If we improved our ability to convince graduates to stay in Denmark after graduation, *we could actually make money from this*. And this is without even taking into account any of the benefits to education quality and intercultural understanding. Something that is hard to put an exact price on, but a valuable asset to give Danish graduates both in terms of “soft” values and the money society can make from graduates improving their ability of cooperating internationally.

In December 2017, the Danish Economic Councils stated in a newspaper that based on their calculations we urgently need more international workers to maintain economic growths<sup>34</sup>. They even suggested cutting taxes for international workers to be more attractive. They used the argument, that convincing people to come and work gives a large surplus to the state because these workers have not used state money for their primary education and the first many years of health care.

The number of graduates who stay in Denmark, and the employment rates, varies between types of education. But all study lines have a positive average contribution<sup>35</sup>. So even if we may currently especially be able to make money from attracting engineers, attracting people from all other study lines also pays off. What makes international graduates stay? The ministry for higher education<sup>36</sup> has studied this and found among others the following factors to make graduates statistically more likely to stay: A Danish romantic partner, having their primary social network in Denmark, having their professional network in Denmark, and having had a student job. This speaks in favour of focusing on better integration of international students, socially as well as in the academic and professional networks. This also means that increased efforts for integration of international students is not only something students will benefit from because it helps us academically and socially. It is something that will benefit all of society in very concrete economical terms. Other initiatives worth considering are removing barriers for international graduates in the labour market, where we see issues of language barriers, conservatism of employers, and the lack of introduction of graduates to the Danish labour market model. Furthermore, we have seen examples of some migration laws causing inexpedient situations such as recent graduates losing their permission to stay in Denmark due to not finding a job quickly enough. The laws are currently not designed to take into account the fact that workers in highly specialised fields are likely to take some time finding the right job even during times of high employment rates.

Are international students only a benefit to the economy in a specific Danish context? No. The same conclusion is made when analysing the impact of international students in a country with a very different labour market and education system, the United Kingdom. Here, studies also show international students as positive contributors to the economy, even when taking into account the expenses for education and various state services. The latest study on this, which also breaks the numbers down by constituencies, can be found here:

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<sup>34</sup> Børsen 2017 <http://borsen.dk/nyheder/avisen/artikel/11/187827/artikel.html> (Accessed 2 February 2018)

<sup>35</sup> Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Research 2015 [https://ufm.dk/publikationer/2015/filer/internationale-studerende\\_mlogo.pdf](https://ufm.dk/publikationer/2015/filer/internationale-studerende_mlogo.pdf) (Accessed 2 February 2018)

<sup>36</sup> Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Research 2015 [https://ufm.dk/publikationer/2015/filer/internationale-studerende\\_mlogo.pdf](https://ufm.dk/publikationer/2015/filer/internationale-studerende_mlogo.pdf) (Accessed 2 February 2018)

<http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/01/11/costsbenefits-international-students-including-parliamentary-constituency/>

And an article about it in University World News can be found here:

<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20180113044047720>

For more information, or for assistance with providing more detailed numbers, feel free to contact the National Union of Students in Denmark, DSF.

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