

APPG for International Students Inquiry: A sustainable future for international students in the UK

International pupils in ISC schools

According to the 2018 ISC Census¹, approximately 10% (53,678) of the pupils in ISC schools are non-British and of the 1,326 schools that completed the last Census, 670 are registered as Tier 4 Sponsors with the Home Office.

Given the importance of international pupils to the sector, ISC welcomes this inquiry and the opportunity to provide evidence to the APPG. We have endeavoured to set out our evidence under the headings provided by the inquiry and appended ISC's response to the Migration Advisory Committee's call for evidence on '*International students: economic and social impacts*' for information.

The educational opportunities and challenges of welcoming international pupils into schools classrooms

Impact on all students' cultural understanding

It is extremely valuable for British pupils to be provided with the opportunity to understand different cultures. Pupils mixing with those from other countries develop an appreciation of different cultures which can in turn bring a new-found appreciation of fundamental British values such as mutual respect and tolerance. Learning and socialising with international pupils can embed greater cultural sensitivity and exposes pupils of all ages to music, art and the heritage of other nations. Such integration (especially at a young age) also prepares British pupils for life in a pluralistic and interconnected global economy. Interestingly, many overseas parents choose UK schools due to the music, art, drama and sports provision.

There can be challenges in balancing proportions and the number of overseas pupils of any particular culture/language in any one school and the range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Schools might also need to be mindful of cultural sensitivities between certain nationalities, which can on very rare occasions cause tensions. However, the vast majority of schools overcome these challenges with ease and integrate international pupils successfully into the school.

Global perspectives

Learning and socialising with international pupils provides British pupils with a wider global perspective adding unique value to their education. An international mix of pupils bring a wide range of educational, social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds and perspectives together and enriches experiences generally in a school. It is essential that children appreciate diversity and difference from a young age. This can be especially important in areas across the UK where there is less diversity and/or exposure to different backgrounds and ethnic groups. This will likely be even more important post-Brexit as European diversity is likely to reduce. Without international pupils there is the risk of schools (and wider society) becoming insular and British pupils will become less well-equipped to operate effectively in the modern world.

¹ <https://www.isc.co.uk/research/annual-census/isc-annual-census-2018/>

These global perspectives work both ways. Pupils studying at independent schools in the UK provide a great deal of soft power benefit when they return to their home countries. More detail on these benefits can be found in ISC's response to the MAC call for evidence (appended).

Impact on breadth of courses

Some schools report that additional international pupils allow them to offer more courses, for example: Maths, Further Maths and Physics A levels as well as IB equivalents, which might not otherwise be accessible to British pupils (as a result of reduced overall demand so that classes/subjects are not viable). Furthermore, hard-working international pupils can have a positive impact on all pupils' overall academic attainment by promoting good attitudes and aspiration across the cohort.

Impact and cost of immigration compliance

The increasing cost of immigration compliance can be prohibitive for many schools. A high number of schools have had to recruit staff just to deal with compliance. Some schools have been put off sponsoring international pupils altogether due to the cost of the compliance burden, particularly when they are sponsoring one or two pupils a year. There are specific policy restrictions that are not fit for purpose where they concern children under the age of 18. For example, pupils are restricted from switching courses in country; so if a pupil came to the UK and was unhappy with their course or institution, they would be required to return home to apply for a new visa.

There is a risk that fewer EEA nationals will come to study in the UK post-Brexit; ISC has seen a reduction of enquiries from EEA nationals on our website's school search facility since the National Referendum on EU membership. The last ISC Census reported that over 30% of non-British pupils come from EEA countries. If EEA nationals are likely to be incorporated into the Tier 4 Points Based System (PBS), then the compliance cost and burden might impact schools that are not currently Tier 4 sponsors. It is however possible that in light of Brexit, the opportunity can be taken to review the PBS and new routes created for different parts of the sector. ISC has lobbied for a long time for a schools route given the stark differences in processes for schools. For example, attendance monitoring is simply not a relevant issue for schools as they are required to take at least two attendance registers per school day; children will not be working or seeking working rights in the UK; and schools are heavily regulated and inspected more regularly than other educational institutions.

Opportunities and challenges of integrating international students and their dependants into local communities

Impact on school education

Those independent schools that rely on fee income from international pupils face the real threat of closure or a reduction in provision if they are to rely solely on British pupils. This would likely result in greater uptake of state school places and consequently an increase in cost for the public purse.

Even if closures could be avoided, schools may have to consider reducing the amount spent on bursaries for British pupils, again adversely impacting the number of pupils in the state sector and therefore raising costs, putting additional pressure on state-maintained education at a time when the education system is already stretched. Most independent schools rely solely on fee income to fund bursaries and boarding, which tends to bring in higher fees, is particularly popular with international pupils (approximately one third of pupils in boarding schools are international pupils).

Transport and housing

Pupils at ISC schools are generally 18 and under so do not place demands on housing as they will either be boarding or living with parents or a guardian (46.9% of these pupils have parents residing in the UK and 53.1% have parents residing overseas). The pupils whose parents reside in the UK will also contribute to the UK economy through their tax contributions, living expenditure and consumer spending.

Facilitating cultural diversity and international dialogue in the local community; and co-production of social initiatives between community and education institutions

A large number of boarding schools with international pupils are outside London and the South East, predominantly in rural areas. Pupils attending these schools, and families visiting the area, bring diversity to areas which may not experience it otherwise. Furthermore, many of these schools are the only or main employer in the area and international pupils not only spend a significant amount of money in shops and on transport, but also generate income for local tourism from visiting families.

According to ISC's 2018 Census, 86% of ISC schools are engaged in some type of public benefit activity or partnerships with state schools, providing a wider group of children with opportunities to mix with international pupils. Beyond partnerships with state schools, between £12m and £16m was raised for charities at ISC schools last year and 860 ISC schools organised volunteering opportunities for their staff and/or pupils. International pupils are part of this voluntary/fundraising activity, developing relationships with local communities. Engaging with local communities helps schools to counter cultural stereotyping. Furthermore, those international pupils who have parents living abroad have increased the demand for homestay placements, providing extra income and cultural integration for British families during school breaks.

About the Independent Schools Council

The Independent Schools Council is a non-profit organisation that represents 1,334 schools in the independent education sector, educating over 500,000 children. Around half of UK independent schools are ISC schools, educating around 80% of all independent school children. ISC schools save the taxpayer £3 billion a year from pupils not being in state education and contribute £9.5 billion to overall UK GDP².

The ISC's seven constituent associations are: Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools (AGBIS), Girls' Schools Association (GSA), Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC), Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS), Independent Schools Association (ISA), Independent Schools' Bursars Association (ISBA), The Society of Heads.

The ISC's four affiliated associations are: Boarding Schools Association (BSA), Council of British International Schools (COBIS), Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), Welsh Independent Schools Council (WISC).

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² https://www.isc.co.uk/media/2588/2014_economicimpact_report_isc.pdf (due to be updated this Autumn)