

A sustainable future for international students in the UK?

**NUS Response to the APPG
on International Students Inquiry**

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1. Introduction

1.1 This document forms the response of the National Union of Students to the Inquiry issued by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on International Students. The APPG asks the question – is there a sustainable future for international students in the UK, and if so, what does this look like? According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the number of international students in the UK for the year 2016/17 is 442,375.¹ However, when considering the impact of Brexit, the current immigration environment, and more attractive post-study work visa options emerging across the world, the inquiry is right to question the sustainability of international students in the UK.

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 a committee elected by and from 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.

1.2 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.

1.3 The APPG comes at an important point in the current policy thinking around international students. The results of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) are yet to be published, and the immigration bill, initially scheduled to be released earlier this year, is expected in the Autumn/Winter period. Therefore, it is an important time to be reflecting on the future of international students – and how they will be treated in future legislation.

1.4 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.

¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/11-01-2018/sfr247-higher-education-student-statistics/location>

1.4 The committee has divided the evidence into four distinct areas:

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- In the Classroom
- In our Communities
- For our Regions and Nations
- For research, Trade and Soft Power

As a result, we have focused our response in these four distinct areas.

1.5 As stated in our response to the [MAC commission](#), NUSUK has developed a series of suggestions for those influencing policy around international students, which is based on debate, discussion and feedback we have received directly from international students.

These are:

- International students should not form part of the calculation of net migration targets. 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. Australia has already implemented the kinds of measures we would like to see for international students in this regard, such as a 2-4 years post study work visa. As a result their rate of growth over the past three years stands at 18%, compared to the UK at 0.7%.²
- 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 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. The recent Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) report on the costs and benefits of international students demonstrates that the net impact of hosting international students

² Universities UK International 'Five Little Known Facts About International Student Mobility (2018)

is £22.6 Billion.³ Consequently, this more than covers the costs.

- **Refugee and Asylum Seeking students** who have been displaced by conflict and/or 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 – or, at the very least, ambiguous at a point where other countries are developing clear narratives around welcoming international students to their universities.

NUSUKs vision for international students

1.6 NUSUK has developed a vision for international students after consultation with international students:

Application

- Accessible information on the variety of education available in the UK.
- A controlled but fair visa system, where international students are not in the migration targets.

Arrival

- International students are greeted in the UK by friendly and welcoming people, and enjoy a full orientation programme which involves their whole region of study.
- They do not have to register with the police.

Study

- International students do not have a limited working allowance, so they are able to work while they study.
- They are able to change course without returning to their home country.
- They do not have to pay an expensive health surcharge.
- They are able to volunteer, enjoy a rich social life, and live without racially-motivated or xenophobic harassment.

Graduation

³ <https://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/>

- International students are able to access a post study work visa where they are able to find a job in the country they have fallen in love with should they wish to stay.
- They enjoy a rich international student alumni community regardless of the country they are from.

1.7 NUS welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the APPG for International Students Inquiry and would be pleased to provide further evidence in any way the Committee may see fit.

2. In The Classroom

What are the educational opportunities and challenges of welcoming international students into our schools, colleges and universities?

Opportunities

2.1 International students already play a significant role in the learning environment of university campuses, and provide UK students with opportunities to interact with different people, understand new ways of living, and to develop intercultural skills both for themselves and the workplace. 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.

2.2 As part of NUS research into student perceptions of international students⁴, we looked at 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. This is particularly the case for those studying STEM subjects, as they are significantly more likely than those studying other subjects to have the opportunity to study and socialise with international students. Undergraduates will study and socialise with international students at sports clubs and societies, in halls of residences and on campus. Whereas postgraduate students mainly study and socialise with international students off campus.

2.4 There are also the significant financial opportunities for institutions and the local economy. According to HEPI, the total benefit to the UK economy associated with a typical EU-domiciled student was approximately £87,000, with the comparable estimate for non-EU-domiciled students standing at approximately £102,000.⁵ However, international student numbers are declining. For the first time in 30 years overall International student numbers have been falling at a time when the international education market is experiencing growth of around 8% per annum. 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 £9bn because of declining numbers of international students, with approaches to the UK student visa system being identified as a key barrier.⁶

Challenges

2.5 Although there aren't many challenges to welcoming international students to the UK, there are challenges to them reducing their numbers, and challenges associated with their experiences in the UK.

2.6 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 studying at their institution or if their numbers were to be significantly reduced.

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

2.8 A significant barrier for international students is the ability to change courses, as they are often required to apply for a new visa if the course is completely different from the old course, or longer than the original course. This could mean returning to their

⁴ NUSUK “Student perspectives on international students” (2017)

⁵ <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Economic-benefits-of-international-students-by-constituency-Final-11-01-2018.pdf>

⁶ Exporting Education UK ‘Supporting International Education in the UK’ (2016)

home country, and re-applying for a visa.⁷ The student is likely to incur a number of costs as a result of this, and may not wish to return to their home country in this time. 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.

2.9 Another challenge is also the language barrier. In a report about the International Student Experience at the University of Stirling, students reported that they struggled even if they felt confident in their ability to speak and understand English. A student stated that, *'It's like, whenever, you can have excellent English skills, according to your school, and then you arrive and you are just like nope!'* Another student supported the idea that the language barrier could be an initial challenge for international students by explaining that, *'It's kind of the little things, and, like for me, the language was kind of hard for me in the start. Like, even though most lecturers are talking plain, simple English, the accent, there are still words that you don't quite understand.'*⁸

2.9 Potential challenges to welcoming international students to the UK are the methods by which they are welcomed by both the institution and their fellow students. 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.⁹

2.10 Furthermore, in 2013 NUSUK researched perceptions amongst international students of how welcomed they were by the UK Government. 50.7% of non-EU students surveyed think that the UK Government is either not welcoming or not at all welcoming towards international students. This was higher for students from Turkey (61.3%), Japan (64.5%), Nigeria (62.8%), India (62%), Pakistan (56.1%), for PhD students (65.8%) and for those with dependents (57.5%).¹⁰

2.11 This feeling has been further compounded by the effects of Brexit. 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. The research by Stirling Students' Union showed that international students felt less welcome in the UK as a whole. One student said *"It's [perception of the UK] definitely changed towards, like, a negative rather than a positive because we don't feel as welcome as we did probably like two years ago."* Another student said that, *"I feel more scared in general now, like, I feel like, yeah, I think I would be anxious maybe down in England."*¹¹

2.12 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 and 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. In a post – Brexit environment it is vital that the UK

⁷ <https://warwick.ac.uk/study/international/immigration/tier4/changes/coursechange/>

⁸ UKCISA and USSU The Impact of Brexit on the International Student Experience at Stirling (2018)

⁹ <https://www.youthsight.com/foreign-students-feel-isolated-and-unwelcome> (Accessed 17 December 2017)

¹⁰ NUS 'Survey of International Student's Perceptions towards the Immigration Bill' (2013)

¹¹ UKCISA and USSU The Impact of Brexit on the International Student Experience at Stirling (2018)

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.

2.13 Another challenge for the UK in welcoming international students to the UK is ensuring that there is a wider range of countries of origin. Research by Centre of Population Change (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council) shows that there is currently a concern from stakeholders about the narrowness of the recruiting base and the dependence of the UK on good relationships with a few major sending countries.¹² Additionally, international students who have come to the UK wishing to have global experience whilst studying may feel disappointed if they find a significant number of people from their own countries.

2.14 Another challenge for international students is housing. Finding a house as an international student can be stressful. If there isn't guaranteed accommodation on site, students will have to find a new home – often without a U.K. guarantor. This can leave international students with the option of either finding a UK guarantor, or paying large sums of money upfront, often this can be around six months to a year's worth of rent. This is likely to be very difficult for most international students, particularly given the already high cost of a UK education and visa constraints on working hours. Paying up front can also have an impact on their ability to negotiate later on. Some HE providers will act as guarantors for international students, but this is far from the case in all institutions.¹³

2.15 Furthermore, 'hostile environment' policy requires landlords to carry out 'right to rent' checks on international students at the beginning of their tenancy to ensure that they are able to rent a property.¹⁴ This may make them more reluctant to rent to international students.

2.16 NUSUK would advocate for all higher education providers to act as guarantors for international students.

2.17 A major barrier to international students and their families coming to the UK is the NHS health surcharge. Currently, students from outside of Europe, who stay longer than six months, are expected to pay a charge of £150 per annum.¹⁵ This is expected to double to £300.¹⁶ Given the aforementioned economic benefits international students bring to the UK, NUSUK believe that the surcharge should be scrapped – and international students should enjoy free healthcare.

2.18 Finally, it is important to mention the challenges faced by thousands of students who were affected by the TOEIC English language scandal. In 2014, widespread cheating was exposed in "TOEIC" exams via the use of "fake sitters". The TOEIC exam was a Secure English Language Test provided by ETS (a Home Office contractor). Subsequently, ETS informed the Home Office that approximately 56,000 people cheated or may have cheated. The Home Office acted against 35,870 students – many of whom are likely innocent.¹⁷ NUSUK calls for an independent investigation into the scandal and that individuals seeking to prove their innocence be granted access to Legal Aid or a special legal assistance scheme for immigration advice and representation in the Immigration Tribunal for successful students. In the long term, we also ask that that in-country appeals are reinstated for international students, and that international students have access to a protection scheme where their Tier 4 sponsor loses its licence.

¹² CPC 'An audit of international student mobility to the UK' (2017)

¹³ NUSUK 'Housing How To: International Students and Housing' (2014)

¹⁴ <https://www.unipol.org.uk/advice/students/know-your-rights/right-to-rent-a-guide-for-students>

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-introduces-health-surcharge>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/health-charge-for-temporary-migrants-will-increase-to-400-a-year>

¹⁷ NUSUK 'The TOEIC scandal: an ongoing injustice' (2018)

3. In Our Communities

What are the challenges and opportunities of integrating international students and their dependants into local communities? Do international students differ from other migrant or visitor communities in this regard?

3.1 Last year, UUK and ComRes jointly released the results of a poll of the British public which demonstrated that:

- Only 26% of the British public think of international students as immigrants when thinking about Government immigration policy.
- Two thirds (64%) of British adults think international students have a positive impact on the local economies of the towns and cities in which they study.
- Three quarters (75%) of the British public also believe that international students should be allowed to work in the UK for a fixed time after they have graduated, rather than returning immediately to their home country after completing their studies.¹⁸

3.2 NUS has asked students' unions for data on how international students participate in their unions. We are still awaiting further information and could provide additional material in due course at the APPGs request. We have good reason to believe that these examples are representative and can be said to be typical across most Higher Education providers in the UK.

Some of the highlights include:

- 45% of students who participate in Green Impact are international students, which is enormously significant.
- At WarwickSU, 37.5% of international students are involved in at least one society.
- 23% of the student populace in Stirling is international and EU. In their impact report to May 2018 for clubs and societies, there were 1556 members with 37% international students. For Sport there were 1857 memberships with 23% international. 80% of the students who volunteer in the environmental society 80% are international and EU, the split being 60 % EU and 20% international.
- 40% of the students at the University of Manchester are international students. Of those, 33% participate in at least one activity across the different activities (societies, volunteering, elections, student reps). International students participated in their resident societies, and EU students volunteer as course representatives and on executive positions for societies/volunteering groups. Whilst international students benefit from general representation across the institution on a range of committees and working groups, Manchester Students' Union have also established specific structures for international students. They annually elect an International Students Officer (who completes this role in conjunction with their studies). The overall democratic participation of international students at Manchester Students' Union is 31%.

3.3 One of the barriers international students faced when volunteering at Manchester Students' Union was DBS checks. This meant they could not work with children or vulnerable adults. Many volunteer on homeless projects, subject specific volunteering and fundraising.

3.4 Another barrier for participating in community life were work restrictions associated with the Tier Four visa. Manchester SU cited this as a reason for not employing many international students at their union. Other students cited the ability not to be able to make money whilst studying a major reason why they would not choose to study in the UK. Without the ability to make money, students are reliant on bursaries, scholarships, or pre-existing savings. This could prevent them from participating in the social and cultural enrichments the UK has to offer – which may have been a significant reason for them choosing to study in the UK.

¹⁸ <http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Universities-UK-Public-Perceptions-of-International-Students-Survey-Data-Tables.pdf>

4. For Our Regions and Nations

According to a recent report by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) there are over three times as many higher education international students London and the South East than any other region of the UK. Is this regional tilt similar for international students in other levels of education and if so, what would be the challenges and opportunities of achieving a greater balance of international students in regions across the UK?

What are the costs and benefits of international students participating in the regional and national labour market and how could we ensure they have a sustainable role in supporting and building local or skilled industry post-study?

4.1 In recent research, NUSUKs analysis of the data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) since 2010 shows that many universities have already seen a reduction of 40% or more international students. This is most pronounced in some of the regions in England where students are most concerned about drops in international student numbers with one exception – London. The largest rises in student numbers have been seen in universities based in London and the South East, while the largest drops can be seen across the Midlands, Yorkshire and in the North East.

University	2010/11 FT & PT non EU	2015/16 FT & PT non EU	% change
University of Hull	2925	1755	-40%
Teesside University	2195	765	-65%
University of Bradford	1980	1090	-45%
University of Wolverhampton	1910	1205	-37%
Staffordshire University	1335	640	-52%
Derby	1090	610	-44%
Bedfordshire	5255	1805	-66%
Oxford University	4500	5385	+20%
Imperial	3915	5755	+47%
UCL	6250	10,790	+73%
University of Sussex	1855	3885	+109%
Kings College London	3855	5340	+39%

4.2 This table shows the percentage change in international students from different universities. This has also had a significant economic impact on those institutions, and the local area.

University	% change	Economic impact ¹⁹
University of Hull	-40%	- £24,570,000
Teesside University	-65%	- £30,030,000
University of Bradford	-45%	- £18,690,000
University of Wolverhampton	-37%	- £14,805,000
Staffordshire University	-52%	- £14,595,000
Derby	-44%	- £10,080,000
Bedfordshire	-66%	- £72,450,000

4.4 In order to prevent negative regional impact, institutions should consider thinking regionally and collaboratively.

Civic Welcomes and Working Groups

4.5 For prospective international applicants, the cost of living, safety, getting a job, and whether they will be made to feel welcome are in the top six motivations for picking a place to study.²⁰ NUSUK believe that if institutions collaborate on a regional level not only with other HE Providers but also with local business, community groups, charities and other interest groups (such as groups which may help students to feel safe in their community) to create a civic welcome for international students when they first arrive, that this may mitigate feelings of isolation and unwelcome in their local area.

4.6 While some places are already providing this as a one off event, such as York²¹, NUSUK believe that this is most effective when regions are working together to create tools for international students.

4.7 Two excellent examples of institutions working regionally to attract international students are Bournemouth and the Northern Consortium UK.

4.8 The Bournemouth International Education Forum is a partnership between the public and private sectors. It is made up of local education providers with strong and proven track records in their individual fields. The Boroughs of Bournemouth and Poole are also actively involved through their Tourism Offices. At a local level, the Forum has taken up the challenge of the Prime Minister’s initiative to promote UK education to a world-wide audience. The educational organisations involved in this innovative project are Bournemouth University, The Arts University College at Bournemouth, the Bournemouth and Poole College, Accredited Schools, University Pathway Providers and White House Guardianships (which offers a placement service into local private and state-run high schools).²² They also organise an annual festival to celebrate international culture with students and local community groups. Since 2012, the University of Bournemouth has welcomed over 11,000 international students.²³

¹⁹ Average value of each student in HE in 2011/12, in terms of tuition fees and living expenses, was £21K - see pp14/15 in [International Education: Global Growth & Prosperity](#)

²⁰ QS Enrolment Solutions, International Student Survey (2018)

²¹ <https://www.yorkcollege.ac.uk/in-the-news/374-autumn-term-2015/2418-international-students-civic-welcome.html>

²² <https://www.studybournemouthpoole.co.uk/>

²³ Bournemouth University, Bournemouth Review 2012-18 (2018).

4.9 The other example is the Northern Consortium UK. The Northern Consortium is a collaboration between universities in the North of England to develop a programme of pre-university study programmes that prepare international students for university in the UK. If they pass these exams, they are guaranteed a place at one of the partner universities. Since 1987, NCUK have placed over 30,000 at the partner northern universities.²⁴

²⁴ <https://www.ncuk.ac.uk/>

5. For Research, Trade and Soft Power

What role do international students play in increasing global research capabilities, trade links and soft power for the UK and what strategies could be implemented to support this further?

Visas

5.1 One of the key ways in which the UK could support global research capabilities, trade links and soft power is through reinstating the post study work visa. 40% of international applicants are likely to pick a country based on their ability to work their afterwards.²⁵

5.2 At present, 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.

5.3 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, 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.

5.4 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 post graduation work are not well known to international students and can be confusing to navigate and apply for.

5.5 Since the removal of the previous Tier 1 (Post-Study Work) visa in 2012, 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. In 2013 only 4,175 students access the Tier 2 visa.

5.6 Qualitative evidence from an NUS survey of International Students in 2012 demonstrates that international students were disappointed by the visa changes:

"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

²⁵ QS Enrolment Solutions, International Student Survey (2018)

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."

"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."

5.7 Most home students support the idea of their international peers staying in the UK post graduation. 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.

5.6 International graduates are likely to bring with them the links to overseas markets and trades, and the skills (including, potentially additional languages) to generate business relationships overseas. NUSUK therefore advocate for the post-study work visa to 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.

Entrepreneurs

5.7 In 2014, NUSUK wrote a joint report with the Entrepreneurs Network exploring the experience of international students looking to be entrepreneurs.

5.8 According to this report:

- Although nearly half, 42%, of international students intend to start up their own business following graduation, only 33% of these students, or 14% of the total, want to do so in the UK.
- Students studying creative subjects make up the largest group of those who want to start a business in the UK (22%).
- Only 17% of students that wanted to start a business thought their institution offered enough specific entrepreneur or enterprise advice and guidance.
- Less than half (46%) of respondents think their institution is certified to endorse them for a Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa, while 43% are not sure, despite 101 of the 163 UK Universities being certified by the Home Office.
- Only 20% of respondents with entrepreneurial aspirations have considered applying for the UK Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa.
- Just 2% of respondents intending to start a business following graduation applied for the UK Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa, with almost two thirds, 62%, saying they didn't even consider it.
- Only 18% think that the UK has better post-study processes in place for international students than other countries; 32% think it is worse than other countries.
- 81% of the respondents considering starting their own business are interested in the

possibility of permanent residency under the Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa.²⁶

5.9 The key recommendations from this 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 self-employment for those working within an institutional programme (curricular or co-curricular) 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, decoupled 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".

5.10 NUSUK would also like to see more international graduates applying for the Tier One (exceptional talent) visa. One graduate who was granted the visa commented: *'I didn't know about the Tier One (exceptional talent) visa until somebody contacted me to tell me what it was. The process was quite arduous and required a lot of information, and as the visa wasn't very well known I felt like a bit of a guinea pig. It also required me to have a lot of graduate experience to prove I was a 'world leader' in my organisation, which lots of graduates don't have. I feel really lucky to have been accepted, but a few of my friends who have tried to get the visa were rejected without feedback. It is hard enough to find a job after graduation, let alone experiencing the additional pressure of having to leave a country you've fallen in love with. I am enormously glad I got to stay, and I wish more talented and capable people were able to have the same opportunities I have had.'*

5.11 Government should consider these recommendations when considering options for post-study work options for entrepreneurs in the UK.

5.12 Although not entrepreneurs, NUSUK would like to see an increase in the number of full time international student sabbatical officers. Students' unions, working in partnership with their institutions, are keen to ensure that the voice and perspectives of international students are clearly heard and acted upon, to engage in the constant development of the best possible experience whilst they are studying here. They also want to ensure that they feel included in the life and community of the institution. Having full time elected officers representing this constituency adds value to the development of an outward looking global community. With the current system, international sabbatical officers are able to apply for a Tier Four visa. NUSUK would like, in any new system, for it to be as easy as possible for international students to be sabbatical officer in their unions. NUS has provided numerous resources helping students' unions, including [a toolkit](#) for students' unions to utilise when employing international students.

Soft Power

5.13 Another way of establishing soft power is through creating networks of international students and graduates. Research has shown that international alumni are more likely to maintain professional networks within the UK, keep active connections with fellow alumni and their institution, and to return to visit the UK. In 2013, 95% of international students who had a positive experience would recommend their time in the UK.²⁷

²⁶ NUSUK and the Entrepreneurs Network 'Made in the UK' (2014)

²⁷ BIS 'The Wider Benefits Of International Students in the UK' (2013)

However, that research also showed that international students were not part of a formal alumni network – and this may be an area where institutions may wish to capitalise on.

5.14 Another way to build soft power is to offer graduates the opportunities to do internships in the UK. AIESIC, the world's largest international youth development organisation, offers programmes which seek to build world citizens who are solution orientated and have the ability to empower others.²⁸ This visa enables far more organisations to employ international graduates and benefit from their world view and expertise.

5.15 One student who participated in the AIESIC programme expressed how important her experience on the AIESIC programme was for building internationally-focused skills in the UK – which subsequently enabled her to gain employment in London on a Tier One visa:

'While I was studying, I struggled to find a job after graduation that wasn't in a large consulting or financial company. I applied for a Tier 5 visa through AIESIC. I was working at a small start-up, and had two years to build up core skills on my CV and develop my experience. I think a lot of smaller organisations would benefit from having international graduates in their organisations, and similarly international students would benefit from the experience'

5.16 NUSUK would like to see more international graduates afforded the experience of working in different kinds of organisations in the UK, and for SMEs to have the opportunity to employ international graduates – thereby building soft power outside of the finance industry.

²⁸ <https://aiesec.org/about-us>

6. Recommendations

6.1 This section summarises the key recommendations we would like to make to the APPG when producing their report for October.

6.2 For Government **to remove international students from migration targets:** NUSUK 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.

6.3. In its place, for government to develop a **distinct and controlled student immigration system from entry to exit** that **attracts international students to the UK.**

6.4. For the Home Office to **restore the post study work visa**, reduce bureaucracy around employing international students, and **make it easier to secure part time work whilst studying**. This includes support for employers to hire international students and graduates (such as creating awareness for the AIESIC scheme, regional partnerships between education providers and local businesses).

6.5. For all universities to **act as guarantors for housing**, and support for landlords that will ensure they are not deterred from offering accommodation to international students.

6.6. For government to **drop the NHS surcharge** for international students.

6.7 For government to develop strategies to allow **refugee and asylum seekers to continue or embark upon their studies** – so that the UK can benefit from their skills and they can be in a position to support their country on their return.

6.8. For government to support the recommendations as outlined in the NUSUK **‘The TOEIC scandal: an ongoing injustice report’:**

- an independent investigation into the scandal
- individuals seeking to prove their innocence be granted access to Legal Aid or a special legal assistance scheme for immigration advice and representation in the Immigration Tribunal for successful students
- in-country appeals are reinstated for international students
- international students have access to a protection scheme where their Tier 4 sponsor loses its licence.

6.9 For government to develop **an international strategy** in consultation with the sector, and student organisations that sets out aspirations and is welcoming to international students in tone.

6.10 For the sector to **develop co-ordinated regional welcome programmes** through working with local councils, community groups, student organisations etc.

6.11. For government to allow **international students to change course in the UK** without having to reapply and return to their home country.

6.12. For government to support the **recommendations stated in the ‘Made in the UK’** report (outlined above).

7. Contact

7.1 NUS would relish the opportunity to comment on this response further. In the first instance, please get in touch with Cat Turhan at Cat.Turhan@NUS.org.uk