

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

Written evidence submitted by ProtectED

1.0 Introduction to ProtectED

[ProtectED](#) is a not-for-profit membership organisation and national accreditation scheme that aims to drive up standards in student safety, security and wellbeing in the university sector. The scheme has been developed over three years by academics and security experts at the University of Salford and K7 compliance Ltd., and is supported by leading organisations in the security and university sectors. Work has involved a national student survey with the National Union of Students (NUS), focus groups with university security managers, campus police officers and student sabbatical officers, and a comprehensive review of good practice recommendations relating to student welfare issues. The ProtectED [Code of Practice](#) and associated membership, assessment and accreditation programme was published in 2017.

At present, university policy and practice to ensure students' safety, security and wellbeing is fragmented — different institutions do different things. This fragmentation in practice means that some students will be better supported than others, depending upon their choice of institution. For example, despite the fact that student suicides are at [record levels](#), only [29% of universities](#) have an explicit mental health and wellbeing strategy. And even though [3 out of 5 students](#) have experienced sexual harassment or assault at university, [39% of institutions](#) provide no staff training on dealing with sexual misconduct. ProtectED creates a 'gold standard' for universities to work towards, with the goal that all students will receive the same high standard of support.

ProtectED takes a student-centered approach — the Code of Practice addresses issues across the whole student experience — both on and off-campus. The ProtectED Code of Practice contains the following sections:

- Core Institutional Safety and Security
- Student Wellbeing and Mental Health
- International Students
- Student Harassment and Sexual Assault
- The Student Night Out.

1.1 Why is ProtectED submitting evidence?

Ensuring the safety, security and wellbeing of international students is one of the main issues that ProtectED seeks to address. International students' perceptions of personal safety and wellbeing can be linked to problems emerging in other areas of ProtectED, such as mental health and the

institutional security response. Consequently, it was suggested by partners in the international HE student domain that *ProtectED* should submit evidence to the All Party Parliamentary inquiry into building a sustainable future for international students in the UK.

2.0 Response to issues identified by the committee

This written submission mainly addresses the question identified in the invitation for written evidence: *What are the challenges of welcoming international students into our universities?*

In doing so, ProtectED would like to highlight three issues:

1. *Personal safety is now a significant issue for international students*

A [2018 report](#) published by Intead and FPP EDU Media identifies an increase in international students highlighting [personal safety concerns as influencing their decisions](#) regarding where to study abroad.

In two separate surveys conducted in spring 2016 (n=40,000) and spring 2017 (n=50,000), prospective international students were asked how important the issue of safety was when deciding where to study.

In 2016, 23% of students indicated that their sense of personal safety in the destination country was a strong factor in their decision making. However, in 2017, 88% of students said that a strong campus safety program was helpful or very helpful to their decision making.

This increased focus by international students on safety and wellbeing issues has been highlighted by both British Council and UKCISA.

This suggests that UK HE institutions need to highlight their efforts to ensure the safety, security and wellbeing of international students, and be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their policies, processes and practice in this area.

2. *Effectively addressing student safety concerns offers the UK a competitive advantage*

The [QS Enrolment Solutions International 2018 Student Survey](#) asked international students to rank their top five concerns about studying abroad. Safety was ranked third, after cost of living and availability of scholarships.

It has been [highlighted](#) that taking measures to ease such concerns can be a competitive advantage for universities seeking to attract international students. In the US, for example, a [list of universities](#) has been compiled, identifying which institutions provide focused support to help their international students thrive and successfully graduate.

ProtectED Accreditation requires member institutions meet minimum requirements for their policies, processes and practice relating to their international students. ProtectED membership and the ProtectED Accredited Institution mark enable international students (and their parents and loved ones) to see which UK universities have achieved or are working towards these minimum requirements.

3. UK universities need to be able to respond to emerging safety concerns of international students

While the UK is generally a safe place to live, it is important that reports in the press that may be of concern to international students are responded to by UK universities. This includes [reports](#) on:

- Police recorded knife crime up 16% (40,147)
- Homicides up 12% (701) (*excluding incidents such as London and Manchester terrorist attacks*)
- Gun crime up 2% (6,492)
- Burglaries up 6% (437,537)
- Robberies up 30% (77,103)

ProtectED is aware that the British Council shares the latest crime figures for England and Wales with staff that talk to international students, and that it is addressing student safety more in talks given to international students.

3.0 The need for visible, principled action on improving standards

The safety-minded international student — and their family — is likely to become increasingly discerning in the choice of HE institution at which to study. ProtectED aims to allay international student concerns through the independent assessment and accreditation of universities' practice around student safety, security and wellbeing.

The ProtectED Code of Practice and accreditation process is based on [five key principles](#). In joining ProtectED, institutions commit to adopting these principles within their policies, structures, processes and culture as part of a multi-agency approach to student safety, security and wellbeing.

Bringing together guidance and best practice on tackling a range of issues, ProtectED supports member universities to work towards and achieve the *ProtectED Accredited Institution* award

If UK universities are seen to prioritise international student welfare by joining ProtectED and taking the lead on tackling issues that negatively impact students' lives, this will allay security concerns and attract international students into UK universities.