

APPG for International Students Inquiry
A sustainable future for international students in the UK?
Queen Mary University of London submission – September 2018

Context

Queen Mary University of London is a global leading university enhancing the regional, national and international agenda. We have a unique student, research and public engagement profile compared to any other university, pushing the boundaries of research and innovation and providing opportunities to individuals with talent and potential, irrespective of their background. Of our 25,332 students approximately 9 per cent are from the EU and 35 per cent are from non-EU overseas countries. Our international students currently represent 162 nationalities.

In the classroom

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

QM: There are many educational opportunities derived from having a university comprised of both UK and international students including improved cultural awareness and a global perspective for all. The presence of international students therefore creates benefits for our UK students, directly impacting on the breadth of courses we are able to offer and the facilities available to support their study experience. For example, research carried out at Queen Mary in 2017 to identify the impact our international students have on educational opportunities found that of 559 Masters courses on offer, only 19 would be viable without international students (criteria for viability being 20 or more UK students enrolled on programmes). Of those 19, none were in STEM subjects. More broadly, the proportion of income derived from international students is such that it underpins a range of activity and roles across the institution, especially relating to research activity. Without income from international students our research activity would also be less viable.

In January 2017, we opened a new £39 million Graduate Centre on our Mile End campus. International postgraduate student recruitment underpinned the business case for the build. The seven-storey building includes 7,700 square metres of new learning and teaching space for the benefit of all of our postgraduate students. In addition to being the home for the School of Economics and Finance, our Doctoral College and Research Degrees Office are located in the building. The Graduate Centre provides work areas and social spaces tailored specifically to the needs and working patterns of our postgraduates, but offers facilities to our wider student community. Future capital projects including a proposed new business school also rely on international student recruitment.

We employ staff across the institution in roles that are specific to supporting international students. These include International Officers (x12), International Student Advisers, International Experience Officer, International Careers Officer, Immigration Compliance Officers and International Admissions staff. We also employ staff for preparatory English language and foundation programmes which are specifically for international students.

Most of the challenges we face in supporting our international students are a direct result of current immigration policy. Instability in immigration policy since 2006 has meant that students and institutions such as Queen Mary have been responding to changes, often with little notice to ensure compliance. As is well documented, the current UK immigration rules often act as a barrier or disincentive to students when considering where to study and the labelling of some countries as 'high risk' compounds the risk of an over-reliance on recruitment from those countries deemed to be

lower risk. The cap on years of study also seems arbitrary. For example, it doesn't allow for those considering a change of career. Someone who has studied a three-year undergraduate degree in the UK cannot return to the UK later in life to study for another three-year undergraduate degree to pursue a different career (with some exceptions for Medicine and Dentistry).

Once in the UK, the present array of types of immigration document (BRPs/Vignettes/Stamps/Exemptions) can also mean that our students are at risk of incorrectly being denied access to housing, financial, health and other services. An online system that allows students to give relevant organisations (HEI's, employers etc.) permission to view their current immigration status would be much more efficient. Delays also with the issuance of BRPs and Police Registration for some nationalities are also particularly problematic and have a direct negative impact on students' early study experience in the UK.

Finally, procedures for obtaining redress where mistakes have been made in processing applications need to be reviewed to ensure that they balance the maintenance of immigration control with protecting migrants from the consequences of Home Office errors. At present, a judicial review is now often the only route to mount a legal challenge to an error made by the Home Office and this often has to be done overseas. Judicial reviews are financially risky, time-consuming and do not suspend any decision whilst awaiting consideration. This can cause major disruption to studies.

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?

QM: Located in a multicultural part of London our international students integrate well with our local community on the whole. We do however also encourage them to get involved in our local community through volunteering. This can be problematic at times with many volunteering roles requiring the need for a DBS check. In order for international students to acquire the equivalent of a DBS they need to apply for a 'certificate of good conduct' from their home country. This process can be extremely complex and lengthy making the ability to undertake volunteering particularly problematic. This is especially an issue for international students who are looking to gain experience of working with children/young people alongside their course. A change to this process would aid our ability to harness international students studying in the UK to work in volunteer positions.

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?

QM: International students bring skills and experience to the regional and national graduate labour market which employers struggle to gain from UK students alone – namely language skills and cultural awareness. Through various schemes the university places international students in businesses looking for knowledge of overseas markets or language skills however managing such schemes comes with a cost.

The most reliable data we have on the impact of our students on the local economy relates to the recent HEPI report into the economic impact of international students by parliamentary constituency. As per the findings of that report, net economic impact in Bethnal Green and Bow puts our students in the top 10 nationally - <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Economic-benefits-of-international-students-by-constituency-Final-11-01-2018.pdf>

We do not currently hold comprehensive data on the part-time work that our students do outside of the University. As a local employer however, we currently employ 250 Tier 4 students in a variety of part-time positions, including Student Ambassador and Teaching Assistant roles. A further 50 Tier 4 students are employed in research support roles at Queen Mary and by our Students' Union (QMSU).

Based on the latest DLHE data, the top 5 industry sectors for those international (non-EU) students from Queen Mary who entered the UK labour market post-study were as follows:

Percentage of respondents	Industry sector
22.4%	Professional, scientific and technical activities
15.5%	Education
12.1%	Human health and social work activities
11.2%	Financial and insurance activities
11.2%	Information & communication

The average starting salary of these students was £27,565.97.

Our international students frequently report that they find it difficult to enter the labour market because of restrictive immigration regulations. Four months immigration permission beyond the end date of the course is often insufficient time in which to secure work. Tier 2 is the most accessible route to work after studies in highly skilled/shortage occupations but even highly qualified and highly skilled workers can find it difficult to obtain sponsorship in time. The restrictions can act as a significant deterrent to international students opting to study in the UK.

The abolition of PSW has also led to fewer graduate positions being offered to international students. Our own Careers Service and other services we have spoken to find that few employers will answer outright whether or not they employ international students. Many employers state on their website that the graduate has to have the 'right to work in the UK' at the point of starting work, despite the fact that they may not offer sponsorship. Feedback from employers is that sponsoring is too burdensome. Additionally there are cases where the salary of a job doesn't reach the minimum threshold, preventing an international student occupying that position. At Queen Mary, our humanities graduates (from Politics and International Relations, English and Drama and History) have a combined average graduate salary of £19,006 (DLHE 201617). That this is not high enough to meet the threshold needed for Tier 2 shows that there are many jobs occupied by UK graduates which are barred to international students limiting their ability to get contribute to the UK workforce after graduation. Similarly, internships are often used by employers to create a pipeline for graduate hires however if an employer isn't planning to hire international graduates this inevitably makes it harder for international students to find UK internships. Given that recent research shows that some 36 per cent of students completing a work experience placement had received at least one definite job offer by the Easter of their final year compared with just 11 per cent of other undergraduates, this again limits international students' ability to have a sustainable role in supporting skilled post-study work in the UK.

In short, for more students to occupy roles post-graduation there needs to be wholesale change in the visa system, making it easier for highly-skilled migrants to stay in the UK for work.

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?

QM: As with most UK institutions, we can point to examples of migrant student alumni who have gone on to hold positions of influence overseas. For example, these include Guðni Thorlacius Jóhannesson (President of Iceland), Danilo Concepcion (President of the University of the Philippines) and Prannoy Roy (Indian journalist and political commentator). Queen Mary is one of the largest (top 5) recipients of (FCO) Chevening scholars in the UK, specifically selected for the programme due to their capacity to become future leaders, influencers and decision-makers. For example, in 2017/18 we received 89 Chevening scholars studying with us across a range of Masters programmes. Upon graduation, they will return home to take up positions of influence across a range of sectors. We have large alumni communities in some of the most influential commercial and political hubs worldwide, particularly in East Asia (notably Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore) and our new Global Policy Institute will offer short visiting fellowships for overseas policy-makers from January 2019. More joined up opportunities to leverage these sorts of links at regional and national level would be welcomed. We believe that given the likely growing importance of HE in trade discussions post-BREXIT this may be essential.

International PhD students benefit the institutional research environment through developing a critical mass in research groups; contributing to research outputs; and supporting collaborations with industry overseas. Our international PhD students, particularly those funded by overseas government scholarships, will commonly return home as part of larger capacity building plans (often under terms of their funding agreement) to take up faculty positions thus extending our reach into universities worldwide and raising our profile globally. They have also provided us with the initial connections to overseas institutions that have grown into long-term strategic collaborative partnerships for Queen Mary: for example our Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Northwestern Polytechnical University and Sichuan University partnerships in China began this way. International PhD students are also well-equipped to give a unique insight into research priorities overseas.

ENDS.