

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

Evidence submitted by the University of Edinburgh

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

- › There are enormous benefits in welcoming international students into our schools, colleges and universities. The University of Edinburgh proudly welcomes over 12,000 international students from 156 different nations each year to our campus, as one of the top five university destinations for international talent in the UK higher education sector.
- › International students at the University of Edinburgh and elsewhere across the UK bring immense educational, social and cultural benefits and greatly enrich our campus, city and country. International students and staff are essential to the maintenance and development of the UK's position as a world leading centre of research and teaching excellence. It is no coincidence that universities, such as the University of Edinburgh, who attract a high proportion of world-leading international researchers, students and academics, are the driving force behind the UK higher education sector's world-leading performance.
- › International students make a very positive and significant contribution impact on the education of UK students and to their living and learning experience. International students bring the world to our campus, enriching our community, academically, socially and culturally.
- › The presence of a significant number of international students on our campus contributes to the internationalisation of our curriculum as well as the promotion of foreign languages. Important social and cultural benefits result from close integration of nationalities including increased confidence and wider horizons in our wider student community as well as the creation of lasting friendships, mutual understanding and dialogue.
- › Research in the UK on the positive impacts of multiculturalism in higher education, commissioned by the Higher Education Academy, suggests the benefits students gain from a multicultural university are as much to do with the "informal socialisation" offered by the campus environment, the plethora of student societies and social activities hosted by universities as from the formal learning experience in classroom and internationalisation of the curriculum.
- › International students ensure that UK students gain in terms of their educational opportunity and enrich their experience on and off campus. A recent HEPI report notes that *"three-quarters of UK students agreed that studying alongside people from other countries is useful preparation for working in a global environment."*¹ A 2014 British Council study found that domestic students tend to possess overwhelmingly positive opinions of international students.² A recent NUS survey of nearly 5,000 students

¹ Higher Education Policy Institute Report, 'What do home students think of studying with international students?', HEPI Report 76, July 2015 http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/HEApaper7_web.pdf

² British Council, September 2014, [Integration of international students: A UK perspective](#)

studying at UK universities showed 70% thought any reduction in international student numbers would impact their cultural experience at university.³

- › Learning in a diverse and multicultural university environment provides our UK students with a richer educational experience. It enables the exchange of different perspectives, values, experiences and beliefs which can contribute to the development of a global outlook. It is essential that the experience UK students have at university is an internationally diverse and global one if they are to graduate fully prepared for the closely-knit global world that we live in today. Graduates who can demonstrate an international outlook, cultural sensitivity and language skills are high in demand across the world.
- › Having a large and engaged population of international students, as the University of Edinburgh is proud to say that we do, is integral to the creation of that experience. Inevitably it is students from the UK are likely to gain the most from their international peers. Furthermore, the very positive social and cultural impacts also reach well beyond the university, into our local communities, schools and neighbourhoods.
- › HEPI research of domestic university applicants in the UK found 87% think that studying alongside students from abroad will give them a better world view, 85% say that studying with international classmates will be useful preparation for working in a global environment; and 76% say international students will help them develop a global network.⁴
- › There are challenges in ensuring that the UK continues to remain an attractive and welcoming destination for international students. It is clear that the succession of changes to UK immigration policy since 2010, most notably the removal and restriction on post study work options for international students, has impacted upon the overall attractiveness and perception of the UK as a study destination. The availability of post study work options for international students is a key element in the decision-making process for prospective students about where to study across the world.
- › It is clear that successive and repeated changes in UK immigration policy has impacted on the number of international students coming to the UK and the attractiveness and perception of the UK as a welcoming study destination. Recent figures clearly demonstrate, in a highly competitive global arena, that the number of non-EU students entering UK universities has stagnated. This is taking place as the number of tertiary education students looking to study internationally is expanding with other nations recording impressive levels of growth in their international enrolments and deploying large scale national campaigns to welcome and retain international talent.

It is clear that the UK needs an ambitious forward looking and welcoming national strategy for international students. The UK must seek to realise the opportunities that exist and ensure that our national offer is highly competitive on a global stage.

To do so we should support

- › Delivery of a coherent UK national strategy and campaign with the education sector to welcome international students and position the UK strongly
- › Delivery of enhanced post study work opportunities for international students that will strongly position the UK's offer in a highly competitive arena for international talent

³ National Union of Students, April 2017, [Student perspectives on international students](#)

⁴ HEPI and Kaplan, March 2015, [What do prospective students think about international students?](#) Youth Sight

- › Changes to the immigration system to ensure that the international student journey is welcoming, attractive and works to support UK national priorities with regards to attracting and retaining global talent.

Question: 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?

- › Per capita, the city of Edinburgh has the highest proportion of non-UK students (29.5%) and the highest proportion of EU students (11.4%) of any UK city⁵. At the University of Edinburgh, almost forty per cent of our student community is from outside of the UK and this international talent has a number of positive impacts on our local community.
- › A recent COMRES poll⁶ found that in Scotland 70 per cent of adults thought that international students had a valuable social and cultural impact on the cities and towns within which they live and 67 per cent thought that international students had a positive economic contribution that helped create jobs.
- › Recent analysis by Biggar Economics, a leading independent economic consultancy, and the University of Edinburgh relating to the economic impact of non-UK international students attending the University of Edinburgh in 2015-2016 clearly demonstrates the very positive economic impact of international students on the City of Edinburgh, Scotland and the United Kingdom. The gross value added economic impact of international students for the City of Edinburgh 2015-2016 was estimated to be almost £70 million and over £90 million for the UK. The estimated economic spend of international students attending the University of Edinburgh supported 1,738 jobs within the City of Edinburgh and over 2,000 jobs in the United Kingdom.
- › There is significant widespread public support in the United Kingdom for international students to be able to stay and work after their studies: 75% of the British public believe they should be allowed to work in the UK for a fixed period after they have graduated, rather than returning immediately to their home country.⁷
- › As a recent British Future and Universities UK report on public attitudes to international students in the UK and immigration that ***“...despite ongoing debates around immigration in the United Kingdom, the British public is not concerned about international students coming to study at British universities.....people welcome the economic and cultural contribution they make. The most common reaction is surprise and even bafflement that international students are classified as immigrants at all.”***⁸
- › The University of Edinburgh takes great pride in the value that our international students bring to Edinburgh, in terms of voluntary activity, collaborative initiatives and enrichment of the diversity and culture that makes Edinburgh special. Last year, over 1,400 students volunteered across the city of Edinburgh supporting our local communities, over 50 per cent of the Student Association volunteers were international students.
- › In terms of public services, international students already pay taxes such as VAT, council tax, national insurance and income tax if they work during their studies and pay a £150 health surcharge as part of their UK study visa for each year of their studies to

⁵ Percentage of Higher education students by domicile in UK cities 2016 HESA

⁶ 2017 COMRES Universities UK

⁷ ComRes, April 2017, Universities UK Public Perceptions of International Students Survey

⁸ International students and the UK immigration debate Report August 2014, British Future and Universities UK

offset any cost of using the NHS. It is important to note that international students on study visas for the UK have no recourse to public funds. That is, international students are not entitled to the vast majority of UK welfare benefits as part of their residence in the UK and it is very unlikely international students qualify for other welfare benefits as they would not meet eligibility criteria for instance contributory employment and support allowance, maternity and industrial injury benefits as they are all dependent on the individual having worked in the UK previously.

- › A study by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research in 2011 estimated that based on their demographic characteristics, international students make lighter use of education, healthcare and social services than the average UK resident⁹.
- › International students live in either university accommodation or private rented accommodation during their studies in Edinburgh close to the main university campus. Even though international students use both university owned accommodation and privately rented accommodation, the extent to which they displace UK citizens is negligible since they pay rents of similar value to the current market rates within the housing sector.

Question: 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?

- › Recent data from HESA indicates that in 2015-2016 there were 50,925 international students studying in Scotland. Outside of London and the South East region in England this is the third highest figure in the United Kingdom.
- › To ensure that the UK's post study offer is attractive and competitive on the global stage there is an urgent and well supported need to extend the provision of these opportunities for international students following graduation.
- › Future UK immigration policy with regards to post study work could learn from Canada where regional differentiation within a federal immigration system has worked to support local employment needs, skills gaps and training needs in the provinces.
- › Canada recognised that a "one-size-fits-all" immigration system serves to attract migrants to areas with high immigrant concentrations. Therefore, all ten Canadian provinces hold agreements with the federal government regarding immigration that works to support and balance provincial and national requirements.
- › Canadian Provincial Nominee Programmes operate as negotiated agreements between provincial and federal governments. The UK system could operate along these principles to reflect local or regional situations by allocating more points to those living, working and residing in a specified region and linked to specific areas of employment sector and/or skills need.

⁹ National Institute of Economic and Social Research 2011
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257236/impact-of-migration.pdf

Question: 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?

Countries across the globe are focused on their 'balance of brains' as well as the 'balance of power'. International students have a vital and essential role in increasing the United Kingdom's global research capability, trade partnerships and soft power.

International students and UK research capability

- › Research is undertaken on a global basis and collaboration, mobility and access to talent are of critical importance to the UK research base. The proportion of the UK's output which involves international partners has increased steadily over the past 30 years – by 2015 less than half of the UK's research output was solely domestic. Half of the post-graduate research student population, which is an important and integral part of the UK research workforce, is comprised of non-UK nationals.¹⁰
- › Although international postgraduate research students constitute the smallest cohort of non-EU enrolments for UK universities, representing around 10 per cent of all non-EU students, they remain vitally important to the UK research base and capability and represent over 40 per cent of the UK postgraduate research student community. At the University of Edinburgh international students comprise over half of all of our leading postgraduate research student community.
- › Non-UK EU nationals represent 13.3 per cent of students enrolled in postgraduate research programmes and non-EU international students represent 28.8 per cent. In the STEM subject disciplines their vital contribution to the UK national research base is even more noticeable. International students account for 51.5 per cent of the 34,685 postgraduate students in these strategically important subject disciplines that are the engines of the UK industrial strategy. For example, 51.9 per cent of postgraduate research students are international across the UK in mathematics, 58.2 per cent in computer science and 59.1 per cent in engineering.
- › The UK is a world leader in research excellence but our research base can only flourish if it is supported to engage and work with the best minds, organisations and facilities wherever they are in the world. A thriving internationally connected research base is essential to ensure that the UK maintains its world leading position in research and innovation and to bring benefit to the society and economy of the UK. We must ensure that we welcome international research talent and that our offer and package is highly competitive and attractive when compared with other world leading research nations.

International students and 'soft-power'

"Soft power demonstrably matters. The United Kingdom's soft power assets bring revenues from international students, tourists and foreign investment, and they enhance the UK's international political influence. Soft power should be seen as a mainstream part of public policy." Professor JP Singh, Director of the Institute for International Cultural Relations, University of Edinburgh

- › Universities support the UK's soft power and global partnerships: many leading international figures are alumni of British universities and our universities are connected with businesses, governments and research partners worldwide. The positive contribution of UK higher education to the UK economy and society will be

¹⁰ Positioning the UK within the global research landscape The Policy Institute at King's, Digital Science and Power of Numbers, in association with Universities UK, March 2017 <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/publications/Positioning-the-UK-within-the-global-research-landscape.pdf>

greatest if British universities are magnets for international talent, are welcoming to international students and are leaders in international research collaboration.

- › As international surveys and research continue to make clear, educational partnerships and talent circulation create long-term soft-power benefits and networks of influence for the UK. Aside from taking the world into our labs and lecture theatres our students from across the world take back powerful memories and experiences that shape their lives and careers and create a network that supports long-term business, science and industry.
- › The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills report in 2013, *'The wider benefits of international higher education in the UK'*¹¹, highlights the significant benefits that international students have in extending UK soft-power and sustaining influence and networks across the world for the UK.
- › The report notes that international alumni had formed very a positive understanding of the UK's culture and values. For some, this underpinned activity on return home to facilitate educational, cultural, developmental and business links and collaborations with the UK. They had become informal ambassadors for the UK, based on an emotional bond developed during their study in the UK. The impact will only increase as they become more influential in society, bringing potential support to UK economic, socio-cultural and political agendas.
- › The report further notes that international alumni had returned home to work in capacity building or other societal development, taking with them embedded British values and ideas. These may be seeds for long-term development of different linkages and synergies with the UK. A recent report by ComRes on the global rankings of soft power¹² stated that the ability of a nation to attract international students is a powerful tool of public diplomacy. It noted that the UK's higher education sector is a long-term asset, locally and nationally, but very importantly on the global stage.
- › The UK's universities have a vital role to play in building and developing Britain's soft power across the world. One widely recognised route through which higher education and research can become soft power assets for a country is through supporting the international mobility of students, staff, and researchers and ensuring that there is national support for the welcome, attraction and retention of global talent.
- › A report by the University of Edinburgh's Institute for International Cultural Relations on soft power found that it can boost overseas student recruitment, tourism and foreign direct investment¹³.

"The findings of the report offers new evidence for the impact of soft power on a state's economic success and global influence. A country's soft power can play a huge part in strengthening its role on the world stage. More than ever the UK needs to ensure that leaders and influencers globally know, understand and experience the UK as an outward looking, engaged nation, promoting its world class arts and education to as wide as audience as possible." Sir Ciarán Devane, Chief Executive of the British Council

¹¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, The Wider Benefits of International Higher Education in the UK
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/240407/bis-13-1172-the-wider-benefits-of-international-higher-education-in-the-uk.pdf

¹² Com Res, The Soft Power 30 – a global ranking of soft power
http://comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Report_Final-published.pdf

¹³ Soft Power Today – Report by the University of Edinburgh and the British Council
https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/3418_bc_edinburgh_university_soft_power_report_03b.pdf