

A submission from the British Academy to the Migration Advisory Committee inquiry on the economic and social impacts of international students in the UK

Summary

- International researcher and student mobility is fundamental to the health of the humanities and social sciences in the UK, as well as to the UK's prosperity more generally, since these disciplines contribute significantly to an economy that is more than three-quarters services- and craft-oriented.
- In recent years, the number of international students has increased more rapidly than the number of UK students, helping to increase the number of staff employed in HEIs. The humanities and social sciences have particularly excelled at attracting international students. Five of the top ten disciplines with the highest proportions of non-UK FTE undergraduates are in the humanities and social sciences (Table A). The humanities and social sciences fare particularly strongly in attracting students, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, from other EU Member States. Seven of the top 10 disciplines with the highest proportions of non-UK EU FTE undergraduate levels are in the humanities and social sciences (Table C). All of these are disciplines where deep understanding of European languages, cultures, and societies is essential.
- UK students benefit from interacting with international students, with three in four UK students having reported that they have a better world view and an enhanced awareness of cultural sensitivities as a result of the interaction. Three in five UK students have indicated to have benefited from greater networking opportunities worldwide. UK HEIs are thus an essential asset to the UK's ability to influence abroad and to soft power. Furthermore, international students predominantly come from key trade, diplomatic, and cultural partners of the UK or from areas of growing interest to the UK. International students also bring specific skills (e.g. language and cultural knowledge) invaluable to UK businesses and strengthen their capacity to export goods and services.
- We strongly encourage the UK Government to facilitate international student mobility in view of its important net economic contribution to the UK and its invaluable contribution to the academic, intellectual and cultural vibrancy of UK universities. In this respect, we recommend that the Government remove international students from its migration statistics. In addition, students who have studied in the UK should be allowed a period of up to 12 months after completing their course to remain in the UK and should be able to apply in-country for employment with UK employers.

Introduction

1. The British Academy, the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences, welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Migration Advisory Committee on the economic and social impacts of international students in the UK. The Academy draws on the expertise of its Fellows to provide independent and authoritative advice to

UK, European and international decisionmakers. The Academy is also a Designated Competent Body for the Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) visa route.

2. International mobility is fundamental to the practice of research and the Academy has a longstanding interest in immigration policy. Most recently, we have published the Academy's priorities in the current negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU, highlighting the importance of the UK's ability to attract an international talent pool through our open labour market. This particularly highlighted that "world-class research in the humanities and social sciences is outward looking and internationally engaged, benefitting from the exchange of ideas, people, methods and practices across borders".¹ The fundamental nature of outward and inward mobility for the humanities and social sciences has also been found in a joint national academies commissioned analysis of the role of international collaboration and mobility.² The following submission draws on all of the above experience and expertise.
3. The Migration Advisory Committee specified that Government wished to receive advice on what are the economic and social impacts of international students in the UK. The Committee is interested in the overall impact of international students, as well as, the impact of tuition fees and other spending by international students on the national, regional, and local economy and on the education sector; the economic and social impacts beyond education, including on the labour market, housing, transport and other services, in particular, the role they play contributing to local economic growth; some breakdown of impacts by type and level of course and institution; and, the impact the recruitment of international students has on the provision and quality of education provided to domestic students.
4. The following submission will respond to the Committee where the Academy is best able to do so and particularly focuses on whether migrant students help support employment in educational institutions; how migrant students affect the educational opportunities available to UK students; and, what role migrant students play in extending UK soft power and influence abroad.

International Students: Educational Opportunities and Employment

5. International students have provided a rich contribution to the scholarly and research activity of the UK. Government policy plays a vital role in attracting these students by facilitating mobility, including through participation in mobility programmes, and guaranteeing quality of teaching and scholarship.

¹ British Academy, 'Brexit means...? The British Academy's Priorities for the Humanities and Social Sciences in the Current Negotiations', November 2017, <http://www.britac.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Brexit>

² Opinion Leader, 'The role of international collaboration and mobility in research', March 2017, <https://www.britac.ac.uk/sites/default/files/UK%20National%20Academies%20Report%20Final%20280417.pdf>

6. The economic contribution of these students is significant and can be evidenced throughout the UK.³ The total net impact of international students on the UK economy was estimated to be £20.3 billion in 2015-2016. All UK regions and nations report economic benefits from international students. In 2015-2016, London reported the greatest net impact with £4.64 billion, followed by the South-East with £2.44 billion, West Midlands with £1.95 billion and Scotland with £1.94 billion.
7. International students represent a significant part of the UK student body. They accounted for 15.26% and 47.13% of the UK Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) student body in HEIs at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in 2015-2016. The number of international full-time undergraduate and postgraduate has increased by 68% between 2006-2007 and 2015-2016, from 275,315 to 403,570, while the UK student body has increased steadily by 4.76% from 1,428,610 to 1,496,516.
8. The number of international students has increased more rapidly than the number of UK students between 2006-2007 and 2015-2016 and helped increase employment in HEIs. In these years, the UK higher education system has seen its staff body, both academic and non-academic, increase by 18%. It increased from 289,995 FTE staff in 2006-2007 to 342,085 in 2015-2016.
9. The humanities and social sciences have particularly excelled at attracting students from outside of the UK. Five of the top ten disciplines with the highest proportions of non-UK (i.e. non-UK EU and non-EU combined) FTE undergraduate are in the humanities and social sciences (Table A). These are: economics & econometrics (34.47%), business and management studies (28.55%), politics & international studies (24.6%), law (22.14%) and anthropology and development studies (21.58%).
10. Similarly, four of the top ten disciplines with the highest proportions of non-UK FTE postgraduate students are in the humanities and social sciences (Table B). These are: economics & econometrics (83.88%), business & management studies (74.18%), anthropology and development studies (68.33%) and area studies (63.54%).
11. The humanities and social sciences fare particularly strongly in attracting students, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, from other EU Member States. Seven of the top 10 disciplines with the highest proportions of non-UK EU FTE undergraduate levels are in the humanities and social sciences (Table C). These are: politics & international studies (11.69%), modern languages (10.62%), anthropology & development studies (9.73%), area studies (9.2%), economics & econometrics (9%), business and management studies (7.85%) and architecture, built environment and planning (6.96%). All of these are disciplines where deep understanding of European languages, cultures, and societies is essential.

³ Higher Education Policy Institute and Kaplan International, 'The costs and benefits of international students by parliamentary constituency', 11 January 2018, <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Economic-benefits-of-international-students-by-constituency-Final-11-01-2018.pdf>

12. Six of the top ten disciplines with the highest proportions of non-UK EU FTE postgraduate students are in the humanities and social sciences (Table D). These are: classics (21.09%), politics & international studies (19%), modern languages (18.86%), philosophy (18.24%), area studies (17.22%) and music, dance, drama & performance arts (15.18%).
13. The ability of the UK to attract non-UK EU FTE students has been largely facilitated by the UK's EU membership, including its participation in successive Erasmus programmes. The UK's EU membership has allowed non-UK EU FTE students to benefit from freedom of movement to study in the UK, financial support and similar or lower levels of tuition fees than students in the UK. Through successive Erasmus programmes, 207,546 students have studied in UK HEIs between 1987 and 2013, benefiting both HEIs and their student body.⁴
14. The humanities and social sciences also attract a high number of students from outside of the EU. Four of the top ten disciplines with the highest proportions of non-EU FTE undergraduate students are in the humanities and social sciences (Table E). These are: economics & econometrics (25.46%), business and management studies (20.7%), law (15.63%) and architecture, built environment & planning (14.83%).
15. Three of the top ten disciplines with the highest proportion of non-EU FTE postgraduate students are also in the humanities and social sciences (Table F). These are: economics and econometrics (71.38%), business & management studies (64.63%), anthropology and development studies (53.84%).
16. This picture illustrates the profound importance of international students in the UK across the humanities and social sciences. The Academy would, however, particularly wish to stress that sufficient critical mass, with regards to student numbers, is required to make some courses viable in specialist subjects and that without the involvement of non-UK students those specialisms might become non-viable. This would thereby deny such opportunities to all UK students too, diminish the breadth and depth of expertise amongst researchers in the UK in the humanities and social sciences, and thus also affect employment opportunities.
17. International students are present across the UK and are a vital part of the UK's HEIs, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Tables G, H, I and J list the institutions with the highest proportions of non-UK EU and non-EU FTE students. These tables illustrate the broad geographical distribution of international students. The income generated from international students allows universities to invest in additional, enhanced or expanded facilities and to offer a greater variety of courses. However, the value of international students far exceeds their financial contribution.⁵

⁴ European Commission, 'The Erasmus Impact Study', September 2014,

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf

⁵ UUK, 'International Facts and Figures 2017', May 2017, http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/International/International_Facts_and_Figures_2017.pdf

18. International students provide an indispensable contribution to strengthening the UK higher education research sector, including as future academics, and in facilitating and intensifying cross-border collaboration opportunities. As the tables below illustrate, the proportion of non-UK students in more research-intensive universities helps to sustain their research capacity through income but also through the international linkages, and connections that they sustain. In addition, these international linkages and international students more generally, provide UK students with a greater cultural and educational enrichment through exposure to and connections with non-UK students. We explore this further below in relation to soft power.
19. Support to HEIs from international students is multidimensional. Any restrictions to international student mobility would risk changing the nature of UK higher education significantly and hinder employment in HEIs. These students account for an important share of the student body and provide a vital role in strengthening research, bringing distinctive skills and perspectives. International students constitute vital support to UK students, including by championing language learning, raising student's awareness of the benefits of outward mobility as part of their studies⁶ and widening opportunities to study.
20. The UK is one of the top destinations for international students in a context of increased mobility and competition from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) globally.⁷ The UK is part of a global market for international students and government policies play a large role in how we in the UK stand globally. We strongly encourage the UK Government to facilitate international student mobility considering its net economic contribution to the UK⁸ and its invaluable contribution to the academic, intellectual and cultural vibrancy of UK universities.⁹ In this respect, we recommend that the Government remove international students from its migration figures.
21. It is essential that no restrictions should be placed on the number of students either from the European Economic Area (EEA) or the rest of the world recruited to higher education courses in the UK. In addition, students who have studied in the UK should be allowed a period of up to 12 months after completing their course to remain in the UK and should be able to apply, in-country for employment with UK employers.
22. Furthermore, students coming to the UK for study visits or exchanges of up to nine months should be permitted to come, provided that they are formally registered with a UK HEI. The conditions on entry should simply be that the registering HEI certifies that:

⁶ Higher Education Policy Institute and Kaplan International, 'What do prospective students think about international students?', March 2015, Report 74, http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/InternationalStudents_v5_web.pdf

⁷ UUK, 'International Facts and Figures 2017', May 2017, http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/International/International_Facts_and_Figures_2017.pdf

⁸ Higher Education Policy Institute and Kaplan International, 'The costs and benefits of international students by parliamentary constituency', 11 January 2018, <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Economic-benefits-of-international-students-by-constituency-Final-11-01-2018.pdf>

⁹ British Academy, 'Brexit means...? The British Academy's Priorities for the Humanities and Social Sciences in the Current Negotiations', November 2017, http://www.britac.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Brexit_Means...TheBritishAcademy%27sPrioritiesForTheHumanitiesandSocialSciencesInTheCurrentNeogtiations.pdf

- i. The students demonstrate sufficient resources to pay the fees for their course and a sufficient level of English to undertake the course;
- ii. The students have adequate additional resources;
- iii. The students have adequate medical insurance.

International Students: Soft Power and Influence

23. As indicated above, UK students benefit from interacting and collaborating with international students in the context of their degree.¹⁰ In this respect, three in four UK students have reported to have a better world view and an enhanced awareness of cultural sensitivities. Three in five UK students have indicated to have benefited from greater networking opportunities worldwide.¹¹
24. International students in the UK account for some of the best students globally and help strengthen and develop the UK's research talent pool and enrich the research capacities of the UK both during their study and following. This helps to maintain and enhance the UK's international research reputation and its influence overseas. In addition, international students returning to their home countries or working and/or further studying in other countries enrich the research capacities of these countries and become part of the international collaborative processes on which excellent science so clearly depends.¹²
25. As one of the major destinations for international students,¹³ UK HEIs provide an asset to the UK's soft power and ability to influence abroad.¹⁴ In July 2017, 58 world leaders had at that point studied in the UK, more than any other country in the world.¹⁵ Having Heads of States spend part of their most formative years learning about and being part of UK culture highlights how the UK's higher education sector is a long-term asset, not just locally and nationally but also globally.
26. As illustrated above, a high proportion of international students' study in the humanities and social sciences. These disciplines are concerned with cross-border issues such as trends in population, the management of the economy, our relationship with others, climate action, the implications of new technologies and, as a result, play a critical role in shaping the understanding of former UK international students on these issues to the potential benefit of the UK.

¹⁰ Higher Education Policy Institute and Kaplan International, 'What do prospective students think about international students?', March 2015, Report 74, http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/InternationalStudents_v5_web.pdf

¹¹ UUK, 'International Facts and Figures 2017', May 2017, http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/International/International_Facts_and_Figures_2017.pdf

¹² Opinion Leader, 'The role of international collaboration and mobility in research', March 2017, <https://www.britac.ac.uk/sites/default/files/UK%20National%20Academies%20Report%20Final%20280417.pdf>

¹³ UUK, 'International Facts and Figures 2017', May 2017, http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/International/International_Facts_and_Figures_2017.pdf

¹⁴ ComRes, 'The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power, 2017', <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2017/briefing-economic-impact-international-students.pdf>

¹⁵ HEPI, 'UK is (just) number 1 for educating the world's leaders', August 2017, <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2017/08/05/uk-just-number-1-educating-worlds-leaders/>

27. The experience of international students in the UK is highly positive too. In 2013, the then Department for Business, Innovation and Skills carried out a survey and reported that 90% of international students studying in the UK agreed that their perception of the UK had changed positively as a result of their studies, illustrating the potential for inward mobility to translate into long-term influence and soft-power.¹⁶
28. It is important to note that international students predominantly come from key trade, diplomatic and cultural partners of the UK or from growing areas of interest to the UK (Table K). International students bring specific skills (e.g. language and cultural knowledge) invaluable to UK businesses¹⁷ and strengthen their capacity to export goods and services.

¹⁶ Higher Education Policy Institute and Kaplan International, 'What do prospective students think about international students?', March 2015, Report 74,, http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/InternationalStudents_v5_web.pdf

¹⁷ British Academy, 'The Art of Attraction, Soft Power and the UK's Role in the World', March 2014, <https://www.britac.ac.uk/sites/default/files/The%20Art%20of%20Attraction%20Full%20Report.pdf>

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Table A: Non-UK FTE relative undergraduate student proportion in 2015-2016

Discipline	Non-UK FTE relative undergraduate student proportion
Economics & econometrics	34.47%
Mineral, metallurgy & materials engineering	31.51%
Chemical engineering	29.31%
Business & management studies	28.55%
Electrical, electronic and computer engineering	27.05%
Civil engineering	26.07%
Politics & international studies	24.6%
Mechanical, aero & production engineering	24.18%
Law	22.14%
Anthropology and development studies	21.58%

Table B: Non-UK FTE relative postgraduate student proportion in 2015-2016

Discipline	Non-UK FTE relative postgraduate student proportion
Economics & econometrics	83.88%
Catering & hospitality management	77.39%
Electrical, electronic & computer engineering	74.29%
Business & management studies	74.18%
Civil engineering	68.39%
Anthropology & development studies	68.33%
Mineral, metallurgy & materials engineering	67.11%
Mechanical, aero & production engineering	66.11%
Area studies	63.54%
Chemical engineering	63.42%

Table C: Non-UK EU FTE relative undergraduate student proportion in 2015-2016

Discipline	Non-UK EU FTE relative undergraduate student proportion
Politics & international studies	11.69%
Modern languages	10.62%
Catering & hospitality management	10.52%
Anthropology & development studies	9.73%
Area studies	9.2%
Economics & econometrics	9%
Business & management studies	7.85%
IT, systems sciences & computer software engineering	7.15%
Electrical, electronic & computer engineering	7.09%
Architecture, built environment & planning	6.96%

Table D: Non-UK EU FTE relative postgraduate student proportion in 2015-2016

Discipline	Non-UK postgraduate student proportion	EU relative student proportion
Classics	21.09%	
Mechanical, aero & production engineering	20.26%	
Politics & international studies	19%	
Physics	18.97%	
Modern languages	18.86%	
Mathematics	18.44%	
Philosophy	18.24%	
Area studies	17.22%	
Music, dance, drama & performing arts	15.18%	
Chemistry	14.69%	

Table E: Non-EU FTE relative undergraduate student proportion in 2015-2016

Discipline	Non-UK undergraduate student proportion	EU relative student proportion
Mineral, metallurgy & materials engineering	25.95%	
Economics & econometrics	25.46%	
Chemical engineering	24.09%	
Business & management studies	20.7%	
Civil engineering	20.3%	
Electrical, electronic & computer engineering	19.96%	
Mechanical, aero & production engineering	17.30%	
Law	15.63%	
Architecture, built environment & planning	14.83%	
Mathematics	14.31%	

Table F: Non-EU FTE relative postgraduate student proportion in 2015-2016

Discipline	Non-EU relative postgraduate student proportion
Economics & econometrics	71.38%
Business & management studies	64.63%
Catering & hospitality management	63.22%
Electrical, electronic & computer engineering	62.27%
Civil engineering	55.01%
Mineral, metallurgy & materials engineering	54.58%
Anthropology & development studies	53.84%
Chemical engineering	50.17%
General engineering	49.47%
IT, systems sciences & computer software engineering	47.49%

Table G: Non-UK EU relative undergraduate student proportion in 2015-2016

Higher Education Institution	Non-UK EU relative undergraduate student proportion
The University of Aberdeen	21.88%
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	16.42%
Glasgow School of Art	14.05%
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	13.94%
University College London	13.41%
The University of Essex	13.25%
The School of Oriental and African Studies	13.14%
University College Birmingham	12.90%
King's College London	12.70%
The University of Glasgow	12.59%

Table H: Non-UK EU relative postgraduate student proportion in 2015-2016

Higher Education Institution	Non-UK EU relative postgraduate student proportion in 2015-2016
Cranfield University	29.90%
The University of St Andrews	26.18%
Royal College of Art	25.74%
Edinburgh Napier University	24.80%
London School of Economics and Political Science	24.58%
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	22.12%
The University of Cambridge	20.41%
The University of Oxford	19.61%
London Business School	19.58%
Heriot-Watt University	19.40%

Table I: Non-EU relative undergraduate student proportion in 2015-2016

Higher Education Institution	Non-EU relative undergraduate student proportion
University of Buckingham	45.73%
London School of Economics and Political Science	43.68%
The University of St Andrews	32.07%
University of the Arts, London	31.86%
Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	30.29%
University College London	27.40%
The University of Liverpool	25.08%
City, University of London	24.15%
The School of Oriental and African Studies	23.79%
The University of Sussex	21.24%

Table J: Non-EU relative postgraduate student proportion in 2015-2016

Higher Education Institution	Non-EU relative postgraduate student proportion
Coventry University	69.15%
London School of Economics and Political Science	58.25%
London Business School	57.64%
Loughborough University	55.21%
The University of Sheffield	53.18%
The University of Southampton	52.98%
Brunel University London	52.34%
The University of Manchester	51.30%
The University of Warwick	49.38%
Newcastle University	48.99%

Table K: Top 10 countries of student origin in 2015-2016¹⁸

Country	Number of students
China	91,215
Malaysia	17,405
United States	17,115
Hong Kong, China	16,745
India	16,745
Nigeria	16,100
Germany	13,425
France	12,525
Italy	12,135
Ireland	10,125

¹⁸ UUK, 'International Facts and Figures 2017', May 2017, http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/International/International_Facts_and_Figures_2017.pdf