

One size fits all?

An analysis of the international student's journey through the UK higher education system



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FOREWORD

According to the OECD, the UK is the second most popular destination in the world for international students. 299,970 non-EU students were enrolled in the UK's higher education institutions in 2012–13 – 13% of the total student body.

In recent years, the growth in immigration to the UK has focused attention on the immigration statistics, particularly those relating to international students, who form the largest cohort of non-EU migrants.

The debate about international students and net migration has not always been an easy one and has sometimes been impeded by there being different sets of data available to which to refer. This can be frustrating for all those interested in understanding the numbers of international students entering, studying in and departing the UK.

I agreed to chair the Commission on International Student Destinations as it represented a timely opportunity to bring together a range of data specialists in a neutral environment to focus on the data alone. What does it tell us? What doesn't it tell us? Where are the gaps and how might they be addressed? What do the statistics say about the journey taken by international students enrolling at and leaving the UK's higher education institutions?

The commission has spent the last year examining a range of data sources in order to map and understand the international student journey in the UK. This report includes statistics that many will be familiar with, but also presents new data and the findings of detailed desk research.

The report goes some way towards piecing together different parts of the international student data jigsaw to give us a clearer picture of international student destinations – but also highlights where the data currently collected does not tell us enough to draw clear conclusions.

This prevents the commission from presenting a coherent picture as we would like. Nonetheless, the commission is now able to make recommendations on how various data collection agencies might work together to improve our understanding even more in the future.

The commission itself has been on an interesting journey, and I am indebted to the openness and willingness of everyone involved to work together constructively. I would like to thank all those involved in compiling this report, and hope that its recommendations will help us in future to articulate the scale, scope and impact of the international student journey more effectively, in order to help inform decisions in this important area.



John Pullinger

President of the Royal Statistical Society
and Chair of the Commission on International
Student Destinations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission on International Student Destinations was established in 2013, following the Office for National Statistics' earlier announcement that migration figures were to be disaggregated with student inflow and outflow reported separately.

The aim of the commission is to enhance understanding of the journeys that international (non-EEA) students at UK higher education institutions (HEIs) take. This includes consideration of their activities pre-enrolment and post-graduation. Advice to the commission was provided by representatives from Universities UK (UUK), the Home Office, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS), vice-chancellors and HEI representatives with a responsibility for international students within their own institution.

The commission's remit originally focused on the evidence base surrounding numbers of international higher education students departing from the UK within a given year, including the International Passenger Survey (IPS). In doing so, this could enhance the cross-checking of student inflows and outflows. However, its remit was widened to examine and evaluate the available evidence on international students' wider migration patterns; their 'journey through the UK education system'.

The commission has not considered in detail statistics relating to students other than those in higher education.¹

Evidence and data relating to migration into and out of the UK are collated by several bodies, including government departments. Despite the emergence of new data sources and welcome improvements to existing ones, it is nonetheless clear that some key gaps remain in the evidence base around student migration. If addressed, these could greatly inform the broader debate around immigration. The limitations of immigration statistics have been well articulated in recent years, and by various groups, including parliamentary select committees², the Migration Advisory Committee³ and the UK Statistics Authority which, in 2013, suggested that, at that time, the official 'estimation of emigration (including overseas students returning home...) is particularly problematic and contributes to substantial uncertainty in the net migration estimates for the UK and locally'⁴.

The commission met three times in total, with research taking place between meetings. As well as analysing official data releases from HESA, the Home Office and the ONS, the commission investigated what alternative sources of information might already be kept by HEIs themselves (as well as other education providers) that could assist in filling some of these gaps.

¹ The HESA statistics in this report are derived from data collected from all publicly funded HEIs in the UK (including The Open University) and The University of Buckingham, which is privately funded. The figures therefore exclude higher education enrolments and qualifications obtained by students registered at UK further education colleges and at other private and independent UK HE colleges. Higher education students for the purpose of HESA's data collection are those students on courses for which the level of instruction is above that of level 3 of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

The commission noted the following:

- International students follow a range of different pathways through the UK education system, which affects the duration of their stay.

- Various agencies collate data on international students, but are often not referring to the same cohorts of migrants, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions about their numbers.

- There is a wider range of data available on students entering the country compared to numbers leaving, which has implications for the measurement of net migration.

- There is little uniformity in the way higher education institutions collate information on their international entrants or alumni, although such data could enhance our understanding of student destinations after graduation.

In light of this analysis, the commission recommends that:

- 1 The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills should work with those education providers not included within HESA's records to address the data gap between HEI student numbers and others. Commission members should encourage such providers to engage with data provision in order to inform the debate about international student pathways.

- 2 UUK should work with a selection of HEIs to identify the proportion of non-EU student enrolments that require a visa to come to the UK.

- 3 UUK should consider repeating its 2011 analysis of HESA data into progression rates and identify trends by students' country of domicile.

- 4 The Home Office should publish its data on in-country visa extensions by previous category annually (as standard).

- 5 HESA should consider developing an action plan to increase Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey response rates for non-EU students in future years, and UUK should produce case studies to analyse what a high response rate to the DLHE might reveal about non-EU student behaviour post-graduation.

- 6 The IPS could helpfully include a question about former students' level of study, in order to disaggregate those leaving the country who were in higher education versus other education providers.

- 7 A more sophisticated methodology should be established to consider the various data sources and develop an anticipated outflow figure for international higher education students subject to immigration control.

- 8 Dialogue between data groups established through this commission should be maintained, perhaps through the existing Migration Statistics User Forum, to facilitate a greater level of information sharing between organisations to allow coherent analysis and linking together of international student data.

² For example, Public Administration Select Committee (2013): <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-administration-select-committee/news/migration-statistics-report-published/>

³ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-12496610>

⁴ Dilnot A (2013) *Review of the robustness of the International Passenger Survey UK* Statistics Authority. Available at: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-reviews/monitoring-review-4-2013---the-robustness-of-the-international-passenger-survey.pdf>

1. INTRODUCTION

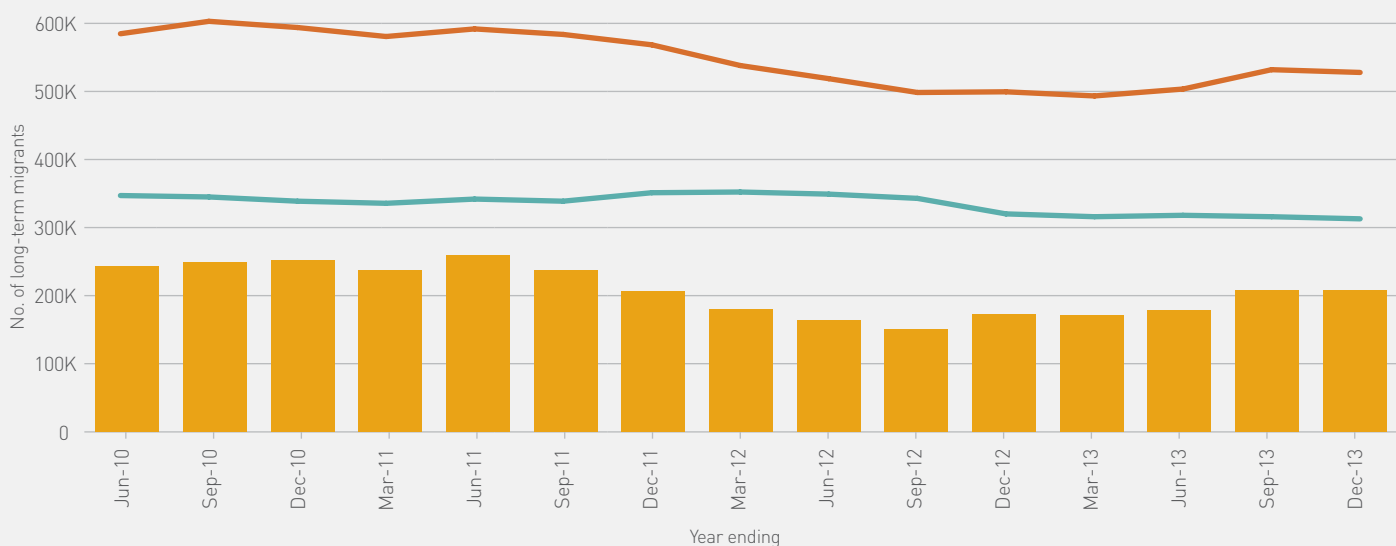
The UK attracts more students from overseas than any other country apart from the United States⁵, and the higher education sector enrolls students from all around the world.

As a public concern, immigration is deemed to be one of the most important issues currently facing the UK after the economy.⁶ International students coming to the UK from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) for a period of 12 months or more are classified as immigrants under the United Nations definition of a long-term migrant.

In the year to December 2013, overall net migration (the difference between the total number of people entering the UK as a migrant and the number leaving) was estimated by the ONS to be 212,000. Recent trends in overall migration are shown in Figure 1.

Although public attitudes to immigration can vary according to which type of migrant is being discussed, overall, 77% of the public now want to see a reduction in immigration.⁷ Separate research carried out by the

Figure 1: Net migration to the UK, all routes and nationalities, rolling 12-month periods



Long-term international migration

■ Immigration ■ Emigration ■ Net migration

Source: Office for National Statistics

⁵ OECD (2013) *Education at a Glance 2013*, available at: http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2013/distribution-of-foreign-students-in-tertiary-education-by-country-of-destination-2011_eag-2013-graph152-en

⁶ Economist/Ipsos MORI April 2014 Issues Index: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3373/EconomistIpsos-MORI-April-2014-Issues-Index.aspx>

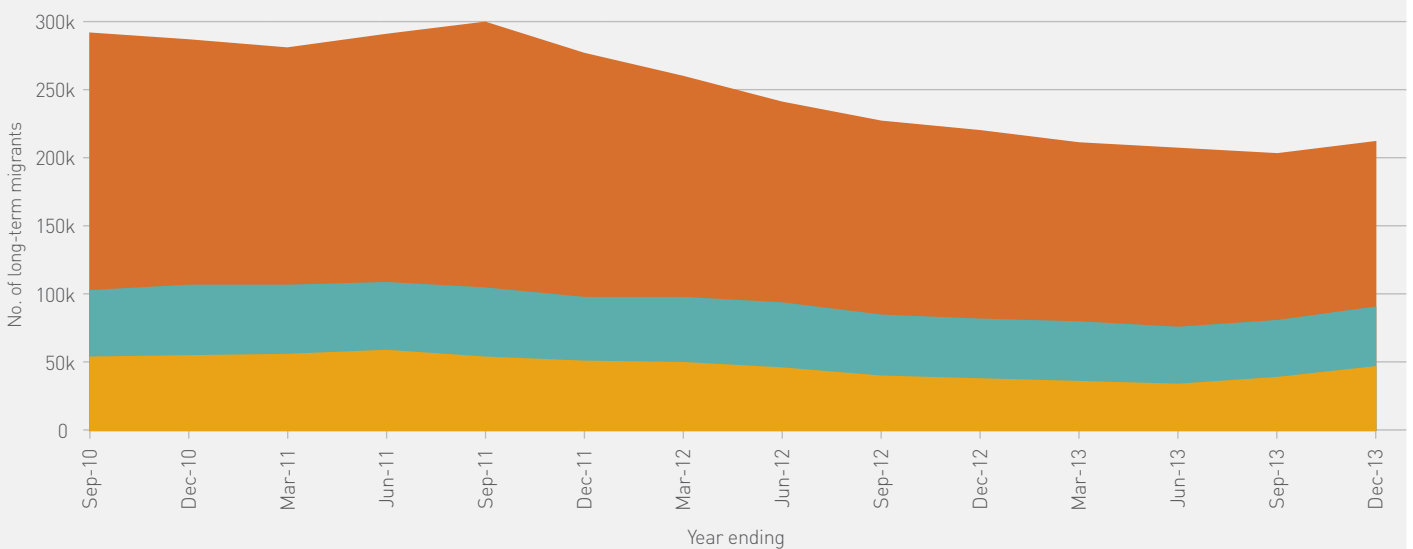
⁷ British Social Attitudes Survey, NatCen, 7 January 2014, available at: <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2014/january/more-than-3-in-4-want-reduction-in-immigration/>

Migration Observatory in 2011 showed that there is majority support for reducing immigration of low-skilled workers (64%), extended family members (58%), and asylum seekers (56%), whilst there is minority support for reducing immigration of high-skilled workers (32%) and university students (31%).⁸

Whilst the latest net migration statistics suggest that the most common reason for migration to the UK is for work, among non-EU migrants, study remains by far the most common migration route into the UK. Up until the year ending September 2012, net migration was estimated to have been falling. Non-EU immigration to the UK for the purpose of study was also estimated to have fallen during the period 2010 to 2012 and continued to fall since: falling from 180,000 in 2011 to 122,000 in 2013.

It is therefore important to develop a greater understanding of the journeys undertaken by international students in the UK; their expected lengths of stay while studying; the numbers undertaking post-study work; the numbers who end up settling in the UK for family reasons; and the level of recorded departures.

Figure 2: IPS estimates of non-EU immigration to the UK by reason for arrival (rolling 12-month periods)



Main reason for migration

Study Work Accompany/Join

Source: Office for National Statistics

Note: Within each release there are also a number of immigrants whose reason for coming to the UK is listed as 'other', 'not stated' or 'going home to live'. In the year to December 2013 this totalled around 9,000, and around 14,000 in the year to December 2012.

⁸ Migration Observatory (2011) *Thinking Behind the Numbers: Understanding Public Opinion on Immigration in Britain*, available at <http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/migobs/Report%20-%20Public%20Opinion.pdf>

2. EXISTING DATA ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Current data sources relating to student migration provide useful and detailed information, but they also have considerable limitations.

They provide details of the 'migration' journeys of international students that come to the UK. Table 1 provides an overview of current data sources published by the Home Office, the ONS and HESA relating to international students. Some HEIs also collect additional data for their own internal purposes such as alumni records – the commission considered whether this data could help inform the picture in future.

It is important to note that many of the sources described in Table 1 cover all international students in the UK – not just those in higher education – whereas students included within HESA's records are those enrolled within higher education providers only.

HESA therefore covers a subset of the total international student population.

Those sources highlighted in blue refer to students enrolled in higher education only. Those in black refer to all international students. It should be noted that even within higher education there can be additional differences in coverage, such as between public and privately-funded institutions.

Table 1: Sources of data on international students

Publisher	Data release	What is measured	Limitations of the data measured
Office for National Statistics	Migration Statistics Quarterly Report	Migration of individuals into and out of the UK, by reason of migration, eg formal study, and region of citizenship. Statistics are largely based on the International Passenger Survey results, and are used to produce estimates of net migration.	Until recently, data on emigration was only available by 'reason for leaving the UK'. As international students are unlikely to state that they are leaving the UK for 'study', but are perhaps more likely to state 'work' or 'family' reasons, it has not been possible to trace student emigration patterns.
	Labour Force Survey	Employment circumstances of the UK population. Data is also collected on a respondent's nationality. At the Home Office's request, data is also now collected on the reason why migrants first came to the UK, to provide some alignment with visa information (not yet published).	In terms of coverage, the survey tracks persons normally resident in private households. Those who live in communal establishments (eg university halls of residence) are included by proxy in private household responses.
Home Office	Immigration statistics	<p>Visa applications by education sector, visas issued (by type and holder's country of nationality), and extensions of stay.</p> <p>Data is also produced on arrivals and admissions into the UK by reason of arrival, eg study.</p> <p>The Home Office also provides data through the <i>Migrant Journey</i> and extensions analysis on numbers of students who subsequently switch into work or marriage categories, although it is not possible to separately identify HEI students within the data. Separate data is also available on student visitors.</p>	Visa issuances do not necessarily correlate with final enrolments at a UK institution. Some applicants for visas may have decided to study in other countries, for example the United States. The Home Office's current administrative systems do not collect data on when student visa holders leave the UK.
Higher Education Statistics Agency	Students in Higher Education Institutions	<p>Record of all students registered at reporting HEIs for a given academic year, including individuals' country of domicile.</p> <p>Record of all student qualifiers within a given academic year, and those who drop out.</p>	<p>It is not possible to determine when each student included in HESA's records arrived in the UK, nor when they leave. Supplementary data is needed to estimate how many of those recorded as completing a degree secured an extension of stay for further study, work, or family reasons. An unknown number of those recorded as domiciled outside the EU have right of abode in the UK without a visa.</p> <p>HESA data does not cover all students studying higher education in the UK.</p>
	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education	<p>What leavers of HE do after they qualify from their course, eg further study, employed, unemployed. Data is collected in two parts, asking leavers what they did six months after qualifying from their course, as well as three and a half years after. Non-EU students are now included in these surveys.</p>	There is currently no published HESA data available on what paths non-EU students take after completing their studies. Whilst non-EU students are now included in this survey, (as of 2011-12), surveying of these leavers for 2011-12 and 2012-13 is seen as a pilot. HESA has not published any data for 2011-12 due to the low and highly variable response rate across HEIs.
Higher education institutions	Alumni surveys	Certain surveys may request information on destinations of international alumni, eg their employment details, location of employment.	Possible inconsistencies between the types of information collected via different institutional surveys may limit the value of such data.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT JOURNEY – AREAS OF FOCUS

From arrival to departure, there is no single path followed by all international students that come to the UK.

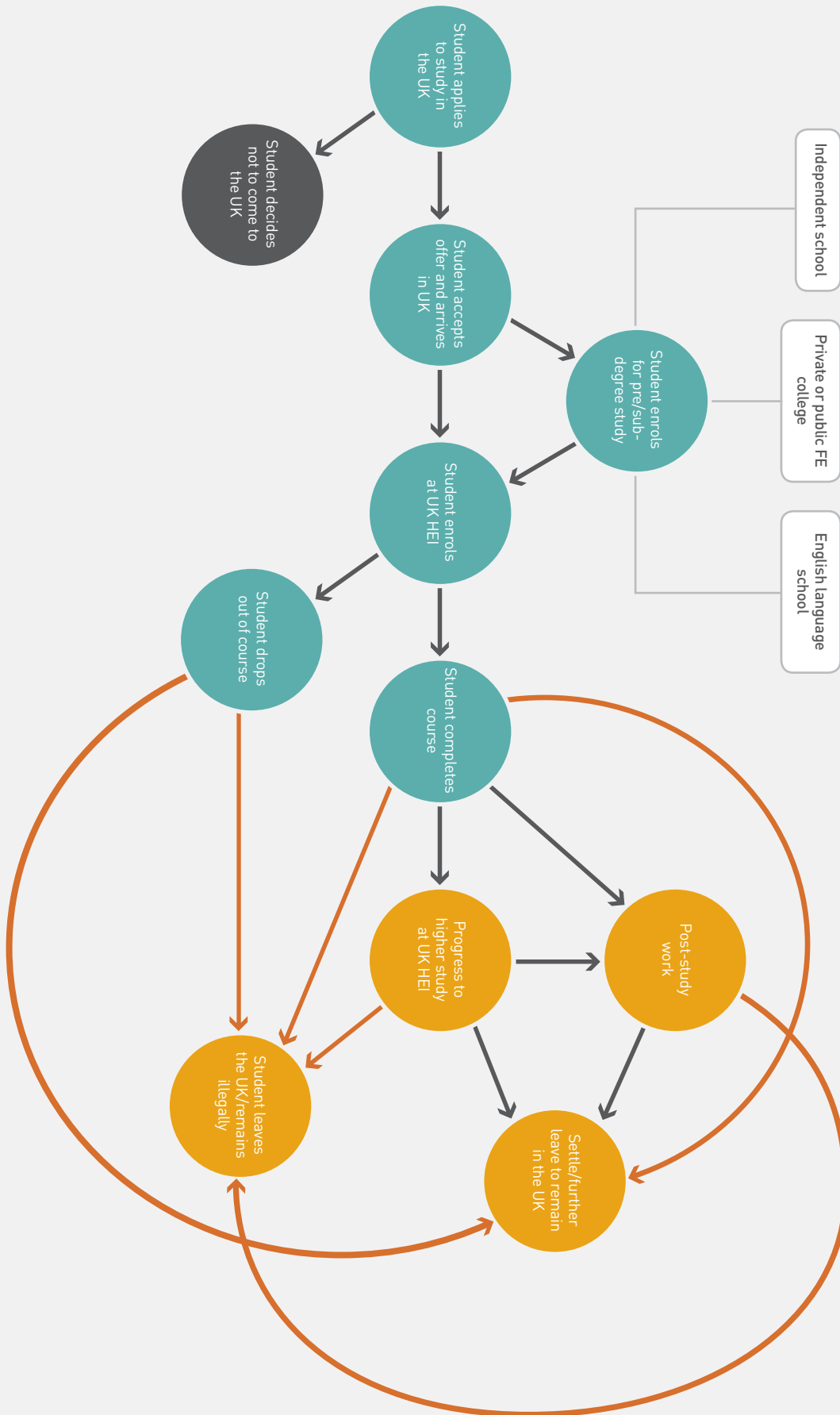
This poses a considerable data challenge and also leads to variation in the length of time for which students remain in the UK.

This report will focus on analysing existing and new sources of data identified by the commission to highlight what the data does tell us about each stage of the international student journey and where information gaps exist. Figure 3 shows the potential stages of the international student journey.

Table 2: Mapping international students' journeys through the UK

Student's activity	Questions to be answered	Data sources analysed to inform the debate
Apply to study in the UK	How many non-EU students apply to the UK HEIs?	Home Office visa applicant statistics; UCAS applicant statistics
Intend to arrive in the UK	How many non-EU students actually intend to take up their confirmed place on a course in the UK?	Home Office visa applicant statistics; UCAS acceptance data
Arrive in the UK as a student	How many of those visa applicants actually come to the UK?	ONS International Passenger Survey, Home Office Tier 4 admissions data and Tier 4 visas granted data
Enrol on pathway course before HEI	How many non-EU students arrive at a HEI after completing a pre-degree level course within the UK? How many arrive from UK independent schools and English language schools?	Data collected from pathway providers in the UK, independent schools, FE colleges; some HESA data
Enrol at HEI	How many non-EU students enrol in UK HEIs?	HESA student record; HEI admissions data
Progress to higher level of study	How many non-EU undergraduates remain in the UK to study at postgraduate level? How many non-EU postgraduates remain in the UK to study?	HESA student record; HEI admissions data
Complete course/drop out	How many students qualify from their course, and how many drop out?	HESA data on qualifiers and non-completers; Home Office reporting data
Undertake post-study work	How many students switch into a work-based (or other) category after graduating?	Home Office statistics on extensions of stay; analysis of HEIs' alumni surveys; HESA's Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey
Depart from the UK	How many students leave the UK and when? How many settle in the UK?	ONS International Passenger Survey (IPS) findings on emigration; HEIs' alumni data; HESA's data on qualifications gained by non-EU students and the DLHE survey; Home Office statistics

Figure 3: Mapping international students' journeys through the UK



4. HOW MANY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS COME TO THE UK?

The first area of measurement in student immigration relates to the number of entries into the UK, and there are various existing data sources to draw upon to estimate these.

How many non-EU students apply to UK higher education institutions?

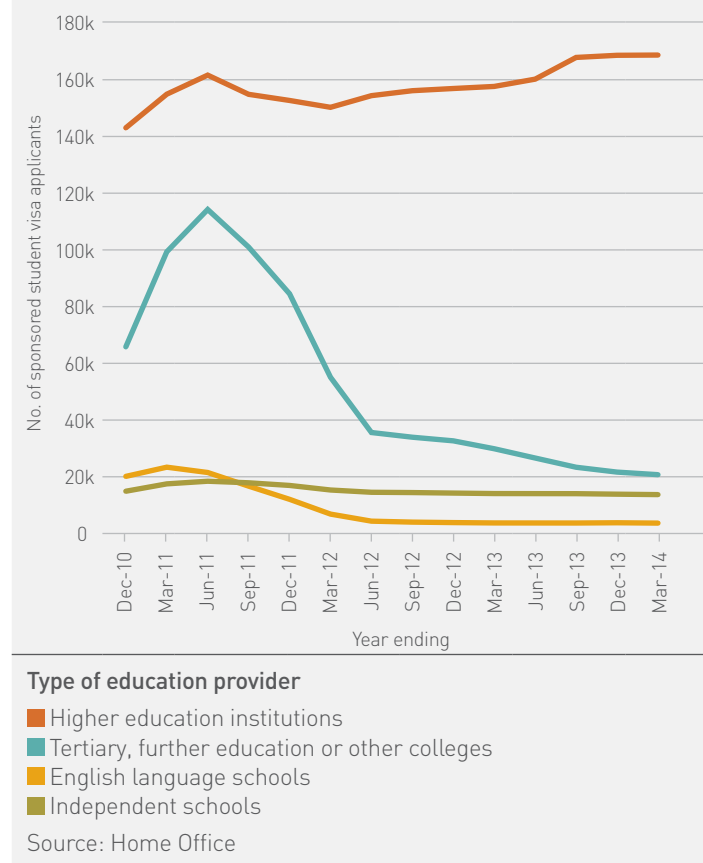
The Home Office produces quarterly statistical reports on the total number of student visas issued, both to out-of-country applicants and to those already in the UK seeking to extend their stay. These reports cover all students, and do not themselves identify how many visas are issued to prospective HEI students.

However, separate data is published on the numbers of prospective students who have been accepted for study by different categories of UK education provider. This relates to sponsored students applying for their visa out-of-country, and information is available at a more disaggregated level. The most recent data, for the year to March 2014, shows that HEI-sponsored applications account for the majority of all sponsored study applications (168,075 applications)⁹. Figure 4 shows how the number of applicants has changed over time.

The Home Office's quarterly release also contains details on sponsored applicants' nationalities. If taken alongside other research, this may, in future, allow for a better understanding of migration trends and their impact. For example, Home Office research (*Migrant Journey: Second report*¹⁰) has shown that students of some nationalities are more likely than others to pursue post-study work opportunities after graduating.

In addition, students of certain nationalities are more likely to come for a shorter period of postgraduate study or to undertake both undergraduate and postgraduate studies. These trends can have implications for net migration and for understanding the length of time students may remain in the UK. Developing a better understanding of these trends may well help to predict the likely impact of these students both economically and on public services.

Figure 4: Sponsored student visa applicants, by type of education provider, rolling 12-month periods



⁹ Immigration statistics, January to March 2014, Home Office 2014, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-january-to-march-2014/immigration-statistics-january-to-march-2014>

¹⁰ Home Office (2011) *Migrant Journey: Second report*, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/migrant-journey-research-report-57>

The Home Office quarterly release shows that, in the year to March 2014, 168,075 prospective students were accepted into a UK HEI and subsequently applied for a visa, but it does not tell us how many applicants actually ended up using their visa to travel to the UK. Although some of those issued with a visa may end up not using it, there is a close correlation between the number of Tier 4 visas issued and Tier 4 student admissions at the UK border.¹¹

Published Home Office data shows that (using rolling 12-month periods), from the year ending September 2012 onwards, 90% of decisions on all Tier 4 entry clearance visa applications have been to grant a visa. Over the same period the statistics also show that HEI-sponsored applications have increased from 74% of Tier 4 sponsored applications to 80%. Separate analysis undertaken by the Home Office based on a sample of students is consistent with these figures, showing that around one in ten HEI-sponsored applicants do not enter the UK.¹²

The data on HEI-sponsored entry clearance visas only covers those applying from outside the UK; separate data is published on HEI-sponsored extensions of leave to study in the UK. UCAS data also provides an indicator of potential arrivals in the UK via its regular data releases on the number of non-EU student applicants. The End of Cycle report for 2013 showed that the number of applicants for autumn 2013 commencement was 70,554, up from 63,022 two years earlier.¹³ However, UCAS only covers applicants to full-time undergraduate courses, whereas most international students come to the UK to study at postgraduate level. A 2010 report issued by i-graduate and the UK Higher Education International Unit looked at application methods of international students. Of those surveyed, almost half applied directly to their selected institution (be it online or written). Around one in four (28%) applied via UCAS or UKPASS.¹⁴

How many non-EU students arrive in the UK?

The ONS publishes quarterly reports containing estimates of long-term immigration to the UK; emigration from the UK; and consequently, net migration. These estimates are largely based on the International Passenger Survey (IPS), a questionnaire operated by the ONS whereby passengers arriving at (and departing from) UK airports, ferry ports and the Channel Tunnel are interviewed in relation to their travel intentions. Those interviewees who state that their intention is to reside in, or depart from, the UK for a period of 12 months or more are classified as long-term migrants in accordance with the UN definition.

Within the IPS it is possible to disaggregate by reason for migrating (eg to study, to work, to accompany a family member), as well as region of citizenship (eg EU, Old Commonwealth, New Commonwealth, and 'Other Foreign'), but, as it is a sample survey, further detailed breakdowns are not usually possible. According to the ONS, in the year to December 2013, 122,000 people from outside the EU came to the UK to study for a period of 12 months or more. This was down from a peak of 196,000 in the year to September 2011. A further 40,000 EU citizens also came to study.¹⁵

¹¹ See chart 'Long-term trends in student immigration' at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-january-to-march-2014/immigration-statistics-january-to-march-2014#study-1>

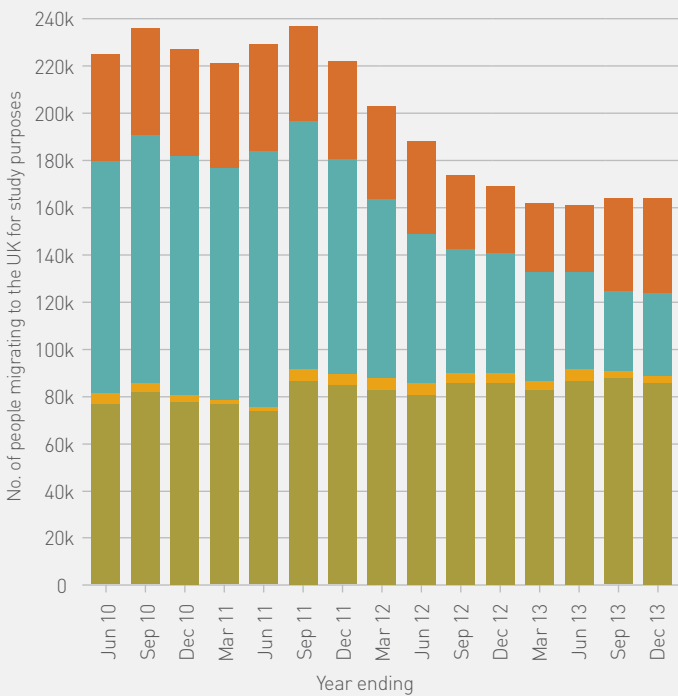
¹² Home Office (2010) *Overseas students in the immigration system: types of institution and levels of study*, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257178/overseas-students-report.pdf

¹³ UCAS (2013) *2013 Application Cycle: End of Cycle Report*, available at: <http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-2013-end-of-cycle-report.pdf>

¹⁴ i-graduate and UK Higher Education International Unit (2010) *A UK Guide to Enhancing the International Student Experience*, available at: http://heglobal.international.gbtesting.net/media/531381/webversion_final-1.pdf

¹⁵ Office for National Statistics (2014) *Provisional Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) Estimates, Year Ending December 2013*, available at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/re/migration1/migration-statistics-quarterly-report/may-2014/provisional-13q4.xls>

Figure 5: IPS estimates of migration to the UK for the purpose of study, by citizenship, 2010–2013, rolling 12-month periods



Citizenship

- EU
- New Commonwealth
- Old Commonwealth
- Other foreign

Source: Office for National Statistics

These figures are useful as an indication of student immigration. However, there are limitations to this data-set. It is not an actual count of people arriving, it is an estimate based on a sample and therefore subject to sampling variability. Around 4,500 migrants are interviewed as part of the IPS over a 12-month period. ONS estimates, for example, that we can be 95% confident that the estimate of non-EU students arriving in the UK in the year to December 2013 is in the range of 109,000 to 135,000.

The ONS and the Home Office have held discussions on the potential for e-Borders (now Semaphore) data to enhance the accuracy of migrant counts produced from the IPS. This new programme involves airlines and other carriers submitting data on their passengers to the Home Office prior to travel. Joint research concluded that, whilst there is potential for this data to improve the understanding of migration and population statistics, it 'cannot replace the IPS as it does not collect all the information required by users of migration statistics', including a person's main reason for migration.¹⁶ This conclusion was reiterated by the UK Statistics Authority in 2013: 'the e-Borders programme is insufficient to provide direct statistical measurement of migration flows'.¹⁷

The IPS figures include students of all types, and no distinction is set out in the published totals about which types of institutions such migrants will be attending, or their level of study. Furthermore, the IPS, as a measure of long-term migration, will not include many Masters students who come to the UK to study for less than one year. (In producing estimates of long-term international migration, the ONS does make allowances for migrant/visitor switchers – those who originally intended to migrate for less than/more than 12 months but whose circumstances change.)¹⁸

¹⁶ Office for National Statistics, *Delivering statistical benefits from e-Borders*, available at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/imps/latest-news/delivering-statistical-benefits-from-e-borders/delivering-statistical-benefits-from-e-borders-downloadfile.pdf>

¹⁷ UK Statistics Authority (2013) *UK Statistics Authority response to migration statistics*, available at: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/letter-from-sir-andrew-dilnot-to-bernard-jenkin-mp-uksaresponse-hc-523-06122013.pdf>

¹⁸ Office for National Statistics (2014) *Long-Term International Migration Estimates: Methodology Document, 1991 onwards*, available at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/population-and-migration/international-migration-methodology/long-term-international-migration-estimates-methodology.pdf>

5. WHERE DO THEY STUDY AND HOW LONG DO THEY STAY FOR?

How many non-EU students arrive at a higher education institution (after pre-degree study) who are already in the UK?

Many international students apply to UK HEIs from within the UK, because they are undertaking pre-degree level study. This poses significant challenges in data terms as these students may be studying at a range of education providers from independent schools, private colleges, and embedded pathway colleges to English language schools.

Research undertaken by The Knowledge Partnership estimated that as many as half of international student applications made to British universities for undergraduate study originate from within the UK. This demonstrates that the 'UK-based international market' is an important market for institutions seeking to recruit international students to undergraduate programmes. However, the research does not tell us anything about the location of students applying for postgraduate level study, who make up the majority of international students.¹⁹

Prior location within the UK may be for a variety of reasons, including previous education or family being based in the UK through other immigration routes. This offers one of the many potential deviations from the standard journey model previously set out. Adding to this complexity, students enrolled in UK education prior to higher education may have no plans to continue into higher education or change their aspirations; their international student journey would focus on only the early part of the journey shown in Figure 3, previously.

Figure 6 (next page) shows just some of the myriad of potential routes of higher education-aspirant non-EU students.

The commission spoke with several HEIs to explore whether applicant or enrolment data might usefully identify a student's geographical location prior to commencing their course. While most universities could access this data, it was cumbersome to extrapolate. Few hold the data in uniform systems, sometimes even within their own institution. It is unlikely that the data would be available in readily comparable forms for any national exercise. It is further complicated by the fact that, as we have seen, students can apply to HEIs through various means, eg via UCAS, direct application or a progression arrangement. Each of these application routes will result in the capture of different information. Most institutions felt that, although interesting, the effort involved in developing this data would not be worthwhile.

¹⁹ The Knowledge Partnership, *UK-Based International Undergraduate Market Report 2013*, available at: http://www.theknowledgepartnership.com/uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/0342_UK-Int-UG-Student-Report_updated_1200dpi.pdf

Figure 6: International applicant routes into UK higher education



Note: The examples in this figure are not exhaustive.

Application routes for international students are further complicated by the different systems in place at different institutions. Prospective students may articulate to a UK HEI through a direct progression arrangement, or apply using UCAS or an institution's own application system.

Applicant location

■ Overseas prior to HE study ■ In UK prior to HE study

How many non-EU students arrive at a higher education institution after completing a pre-degree course in the UK?

There are a complex variety of pathways into higher education in the UK. Pathways solely focusing on academic progression may or may not operate under a formal relationship between a higher education institution and an individual provider of pre-degree level study. The most common formalised pathway agreements between HEIs and pathway providers for students are set out in Table 3 (grouped into generic terms rather than listing the names that each provider attributes to each model).

Table 3: Pathway provider routes into higher education through formal agreements

Entry at various levels (including to pathway providers' baccalaureate or foundation study provision)	Entry into Year 1	Entry after Year 1 (eg by passing Year 1 undergraduate, or progressing directly into postgraduate study)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English language provision • GCSE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Baccalaureate • Foundation studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation Year 1 • Graduate diploma

Different pathway routes have different visa implications, and will result in different amounts of time spent studying in the UK. For example, a required pre-sessional English language course may last between three and 40 weeks, whereas a pre-degree Foundation course could run for a full academic year; bolting the two together could total almost two years of study before even entering higher education.

Previous analysis by UUK in 2011 estimated that around 40% of non-EU HEI students had arrived after completing a course at a pathway provider in the UK. As part of the commission's work, further research was undertaken to identify whether or not this figure could be updated.

Pathway providers

At present, there is no central record kept of the number of students enrolled within pathway providers. The commission contacted five of the largest providers of pathway courses in the UK. Between them, these companies have arrangements with over 60 UK HEIs.

The data shared by one significant provider showed that over 25,000 non-EEA students were enrolled in its colleges across the UK between 2009–10 and 2012–13. Of these, just over half were studying English, with the remaining number enrolled on other pathway courses. The average duration of these courses was 11 weeks for English language and one academic year for all others.

Across the four cohorts examined, on average, 67% of all the non-EEA students enrolled progressed to study at a UK HEI – for either undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications. It is difficult to know whether this can be taken as indicative of sector trends, as it relates to just one provider's data. It would be helpful if this data was available for all providers and held centrally, which would inform understanding about likely stay periods for international students including pre-higher education experience, and the likely numbers moving into higher education.

Another set of data from pathway providers showed that in 2009–10 there were a total of 12,586 students enrolled across five programmes. By March 2011, 10,199 of these students had progressed on to UK HEIs. Others were deemed to either still be in the pathway programme at that point, or may have left the UK.²⁰

To inform this picture further, UUK recently asked its members' institutions whether they retain centralised data on the previous UK study of international entrants. Thirty-five institutions confirmed that they held this data. These respondents reported that between 0% and 75% of entrants had enrolled via another UK education provider. The median response cited was 15% of entrants. The actual percentage may well be higher or lower as UUK's members were under no obligation to declare this information as part of the survey. More recently, *Times Higher Education* collected data from pathway providers on student enrolments in the UK. In 2011, a study estimated that these pathway providers accounted for around half of the total market.²¹

²⁰ Written evidence submitted by university pathway providers to the Scottish Affairs Committee, 2011: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmsscota/912/912vw15.htm>

²¹ CentreForum (2011) *Pathway to prosperity: making student immigration work for universities and the economy*, available at: <http://www.centreforum.org/assets/pubs/pathways-to-success.pdf>

Table 4: Students enrolled within pathway providers

Pathway provider	Students enrolled in the UK
INTO University Partnerships	4,000
Kaplan International Colleges	4,000
Navitas	2,400
Study Group	c. 5,000
Cambridge Education Group	Figure not available

Source: *Times Higher Education*

Independent schools

Another pathway into higher education is via one of the many independent schools teaching non-EEA pupils. In January 2014 there were 24,391 non-British pupils enrolled within Independent Schools Council (ISC) schools, whose parents live overseas, as well as a further 11,329 foreign students whose parents live in the UK.²²

Within this cohort, 4,791 were from Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China) and 4,753 were from mainland China.

An ISC survey from 2011 showed that 77% of international pupils enrolled in an ISC school go on to universities in the UK, equal to around 8,000 entrants.²³

Other pathways

Other pathways include further education colleges, private colleges and English language schools. In the absence of centrally-held data, research has been carried out for the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills in an attempt to estimate the number of international students within UK-based further education and privately-funded providers of higher education.

Conclusions were based on surveys of providers, and included the following:

- There were 13,333 Tier 4 learners enrolled in further education colleges in England in 2010–11. This was estimated to fall to 9,494 by 2012–13.²⁴
- There were 160,000 higher education learners within privately-funded higher education providers in 2011–12. 41% of identified learners were from non-EU countries.²⁵

A considerable level of guesswork is still required when analysing the size of the further education and private higher education markets in the UK, which inhibits the debate on student immigration. Based on the above analysis, it is clear that various estimates can be made around the percentage of HEI entrants that come directly from pathway programmes already in the UK. However, this information is not collected centrally, and so, at present, only broad estimates are possible.



Recommendation 1

The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills should work with those education providers not included within HESA's records to address the data gap between HEI student numbers and others. Commission members should encourage such providers to engage with data provision in order to inform the debate about international student pathways.

²² Independent Schools Council (2014) *ISC Census 2014*, available at: [http://www.isc.co.uk/Resources/Independent%20Schools%20Council/Research%20Archive/Annual%20Census/2014/ISC_Census_2014_11Apr14%20v2%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.isc.co.uk/Resources/Independent%20Schools%20Council/Research%20Archive/Annual%20Census/2014/ISC_Census_2014_11Apr14%20v2%20(2).pdf)

²³ ISC (2011) *Overseas Pupils in ISC Schools*, available at: http://www.isc.co.uk/Resources/Independent%20Schools%20Council/Research%20Archive/Bulletin%20Articles/2011_06_Bulletin_OverseasPupilsInISCschools_KD.pdf

²⁴ Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (2013) *Evaluation of the value of Tier 4 international students to FE colleges and the UK economy*, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182049/13-767-evaluation-of-value-of-tier-4-international-students-to-fe-colleges-and-uk-economy.pdf

²⁵ Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (2013) *Privately funded providers of higher education in the UK*, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/207128/bis-13-900-privately-funded-providers-of-higher-education-in-the-UK.pdf

How many non-EU students enrol in UK higher education institutions?

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects comprehensive data on all students and staff within 161 higher education institutions in the UK. These statistics are provided to government and other funding bodies to support regulation and funding of higher education providers. The HESA student record for a given academic year contains useful information on the numbers of non-EU students enrolled. This includes their country of domicile, their age, subject of study, and the expected duration of the course currently being studied.

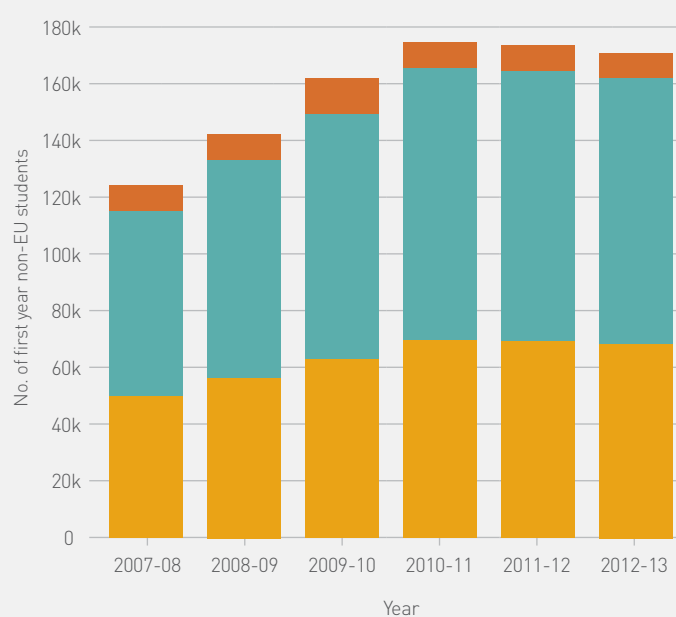
Records show that 171,910 non-EU students were recorded by HESA as starting a course in the academic year 2012–13.²⁶ There continues to be a greater number of international students starting courses at postgraduate level (59%) than at undergraduate level (41%). China continues to send more students to the UK than any other country: one in three non-EU student entrants now come from China. This is consistent with Home Office data on study visas granted, with Chinese nationals accounting for 31% of study visas issued for the year ending March 2014 (main applicants).

In 2011–12 and 2012–13, HESA records show that the number of non-EU students commencing courses at UK HEIs declined, especially at postgraduate taught level, where students are most likely to study for one year or less. At undergraduate level, where length of study is typically three years for a first degree, numbers have remained more balanced. At the same time, Home Office data on HEI-sponsored student visa applicants has shown levels of growth.

These trends have implications for the measurement of expected student emigration, as a change in inflow within one year will most likely not be evident in the outflow until some years later. As shown in Figure 7, this decline in enrolments follows growth in preceding years.

The annual collection by HESA means that there are good, historical records available on non-EU HEI entrants. However, the information is not directly comparable to the data covering visas for several reasons.

Figure 7: Non-EU students enrolled onto the first year of their HEI course



Level of study

- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate taught
- Postgraduate research

Source: HESA Student Records, 2007–08 to 2012–13

Firstly, HESA records a student's country of domicile not their visa status, and therefore includes those domiciled outside the EU who have right of abode in the UK and do not require a visa. Non-EU-domiciled students are those whose normal residence prior to commencing their programme of study was outside the EU.

The definition of a non-EU or 'international' student does not necessarily correlate with the number requiring a Tier 4 visa to gain entry clearance to the UK. This can lead to difficulties in matching various data sources on international students.



Recommendation 2

UUK should work with a selection of HEIs to identify the proportion of non-EU student enrolments that require a visa to come to the UK.

²⁶ Higher Education Statistics Agency (2014) *Statistical First Release 197*, available at: <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1897/239/#non-uk>

Secondly, HESA data does not tell us whether or not a student enrolling at a HEI was already in the UK prior to commencing their course. This may contribute to divergence between visa data and HESA data. For example, Home Office data shows that there were 155,877 HEI-sponsored student visa applications in the year to September 2012, whereas HESA's records show that the number of non-EU first-year HEI enrolments in 2012–13 was 171,910. This could be explained by the data-sets counting different groups of students, different definitions and timing differences. For example, Home Office data is based on an applicant's nationality, whereas HESA data is typically based on a student's domicile. Also, visa data refers to those applying out-of-country only, and have shown growth.

There will also be a proportion of HEI-sponsored students applying for a visa who do not come to the UK. However, as already indicated, there is a close correlation between Tier 4 visas granted and Tier 4 admissions at the UK border. Overall, the differences in trends between the two main series are relatively small, as shown in Figure 8.

How many non-EU undergraduates remain in the UK to study at postgraduate level?

It is quite common for international students to enrol on an undergraduate programme in the UK, and then continue studying for a postgraduate qualification. In 2011, UUK carried out an analysis of HESA's student record to identify those non-EU undergraduate students who qualified in 2008–09, and then went on to study for a postgraduate qualification in the following year. Whilst there are limitations to these findings, due to the complex matching required to track individual students' records, the analysis highlighted some interesting trends of relevance to our understanding of the lengths of stay of different international students.

The analysis showed that around one in four (26.5%) non-EU undergraduates remain in the UK to study for a higher qualification immediately after completing their undergraduate course. Such students were therefore likely to have a total expected length of study of four years, although for some it was even longer.

The same analysis also showed that undergraduate students from certain countries are far more likely to remain in the UK for higher study than others. On average, one in four students progressed to higher study, but this increased to one in two for Chinese students (49.5%). By comparison, the percentage of Indian students progressing is relatively low at 15.1%.

An increase in student numbers from a specific country can therefore have implications when considering students' lengths of stay and expected levels of emigration. For instance, the recent pronounced growth in undergraduate enrolments from China has implications given the propensity of Chinese students to progress to postgraduate study and so remain for four years or more.

Figure 8: Number of non-EU student entrants compared to the number of student visa applicants

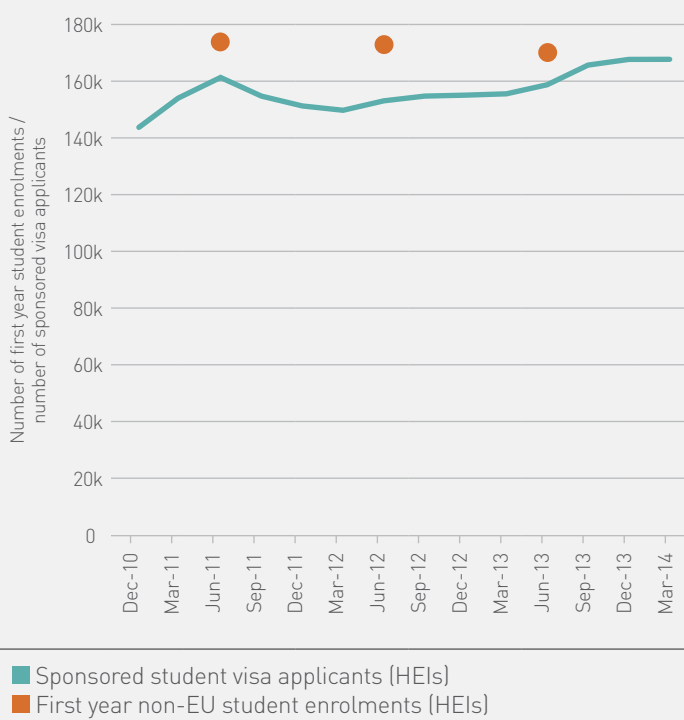
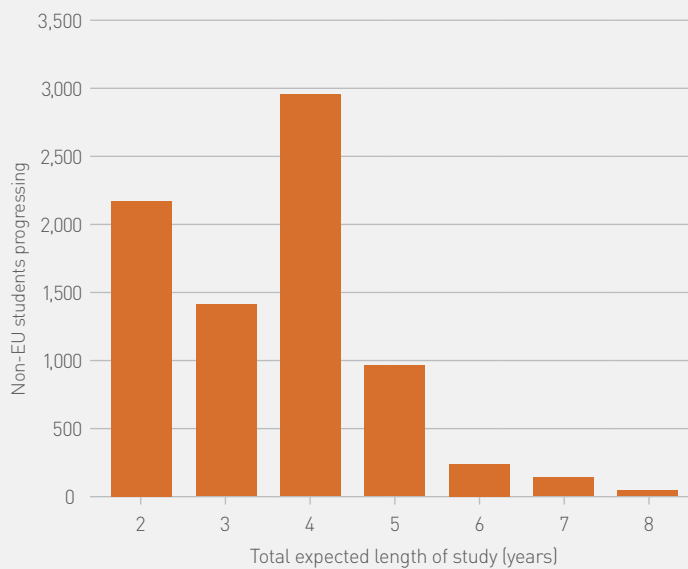
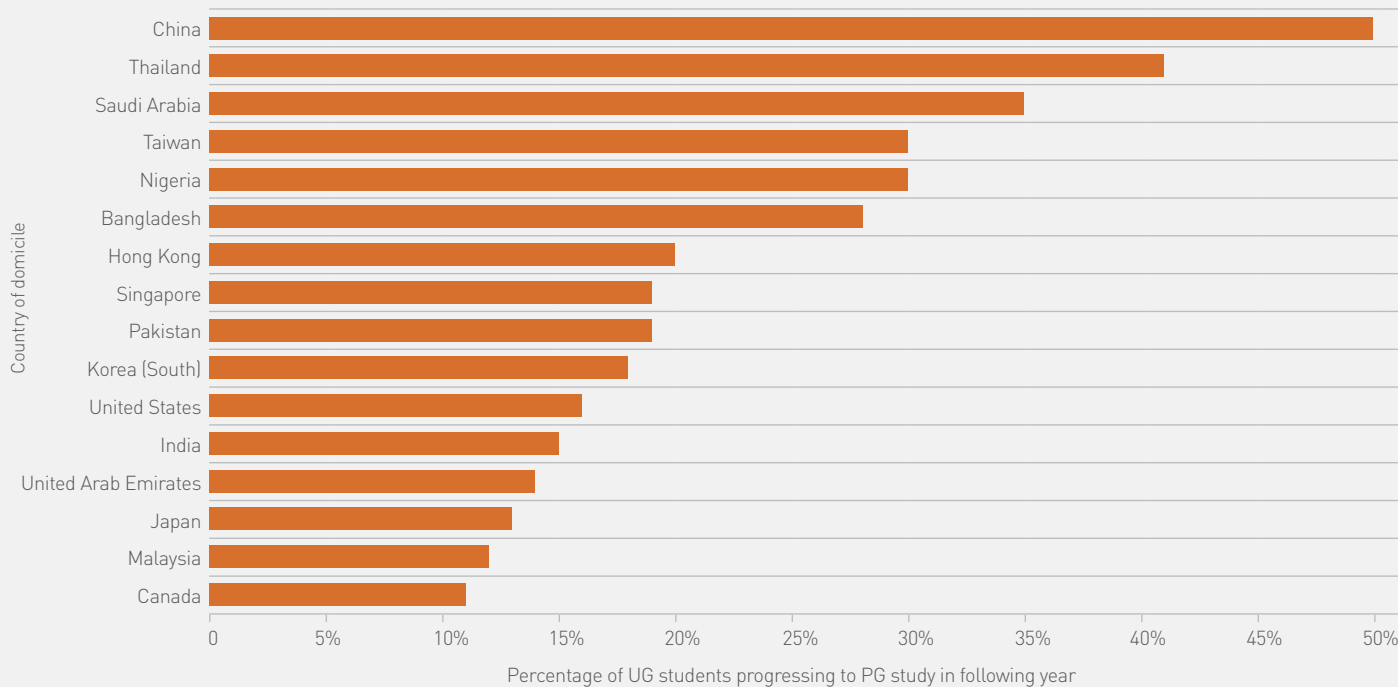


Figure 9: Cohort study: total expected length of study of non-EU undergraduates progressing to postgraduate study in the following year (in years)



Source: HESA, Universities UK (cohort study)

Figure 10: Cohort study: levels of undergraduate students progressing to postgraduate study in the following year, by country of domicile



Source: HESA, Universities UK (cohort study)

An increase in enrolments from a country whose students are likely to study for both an undergraduate and postgraduate qualification whilst in the UK could have a different impact on net migration than an increase from a country whose students are likely to study for shorter periods. For example, in 2012–13, 86% of students from Hong Kong (SAR) were enrolled at undergraduate level, whereas Indian students are more likely to come to the UK for postgraduate study. One influence behind these trends is the differing capacity for higher education within international students' home countries.

Notably, this analysis of the HESA student record is already a few years out of date. Repeating this exercise could help inform our understanding of HEI progression rates.

HESA records the expected duration of non-EU students' HEI courses. As expected, those studying for their first degree are typically expected to study for between three and four years, whilst those studying at taught postgraduate level (typically, although not exclusively, Masters students) are expected to study for around one calendar year. It is worth noting that



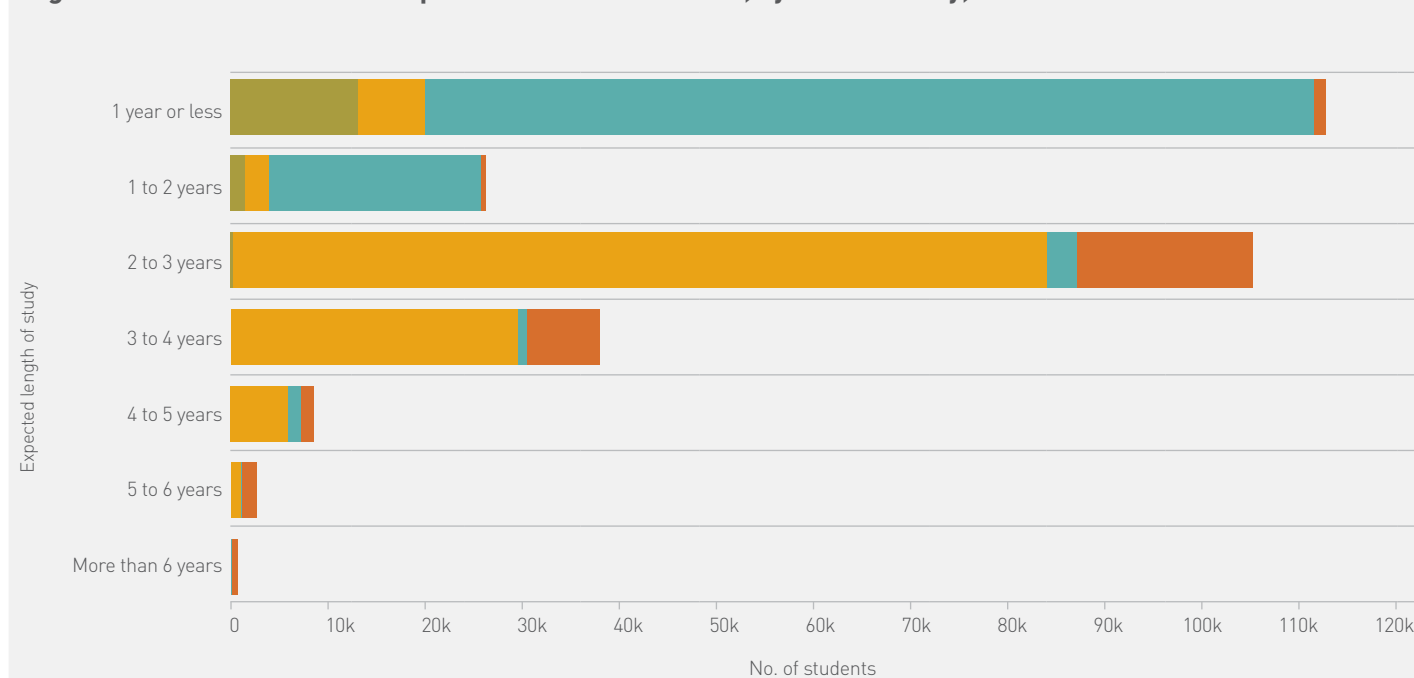
Recommendation 3

UUK should consider repeating its 2011 analysis of HESA data into progression rates and identify trends by students' country of domicile.

students would be excluded from the ONS's counts of long-term migrants if their intended total stay in the UK is less than 12 months.

The most common 'expected length of study' among non-EU students at HEIs is one year or less, mainly due to the high number of postgraduate taught students. This data only covers students' current course. Those who qualify from their course and progress to a higher level of study will obviously have longer total expected lengths of study.

Figure 11: Non-EU students' expected duration of course, by level of study, 2012–13



Level of study

Other undergraduate First degree Postgraduate (Taught) Postgraduate (Research)

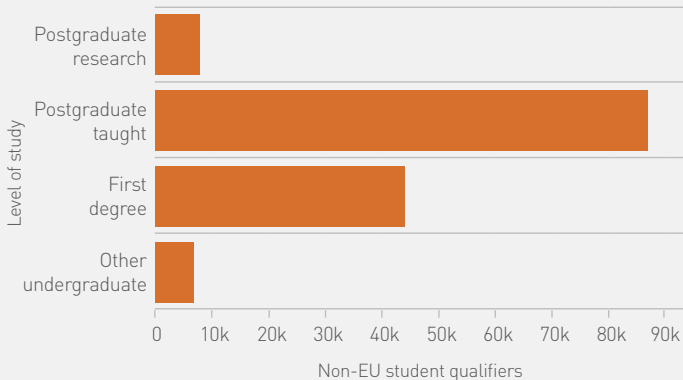
Source: HESA Student Record 2012–13

How many students qualify from their course and how many drop out?

HESA's student record contains information on the number of qualifiers who have completed their studies within a given academic year. This could be useful when considering the numbers who then take up post-study work, or when considering student departures from the UK. In 2012–13 there were 299,970 non-EU students enrolled at UK HEIs. 143,930²⁷ completed their studies that year; those 'qualifiers' could potentially progress to further study, switch to post-study work, switch into a family-based visa category, leave the UK, settle in the UK or remain in the UK illegally. However, a proportion will already have right of abode in the UK and not require a visa to stay in the UK.

In future, information on qualifiers could be analysed alongside the numbers of students extending their student visa or entering employment in the UK.

Figure 12: Non-EU student qualifiers in 2012–13, by level of qualification



Source: HESA Student Record 2012–13

Similar records are kept by HESA on students whose studies ended prematurely, for example due to financial reasons or academic failure. However, the information kept on where such students went next is incomplete, except in instances where the student transferred to another institution, or entered employment.

The Home Office requires various types of information in relation to its oversight of the sponsoring of international students under the terms of a Tier 4 licence. Further use could be made of the following types of information reported to the Home Office by HEIs for audit purposes, for example where students:

- do not enrol for their course
- do not maintain contact
- withdraw from, or defer, their studies
- cease to be sponsored by the HEI for other reasons
- experience a significant change in their circumstances
- complete their course earlier than anticipated

These records could be compared to those kept by HESA, in order to refine estimates of the numbers of HEI students whose studies end prematurely for various reasons.

Home Office research in 2010 analysed the compliance of a sample of non-EEA students studying at universities in terms of whether they were enrolled on a course, had valid leave to remain in the UK or had potentially overstayed their visa. This found that 84% of the sample were enrolled on a course and continuing to study and 2% of the sample were potentially non-compliant with their visas, in that there was no record of them leaving the UK and they did not have valid leave to remain.²⁸ This research provided a useful indicator of levels of non-compliance in the system. However, it is difficult to provide robust estimates of the actual level of non-compliance.

²⁷ Higher Education Statistics Agency (2014) *Statistical First Release 197*, available at: <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1897/239/#quals>

²⁸ Home Office (2010) *Overseas students in the immigration system*, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257178/overseas-students-report.pdf

6. WHAT HAPPENS TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ONCE THEY FINISH THEIR COURSE IN THE UK?

How many students switch into a work-based (or other) visa category after graduating?

Home Office data on grants and refusals of extensions of leave to remain in the UK to study is published on a quarterly basis. New information on extensions by previous category, showing which visa holders switch into the student route and the categories of those who were previously studying, was updated in May 2014. The Home Office is considering how frequently this data might be published in future.

From this new data, it is possible to build a clearer picture of the international student's journey through the immigration system. When considering those in the UK on a student visa, it is possible to identify how many students were:

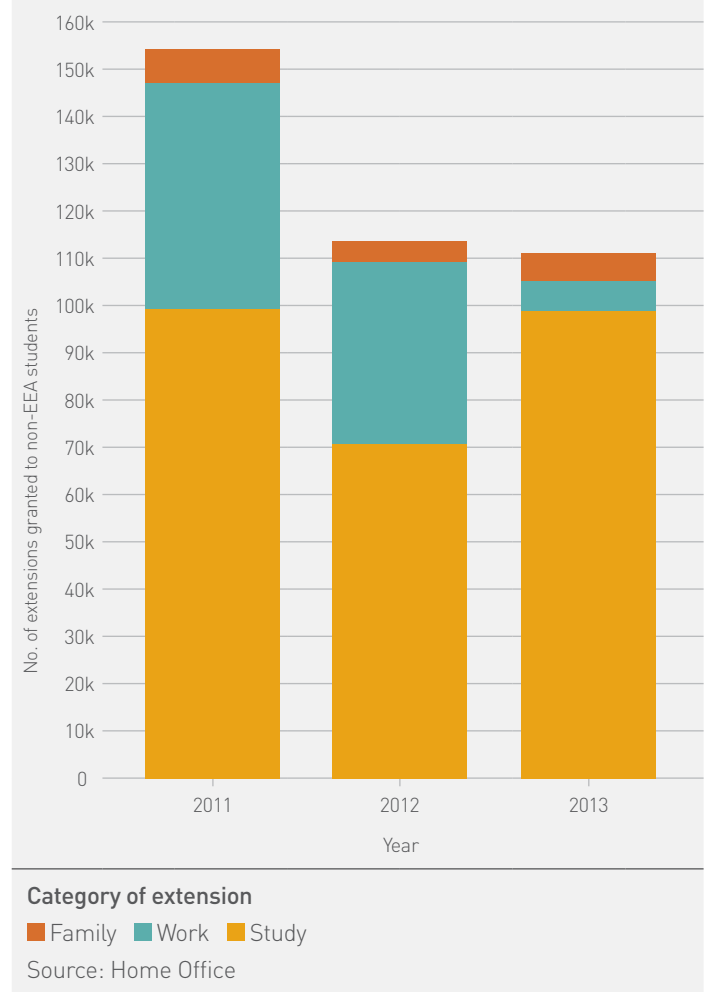
- granted further leave to remain as a student (ie progressed academically or extended their time on an existing course)
- granted a visa in a work-based category (eg post-study work)
- granted a visa in a family-based category (eg to get married)

Although this data covers all sectors, as 80% of out-of-country student visa applicants are sponsored by HEIs, it is reasonable to assume that a large number of these extensions were granted to higher education students.

In 2013, the number of former students granted an extension of stay in the UK was 111,939. The large majority (89%, 99,107) of these were for further leave to remain as a student. There were also 6,238 former students (6%) who switched into a work-based category, and 5,941 (5%) who switched into a family-based category.

In 2013, the number of students extending their leave to remain as a student increased by around 28,000 compared to the previous year, whilst the number switching to a work-based category declined by around 32,000, largely due to a fall in extensions under the Tier 1 post-study category (closed in April 2012 to new applicants), which fell by over 34,000.

Figure 13: Extensions of stay granted to existing non-EEA students, 2011–2013



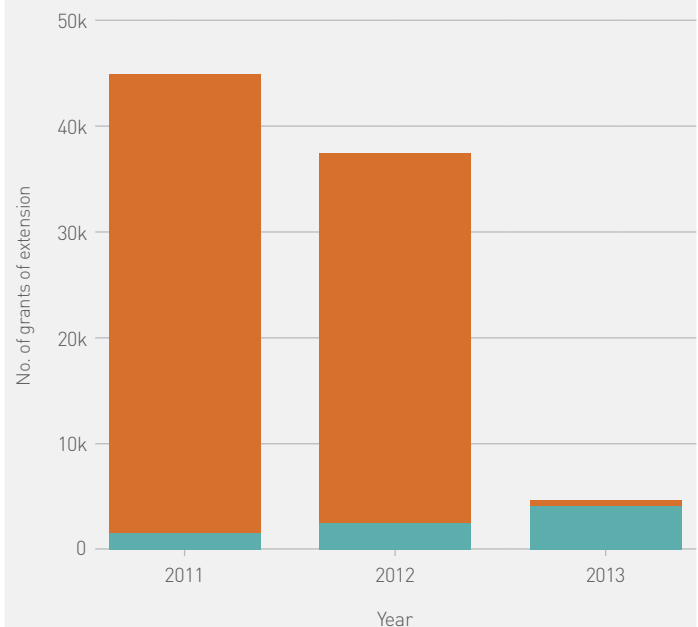
There were fewer grants of extensions to former students in 2012 and 2013, compared to 2011. Much of this could be due to policy changes taking effect during 2012, such as the closure of the Tier 1 Post-Study Work route for most students, the introduction of academic progression and limits on study time, as well as previous falls in grants of study visas. Publishing such data is useful as any visible trends in extensions granted will have implications for the measurement of student emigration, in that, all other things being equal, should fewer graduates apply for post-study work or to extend their studies it could be reasonably assumed that they will depart from the UK earlier.

However, the reduction in student visa extensions seen in 2012 could also be partially explained by procedural rather than behavioural change. For example, in certain circumstances, institutions now issue students with a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) which covers both the pre-sessional course and their main course of degree level study. Previously they may have issued two CAS documents: one for the pre-sessional course and another for the main degree. The second course would require the student to make an extension application and would have been recorded in the extensions data.

Home Office data on extensions offers a useful indication of the scale of Post-Study Work among international students who have completed their course. However, it does not tell us where such students studied, or the occupations they are working in. The closure of the Tier 1 Post-Study Work route, and the restriction of post-study work opportunities to Tier 2, means that, from April 2012, all jobs taken up by non-EU graduates must be at graduate level and must meet minimum salary requirements.

As already highlighted, the number of students granted an extension of stay to work fell by more than 32,000 in 2013 due to previously introduced changes in visa policy. This analysis is a valuable resource in developing understanding of student migrant behaviour and tracking the impact of policy changes on international student journeys.

Figure 14: Number of student visa holders granted extensions of stay via selected work-based routes, 2011–2013



Extension of stay category

■ Tier 1 Post-study ■ Tier 2 General

Source: Home Office

Recommendation 4

The Home Office should publish its data on in-country visa extensions by previous category annually (as standard).

Analysis of Home Office and HESA statistics indicates that the numbers in post-study work differs by students' country of origin. This can be partly evidenced by comparing data on extensions by nationality with original numbers of visas granted, or with the number of non-EU students identified within HESA's student record as qualifying. Whilst not a perfect comparison, analysis suggests that, in 2011, a student was more likely to remain in the UK to work after graduating if they were from the Indian subcontinent and parts of West Africa. In comparison, post-study work was not as common in 2011 among students from major English-speaking countries eg the United States, and parts of the Far East, including China. A separate study by BIS in 2012 showed that Indian and Nigerian students were more likely to switch into a work-based category after graduating than students from China, the United States and Malaysia.²⁹

Such comparisons, although crude, may be useful in future in projecting how many incoming students are likely to seek post-study work opportunities post-graduation.

The commission explored whether HEI-owned alumni data might assist in developing understanding of what happens to international students once they graduate. The commission interviewed eleven UK higher education institutions about their non-EU alumni records, investigating the type of data collected and the methods of doing so.

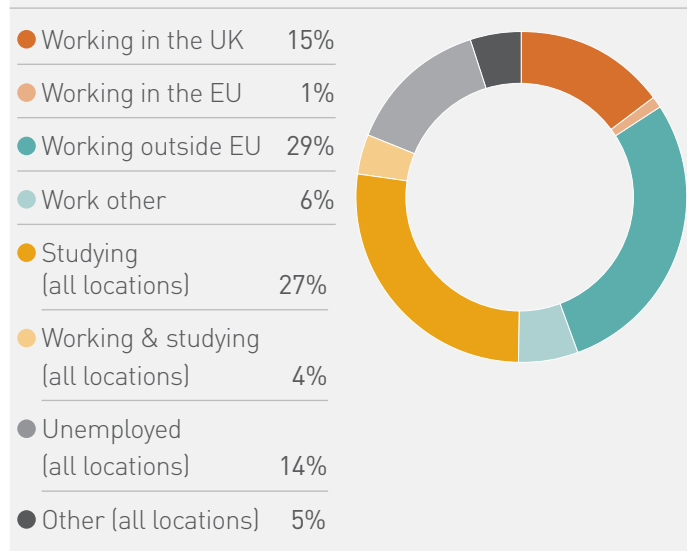
The study showed that HEIs used a number of methods to maintain links with and collect data on their international alumni, including:

- collecting details at graduation ceremonies
- engaging through alumni groups
- LinkedIn and other social media
- data surveys
- other alumni events organised by the HEI

However, the study clearly showed that alumni information is patchy and inconsistent across the sector. This is partly the result of the considerable range of data collection methods used by individual institutions as well as the different levels of priority afforded to collecting such data.

The commission therefore explored whether HESA's annual Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey might be a viable alternative to alumni data. The DLHE provides useful information on the activities, including employment, of graduates six months after their studies have ended. This includes the specific Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code of their employment, and their salary. Until recently, these surveys have captured data on home and EU students only. However, as part of the 2011–12 survey, non-EU graduates were included for the first time. Although response rates were relatively poor (around 27% compared to approximately 77% of home and EU graduates), there are some potentially useful headline results to be taken from the 34,470 responses to the DLHE from non-EU leavers when thinking about student destinations.

Figure 15: What are non-EU students doing six months after completing their course?



Note: The category 'Work other' includes those working part time only and those whose location of employment is unknown.

Source: HESA, Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education, 2011–12

²⁹ Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (2012) *Tracking International Graduate Outcomes*, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32422/12-540-tracking-international-graduate-outcomes-2011.pdf

Of this total, 81% were either still studying, were in employment, or both. Around half (50%) of all respondents were working only. Among this group, of those whose location of employment was known, the majority (around two-thirds) had a job back in their home country (or another non-EU country). One-third of those in employment were working within the UK, whilst a smaller proportion were employed within another EU country.

Despite the first DLHE survey of non-EU students being a pilot exercise with no targeted response rate in place, more than 130 HEIs were successful in receiving responses from non-EU leavers.

However, the low response rate overall means that these findings must be treated with caution, as they may not be representative of the entire non-EU graduate population. Nonetheless, looking further ahead this is a potentially valuable source of information on the migration patterns of international students.

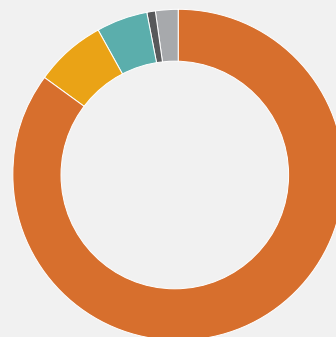
Recommendation 5

HESA should consider developing an action plan to increase Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey response rates for non-EU students in future years, and UUK should produce case studies to analyse what a high response rate to the DLHE might reveal about non-EU student behaviour post-graduation.

At present, the most comprehensive research into the length of time international students spend in the UK is the series of Home Office *Migrant Journey* studies. These studies (released in 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2014) examine cohorts of migrants and track their immigration status five years after entry. The latest version of this report looked at a cohort of people from outside the EEA who entered the UK on a student visa in 2007. The findings suggest that, after five years, the vast majority of students were not identified within the immigration system, in that their leave to remain had expired.³⁰

Figure 16: Immigration status of non EEA students five years after entering the UK in 2007

Expired leave to remain	85%
Switched to work visa	7%
Still studying	5%
Settled permanently	1%
Other	2%



Source: Home Office, *The Migrant Journey*, 2014

The study showed that, of those issued a study visa in 2007, 14% still had valid leave to remain by 2012 (5% were still studying, 7% were working and 2% had a family visa or permit), whilst another 1% had settled permanently in the UK. Although the study cannot show whether an individual is still located in the UK or not, it does show that only 15% of students remained in the immigration system after five years. Of the 85% whose leave to remain had expired, it is not known how many had left the UK, how many had not been captured by the study or how many had remained in the UK without valid leave to remain. The uncertainty over their departure is because the UK does not currently carry out full exit checks, meaning it is not yet possible to provide a comprehensive account of how many visa holders leave the country.

Although these studies do not disaggregate by a student's place of study, as we have seen, HEIs now sponsor the great majority of Tier 4 visas. Separate research from the Home Office suggests that students enrolled at higher education institutions have a low level of non-compliance with their visa requirements (see page 21). However, some non-compliance does occur.

³⁰ Home Office (2014) *Migrant journey: fourth report*, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/migrant-journey-fourth-report/migrant-journey-fourth-report#study>

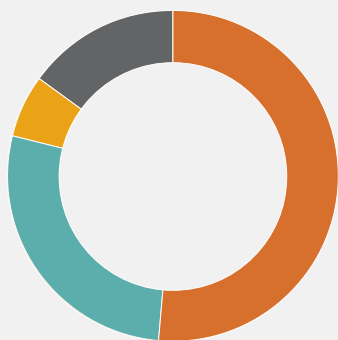
How many students leave the UK and when?

In recent years, one of the International Passenger Survey's (IPS) shortcomings has been that migrants originally arriving in the UK as students were not identifiable within the numbers of people emigrating. This was because emigrants were asked about their reasons for leaving the UK, rather than what their original reason for entering the country was. A new question was introduced in 2012 to try and solve this issue. The results from this additional question within the IPS have been published by the ONS.

In the year to December 2013, 97,000 non-EU citizens were estimated to have emigrated from the UK. Of this total, there were an estimated 50,000 people who had originally come to the UK to study. A similar number is estimated to have emigrated during calendar year 2012.³¹

Figure 17: IPS estimates of non-EU emigrants' original reason for immigrating to the UK, 2012

● Study	49,000
● Work	26,000
● Accompany/Join	6,000
● Other	14,000



Source: Office for National Statistics

Note: An additional 1,000 people were estimated to be 'new emigrants'.

In comparison, the IPS estimate for non-EU student immigration in the year to December 2013 was 122,000. As mentioned previously, it is currently unknown what proportion of student immigrants and emigrants were HEI students, but further information may be available in future.

The publication of this information is an important step forward in the development of an evidence base on student net migration, and will become even more useful as time goes on and more evidence becomes available. Indeed, the ONS recognises some of the limitations and has set out the possibilities of the changes to enhance future understanding:

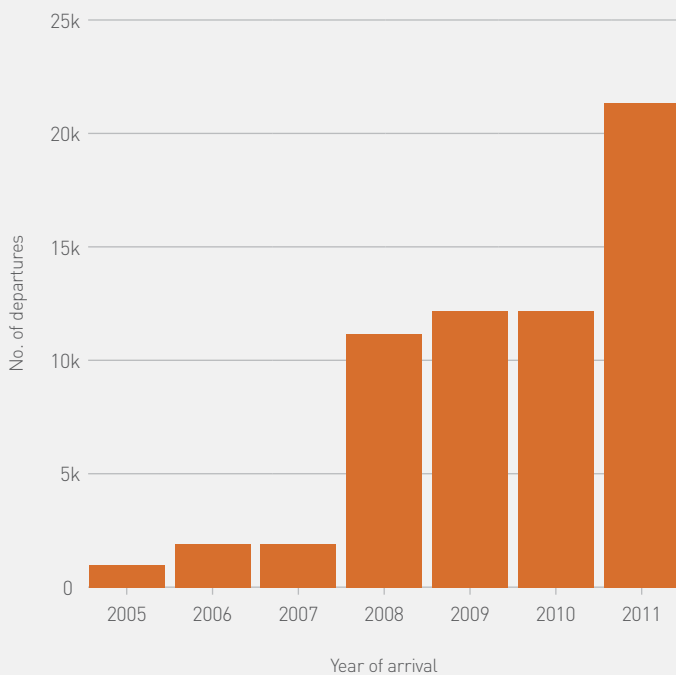
It is not currently possible to calculate a meaningful estimate of net migration for students. This is because 2012 data only show the number of former students who emigrated in 2012. Many students who arrived in previous years may have emigrated before 2012. Over time it will be possible to build up an increasingly detailed picture of what happens to different cohorts of people immigrating as students and subsequently emigrating... This will enable a greater understanding of the effect of flows of students into and subsequently out of the UK.³²

The ONS has analysed the results of former students' emigration by their year of arrival in the UK (although this data is not limited to non-EU students). Of the 67,000 emigrants in 2012 who were former students, the majority had been in the UK for four years or less, with the highest number having arrived in 2011. As noted earlier, there are more international students enrolled at postgraduate taught level than at any other, and such students are most likely to study for one calendar year or less.

³¹ Provisional Long-Term International Migration (LTIM) Estimates, Year Ending December 2013, Office for National Statistics, 2014: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/migration1/migration-statistics-quarterly-report/may-2014/provisional-13q4.xls>

³² Office for National Statistics (2013) *Why did emigrants previously arrive to live in the UK*, available at: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_340787.pdf

Figure 18: IPS estimates of former students emigrating from the UK in 2012, by year of arrival



Source: Office for National Statistics

Note: there were an estimated 3,000 former students who originally immigrated before 2005.

Whilst the largest proportion of all non-EU emigrants were former students, the total number of former student emigrants is lower than the number of student arrivals. However, HESA data shows that the number of non-EU students enrolled in UK HEIs increased by around 73,000 between 2007–08 and 2011–12.

There are several possible explanations as to why there is currently a gap between student inflows and outflows. However, the available data does not enable firm conclusions to be drawn on the extent to which these explanations apply.

A student entering in a previous year could still be in the UK perhaps because he/she:

- is still studying
- has completed their studies and has now switched into a different visa category, or has the right to settlement in the UK
- remains in the UK without legitimate leave to remain

The IPS is also subject to sampling variability. Further changes to the IPS could enhance the understanding of HEI student behaviour and departures.



Recommendation 6

The IPS could helpfully include a question about former students' level of study, in order to disaggregate those leaving the country who were in higher education versus other education providers.

7. EVALUATING STUDENT MIGRATION PATTERNS

How far is it possible to calculate from all the sources available how many non-EU students should have left the UK after completing their higher education studies in 2012?

In an ideal scenario, it should be possible to use the many different data sources examined by this report to calculate the numbers of HEI students that should be leaving the UK within a given year. However, it is very difficult to ascertain exact numbers of higher education students flowing through the system at different points:

- some data sources refer to international higher education students only, while others cover all international students
- some use academic reporting years while others use calendar years
- some capture short periods of study while others only capture students in the UK for more than twelve months

Figure 19 shows what we do and what we do not know in terms of the size of the flows moving through the system following enrolment at a higher education institution. The pattern may not be consistent from one year to the next, and even data on extensions in 2012, for example for work, could be overstated.

Logically, it might be assumed that all international students who qualify and complete their studies in any academic year (measured by HESA) will either: not be subject to immigration control, have leave to remain in the UK (measured by the Home Office), depart (as measured by the International Passenger Survey), or stay illegally. However, there are limitations to all of these data-sets, as follows.

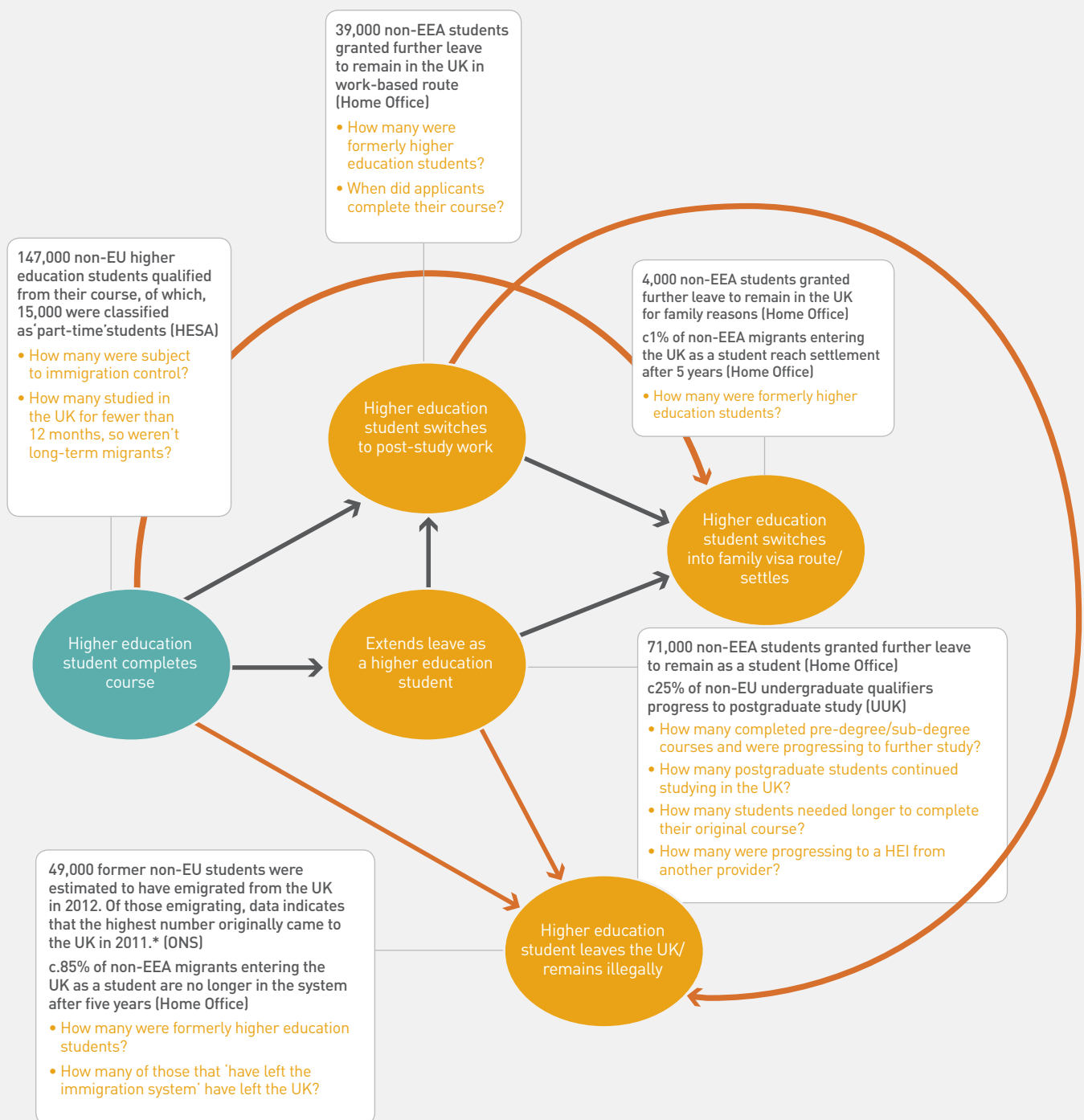
HESA statistics

Figure 19 indicates that 146,595 non-EU students completed their higher education course in 2011–12. However, the statistics do not record visa status so it is not possible to calculate how many completers were subject to immigration control. We cannot presume that every non-EU student who completed their course would be required to either leave the UK or secure further leave to remain. Some may require neither.

In addition, HESA statistics do not show how many of the completing students are ‘long-term migrants’ (on the basis that they have been in the UK for at least 12 months). Some of those captured by HESA may in fact be students completing a course of less than a year, who may therefore not be captured in the international student departure estimates from the IPS. This may lead to some students being recorded as completing their course, but not being recorded as leaving the UK in the long-term migration statistics as they were in the country for less than one year. Recent Home Office analysis suggests that 72% of all visas for study issued in 2013 were for a year or more, accounting for 156,400 student visas of the total of 218,600.³³ The remainder were for courses lasting less than one year, indicating that significant numbers may fall into the category of higher education students studying for less than one year.

³³ See Home Office, Entry clearance visas by length (2014): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/entry-clearance-visas-by-length/entry-clearance-visas-by-length>

Figure 19: International student completer migration patterns in 2012



Note: This diagram is a subset of Figure 3.

Key

Black text refers to 'Known' Orange text refers to 'Unknown'

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand. Data is presented for 2012 for consistency with other sources but data for 2013 shows a different picture.

*This analysis by 'year of arrival' was not limited to non-EU citizens.

Of the 146,595 recorded as non-EU completers, 15,260 were recorded as part-time students. This adds a separate layer of complexity and potential confusion. The student visa route is only open to those non-EU students studying full time. However, some non-EU students may be recorded by HESA as part-time completers as their period of study during a given academic year is less than 24 weeks. This makes it hard to calculate how many of these 15,620 completers should be discounted as they were part-time students unable to get a student visa, and how many were students subject to immigration control who were recorded as part time due to the study time completed in that given academic year.

As previously indicated, HESA data does not cover all students enrolled in higher education; it excludes many students enrolled at private providers and further education colleges.

Home Office data

As Figure 19 shows, there are various data sources available from the Home Office relating to students extending their leave to remain and in some cases switching into work, family or settlement categories. There might also have been a number of students awaiting a decision on their application for an extension of stay.

However, it is not known within the 'extensions by previous category' data what proportion of the data-set relates to higher education students. This means that, currently, it is not possible to calculate how many higher education completers remain within the immigration system and would therefore not be expected to depart the UK immediately.

Home Office data on immigration control is predominantly designed to measure immigration control administrative processes and is not designed to measure the subset which is higher education students' progress through the higher education system and beyond.

Table 5: Number of extensions granted to former students, 2012 and 2013

Current immigration category	Number of extensions granted to former students in 2012	Number of extensions granted to former students in 2013
Tier 1 Post-Study Work	38,505	6,238
Other Work categories		
Extension to study	70,962	99,107
Family	4,312	5,941
Other	1,327	653

Source: Home Office

Looking specifically at the Tier 1 Post-Study Work route:

- The route could be applied to by individuals at listed bodies studying for recognised body qualifications, so would include higher education students in further education institutions, students on validated courses at private colleges etc (not just HEI-enrolled students).
- Individuals could apply up to a year after the award of their qualification and could apply from both inside and outside the UK.
- As individuals can apply up to 12 months after gaining their qualification, the 2012 figure may include both 2011 completers and a large number of 2012 completers (especially those finishing before April 2012).

Based on this, it is difficult to accurately calculate how many Tier 1 Post-Study Work applicants were 2012 completers from HEIs (as opposed to completers from private colleges/further education/Scottish further education/2011 HEI completers applying no more than 12 months after completing their course).

Departure data

As Figure 19 shows, there are sources of data that give an indication of departures from the UK or departures from the immigration system, notably the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and the Home Office's *Migrant Journey* studies.

The IPS estimates that in 2012 49,000 individuals who originally came to the UK as international students departed the country. However, this data does not record how many of that 49,000 were students departing from the higher education system. It is also subject to sampling variability. A proportion will also be students who completed their degree earlier than 2012.

In 2010, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) estimated expected levels of non-EU student outflows, concluding that the numbers that were published at that time (before certain improvements were made to the IPS) ought to be 50,000 higher than represented. The MAC noted: 'There are two potential reasons why the estimated outflow of students is much larger than the flows recorded in the IPS. First, a proportion of students may be overstaying their legal right to stay in the UK, or second, the IPS may potentially undercount outflows of students.'³⁴ For example, it is not known at present how many Masters-level students on arrival indicate their intention is to stay for more than a year, but in the event stay less than a year, and thus when surveyed on departure are not counted as emigrants. However, as highlighted previously, improvements have been made to the IPS in recent years, which may reduce this uncertainty in future.

The *Migrant Journey* shows that, of those issued with a study visa in 2007, 85% of students had no further leave to remain after five years, and were not identified within the immigration system. A further 1% had reached settlement after five years and 14% still had valid leave to remain. However, it is not known how many of those who were not identified within the immigration system had left the UK, nor is it possible to determine how many students within the cohorts examined were previously higher education students.

It is clear that the HESA data on student completers does not directly correlate with the ONS's estimates of student departures. This is because students completing a course may remain in the UK legitimately for further study or post-study work. Others may remain illegally. Even when taking into account all the available data sources and their limitations, it is difficult, accurately, to assess the size of the gap between the number of higher education completions and the number of departures. Further work is therefore needed to enhance the available data and develop an accurate anticipated outflow figure for international students subject to immigration control.

Recommendation 7

A more sophisticated methodology should be established to consider the various data sources and develop an anticipated outflow figure for international higher education students subject to immigration control.

³⁴ Migration Advisory Committee, Home Office (2010) *Limits on Migration*, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257257/report.pdf

8. WHAT IS KNOWN AND WHAT IS UNKNOWN FROM THE DATA SOURCES IDENTIFIED?

It is clear from the commission's analysis of the data sources available that they all offer useful information but that nonetheless gaps remain.

Table 6 summarises what we do know about each stage of the international student journey in the UK and what we do not know. Points highlighted in blue are those 'unknowns' to be addressed by one of the commission's recommendations.

Table 6: Uses and limitations of existing data sources

Part of the student journey	Known	Unknown
Apply to study in the UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of applicants sponsored by a HEI (and their nationality) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many successful applicants actually come to the UK
Intend to arrive in the UK to study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of students accepting a place on a course via UCAS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many students choose not to take up their offer for study
Arrive in the UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimated number of non-EU students coming to the UK for at least 12 months HEI students' expected length of study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-HEI students' intended length of study Their level of study/type of educational institution
Enrol at HEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total number of non-EU-domiciled students studying in HEIs within a given year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number who actually require a visa to study in the UK (and are therefore subject to immigration control) and enrol at a HEI Location (mainly of postgraduates) prior to enrolment
Complete course/ drop out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of HEI students qualifying in a given year Number who did not complete their course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Destinations of those course completers after graduation Destinations of those whose course comes to an end (either due to completion or non-completion)
Progress to higher study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of non-EU undergraduates who remained in the UK for postgraduate study in 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progression rates for cohorts since the one-off UUK analysis in 2011
Extend leave to remain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Tier 4 visa holders who extended their leave to remain as a student Number of Tier 4 visa holders who switched into other visa categories (work, family, other) Estimates on the percentage of students who still have valid leave to remain after five years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree to which extensions to Tier 4 visas reflect students starting new courses or seeking further time to complete existing course The percentage of HEI students within extensions data
Depart from the UK/settle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The IPS estimate of the number of emigrants who were former non-EU students Years in which these students first came to the UK Estimated percentage of those who have settled in the UK after five years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many of those identified as having no valid leave to remain after five years had left the UK and how many had remained illegally How many of those leaving the UK were studying at a HEI compared to other education providers How many of those with valid leave to remain actually emigrate from the UK

9. CONCLUSIONS

Whilst the data sources available have limitations, by comparing a selection of sources it should be possible to frame an understanding of how many former HEI students could be expected leave the UK in a given year.

The recommendations put forward by this commission provide a means to sharpen that understanding to provide statistics that are more useful to decision makers.

The commission's meetings have started helpful conversations about the student journey between the major data-holding organisations. There have been productive discussions on the strengths and weaknesses of various data-sets, and on areas for improvement. This regular dialogue should continue and, in time, decrease the evidence gaps and increase the potential for read-across between data-sets. This will facilitate a greater level of information sharing between organisations to allow coherent analysis and linking together of international student data.



Recommendation 8

Dialogue between data groups established through this commission should be maintained, perhaps through the existing Migration Statistics User Forum, to facilitate a greater level of information sharing between organisations to allow coherent analysis and linking together of international student data.

ANNEXE A: COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENT DESTINATIONS – TERMS OF REFERENCE

Commission on International Student Destinations membership

The Commission on International Student Destinations will be composed of:

- Vice-chancellors

- Other senior representatives from higher education institutions including directors of international offices and academic registrars

- Representatives from related organisations – HESA, ONS, Home Office, BIS, Migration Observatory

Commission on International Student Destinations activity

The working group will:

Phase one

- a) consider the data available to universities, the public, and government about what happens to international university students between the completion of their studies and their departure (or otherwise) from the UK
- b) identify gaps in the information and data available
- c) consider if the higher education sector can use its own data sources to fill any of the gaps identified
- d) consider to what extent the development of e-Borders and integrated case working processes will address in the long-term the limitations of current data on international students, particularly departures

- e) devise a one-off study bringing together a range of data sources and expertise to test whether additional sources of information can be used to improve understanding of international student behaviour post-graduation (this phase will depend on benefits and costs of available options including cost, legal considerations and resource implications)

Phase two (subject to outcomes of phase one)

- f) undertake the activity devised in (e)

Phase three

- g) report on the findings of phases 1 and 2 and issue short- and long-term recommendations which require collective action from the higher education sector

Notes

The Commission on International Student Destinations will operate as a politically neutral group.

As appointed Chair, John Pullinger will act as the sole spokesperson for the commission.

The commission will not consider the pros and cons of current or future immigration policy.

ANNEXE B: MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

John Pullinger (Chair) (Royal Statistical Society)
Professor Edward Acton (University of East Anglia)
Professor Colin Riordan (Cardiff University)
Professor Quintin McKellar CBE (University of Hertfordshire)
Professor Paul Webley (SOAS, University of London)
Professor Koen Lamberts (The University of York)
Jonathan Waller (Higher Education Statistics Agency)
Denise Jones (Higher Education Statistics Agency)
Richard Pereira (Office for National Statistics)
Paul Vickers (Office for National Statistics)
Representatives from the Home Office
Andrew Ray (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills)
Dr Scott Blinder (Migration Observatory)
Professor Ella Ritchie OBE (Newcastle University)
Jo Doyle (University of Southampton)
Alan Mackay (University of Edinburgh)
Delia Heneghan (The University of Northampton)
Linda Mason (Sheffield Hallam University)
Tim Gutsell (University of Essex)
Karl Ward (The University of York)
Sue Grant (University of Hertfordshire)
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