



BRIEFING PAPER

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International and EU students in higher education in the UK FAQs

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Contents:

1. Overseas student numbers
2. What policies have had an impact on international/EU students?
3. Non-economic benefits of international students
4. Impact of international students on universities
5. Funding
6. EU students
7. Sources of information



Contents

Summary	3
1. Overseas student numbers	4
1.1 Fees paid by overseas students	7
How much are fees for overseas students?	7
1.2 UK students abroad	7
How many UK students study abroad and where do they go?	7
1.3 What impact will the coronavirus pandemic have on international students coming to the UK?	7
2. What policies have had an impact on international/EU students?	8
2.1 Net migration target	8
2.2 Post-Study Work Visas	9
2.3 Brexit	10
2.4 The Higher Education and Research Act 2017	12
2.5 The International Education Strategy March 2019	12
3. Non-economic benefits of international students	13
How do international students benefit UK higher education?	13
What do international students contribute to the UK HE experience?	13
4. Impact of international students on universities	14
Which universities have the most overseas students?	14
How many staff at universities are from overseas?	14
5. Funding	14
5.1 Institutional income	14
What research income comes from the EU/other overseas?	14
5.2 Which universities get the most research funding from overseas?	15
How much fee income comes from overseas?	15
5.3 Student support	15
What support is available for international students?	15
I am a British citizen so why have I been classified as an international student?	16
6. EU students	16
What support is available for EU students?	16
How much do EU students take out in loans?	16
How many EU students repay loans?	16
How do EU students repay their loans?	17
Will the Government continue to fund EU students post Brexit?	17
6.1 Erasmus+	18
How many students come to the UK on Erasmus+ programmes?	18
How many UK students are on Erasmus+ programmes and where do they study?	18
Will Brexit affect the UK's participation in the Erasmus+ scheme?	19
A UK alternative to Erasmus+ ?	19
7. Sources of information	21

Summary

In 2018/19 there were 485,600 overseas students studying at UK universities; 20% of the total student population. 143,000 were from the EU and 343,000 from elsewhere

New overseas entrants to UK universities fell from almost 240,000 in 2010/11 to just over 230,000 in 2015/16. **Increases in the last three years have seen overseas entrants numbers reach a new high of 267,000 in 2018/19.**

The top sending countries for overseas students have changed over the last few years. **China currently sends the most students to the UK, more than 86,000 in 2018/19;** this number has risen by 62% since 2011/12. In contrast the **number of students from Nigeria has declined significantly** - numbers have fallen by 45% since 2011/12. There has also been a more recent decline in numbers from Malaysia.

There has been a general drop in entrants from the major EU countries since 2011/12; Ireland down by 37%, Cyprus 37%, Greece 21%, Germany 18% and France 14%. Italy was the exception with numbers up by almost half.

In recent years, the UK has been the second most popular global destination for international students after the US. In 2017 the US took 26% of all higher education students who were studying overseas at universities in the OECD, the **UK was in second place with 12%.** But market share has been slipping and other English speaking countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada are now seeing significant increases in overseas students - as are European countries which are increasingly offering courses in English.

The decline in numbers from some countries has been attributed to a number of factors such as changes in student visa arrangements, the net migration target and Brexit. The Government has guaranteed to fund EU students until the end of 2020/21, but from 2021/22 EU students will **no longer be treated as home students.** The UK's future participation in the Erasmus+ programme is yet to be decided.

Universities UK has estimated that in 2014-15 international students contributed around £25.8 billion in gross output to the UK economy. International students also benefit the UK in other **social, cultural and intellectual** ways and they are an important contributor to the UK's 'soft power' overseas.

Any decline in student numbers is a concern and providers are particularly worried currently about **the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the number of international students coming to the UK in 2020/21 and beyond..**

On 16 March 2019 the Government launched the [International Education Strategy](#) – which will aim to recruit 600,000 international higher education students annually by 2030. The Government has introduced a two year **Graduate Route** post study work visa and a **three year visa for PhD graduates.**

This paper answers some frequently asked statistical and policy questions on international and EU students.

1. Overseas student numbers

How many overseas students are at university in the UK?

In **2018/19 there were 485,600 overseas students studying at UK universities; 20% of the total student population**. 143,000 were from the EU and 343,000 from elsewhere.

New overseas *entrants* to UK universities peaked at 238,000 in 2011/12. Their number fell by 10,000 in 2012/13 largely due to a drop in entrants from the EU in the first year of higher fees in England. Since then increases in the last three years, mainly from outside the EU, have seen overseas entrants reach a new high of 267,000 in 2018/19. This was 34% of all first-year students at UK universities. 64,000 were from the EU and 204,000 from elsewhere.¹

Which countries send the most students?

The top ten countries are shown opposite. **China clearly dominates** with more entrants than the rest of the top ten combined.

How has this changed in recent years?

Change since 2011/12 is shown opposite. Some of the key recent trends are:

- Chinese student numbers are up by 62% since 2011/12. They increased by more than 20,000 in 2018/19 alone. Numbers from the US have increased more steadily over the same period
- Indian student numbers fell by 44% between 2011/12 and 2015/16. They have increased since then and are now above their 2011/12 number. There has been a more recent decline in numbers from Malaysia and particularly Nigeria.
- There has been a general drop in entrants from the major EU countries since 2011/12; Ireland down by 37%, Cyprus 37%, Greece 21%, Germany 18% and France 14%. Italy was the exception with numbers up by almost half.

TOP 10 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

First years 2018/19

China	86,485
India	17,760
United States	12,085
Germany	7,115
Hong Kong	6,925
France	6,645
Malaysia	5,940
Italy	5,930
Greece	4,770

Source: [Where do HE students come from?](#), HESA

CHANGE IN 1ST YEARS

11/12-18/19: Major non-EU countries

China	+62%
Hong Kong	+30%
United States	+20%
India	+9%
Canada	+7%
Thailand	-3%
Saudi Arabia	-6%
Malaysia	-24%
Nigeria	-45%

Source: [Where do HE students come from?](#), HESA

What is the UK's share of the overall international higher education market?

¹ HESA, [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2018/19](#)

In 2017 the US took 26% of international students who were studying overseas at universities in the OECD. The **UK was in second place with 12%** followed by Australia with 10% and France and Germany both with 7%. In the same year the UK had one of the highest rates of international students² in the OECD with 18%. This was more than double the EU average and behind only Luxembourg (47%) and New Zealand (20%).³

How much is the international higher education market worth to the UK?

There have been various estimates over the years of the value of education and training 'exports' to the UK (overseas students studying in the UK and some training/consultancy abroad) carried out for the British Council, Universities UK and the Government. These cover a wide range of definitions, years and methodologies. There is a substantial amount of uncertainty about these figures. They are highly approximate estimates only and are often made by groups with an interest in the sector. Estimates include:

- In 2011, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) [estimated](#) that the total value of higher education exports to the UK in 2008/09 was **£7.8 billion**. It projected that this would grow to £10.4 billion by 2015 and £13.2 billion by 2020.
- More up to date estimates of HE 'exports' for the UK were published by BIS in 2013. They put the total at **£10.2 billion** in 2011; 2.1% of UK exports.⁴
- Universities UK [estimated](#) that in 2011/12, the value of higher education exports to the UK was **£10.7 billion**
- The Department for Education estimated that in 2016 higher education accounted for **£13.4 billion** out of a total £19.9 billion in international education exports and transnational education activity.⁵

In 2018 Universities UK published [new research](#) on the subject that put the **total value in 2014-15 at £25.8 billion**. As with the other estimates this includes direct spending by students on and off-campus and the indirect of 'knock-on' effect of this spending on the economy. It also includes an estimate of the impact of visitors to the UK linked to international students. The report also estimated that international students were 'responsible' for £10.8 billion of UK export earnings and their spending supported just over 200,000 jobs. The component parts of the £25.8 billion are:

- £4.8 billion generated in fees
- £5.4 billion off-campus spending by students
- £0.7 billion on-campus spending (excluding fees)
- £13.5 billion in the knock-on economic benefit of this spending ('gross output supported')
- £0.5 billion direct spending by visitors to international students

² As a proportion of all students at tertiary level

³ [Education at a Glance 2019](#), OECD. Indicator B6.1

⁴ [International Education – Global Growth and Prosperity: An Accompanying Analytical Narrative](#), BIS (pp29-62 especially)

⁵ [UK revenue from education related exports and TNE activity](#), DfE

- £1.0 billion in knock-on economic benefit from visitor spending

What level courses do overseas students study?

Overseas students are much more likely than home students to study full-time and/or follow postgraduate courses. In 2018/19 50% of non-EU students were on postgraduate courses compared to 31% from the EU and 19% of home students. At undergraduate level overseas students were more likely to be on first degree courses than home students. Overseas students were also more likely to be studying full-time; 90% of those from the EU and 93% of non-EU entrants compared to 76% of home students.⁶

In 2014/15 56% of Chinese students were studying at postgraduate level (mainly taught courses), a very similar rate to those from the US (57%) and slightly below the proportion of Indian postgraduates (64%). The majority of EU students were undergraduates (63%).⁷

How many UK universities have overseas campuses?

The UK higher education sector is involved in various types of transnational education (TNE) and a number of universities have established branch campuses overseas to increase their global reach.

In 2012, UK universities had opened 25 campuses in 12 countries, according to a study by the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education. A publication by UUK and the British Council in 2016 gave information on some of these campuses:

Over the last decade a number of universities have opened branch campuses. A very well known example for the UK has been the University of Nottingham campus in Ningbo, China and in Semenyih, Malaysia. Manchester Business School and Middlesex University are other notable players, as well as Lancaster and Strathclyde universities that signed agreements in May 2009 to establish campuses in Pakistan. Aberystwyth University followed Middlesex University in opening a campus in Mauritius in 2014. The University of Liverpool and Xi'an Jiaotong University in China formed a partnership for setting up Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), an independent university based in Suzhou, Jiangsu, China. The UK's existing and currently planned branch campuses are concentrated quite heavily in the UAE, China, Malaysia and Singapore, though single campuses have been established in less well known locations such as Uzbekistan (Westminster).⁸

It has been suggested that a number of British universities are considering plans to open new branches inside the EU ahead of Brexit as a way of maintaining partnerships with other EU universities and retaining and

⁶ HESA, [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2017/18](#)

⁷ [Where do HE students come from?](#), HESA

⁸ HE Global, [The Scale and Scope of UK Higher Education Transnational Education](#), Universities UK and the British Council, June 2016

attracting staff who needed to work within the EU.⁹ Oxford University may also create its first foreign campus in response to Brexit.¹⁰

Other universities have created institutional partnerships with overseas universities, or set up validation and franchising arrangements. An article in the *Times Higher Education*, “Empires and allies”, in 2012 discussed UK HE’s overseas education.¹¹

Further information on overseas education is given on the UUK international website at [What is UK HE TNE?](#)

1.1 Fees paid by overseas students

How much are fees for overseas students?

A survey of typical fees for overseas (non-EU) students at UK universities¹² gave these averages for different types of courses in 2019/20 (opposite). Overseas fees for classroom-based courses have risen faster than the home rate in recent years at both undergraduate (where the home/EU rate is capped) and postgraduate levels.

Undergraduate	
Classroom	£14,900
Lab-based	£17,000
Postgraduate taught	
Classroom	£15,100
Lab-based	£17,500
MBA	£20,500

1.2 UK students abroad

How many UK students study abroad and where do they go?

In 2017 an estimated **2% of UK students in higher education were studying abroad**. This rate was half the EU average and well below levels in Germany and France (both 4%). The **most popular overseas destinations for UK students were the US** with 29% of home students studying abroad, followed by the Netherlands (8%), Germany, Australia and France (all 6%).¹³

1.3 What impact will the coronavirus pandemic have on international students coming to the UK?

Library briefing, [Coronavirus: implications for the further and higher education sectors in England](#), 17 April 2020, discusses the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on international students on p5-9.

⁹ “[UK universities draw up plans for EU campuses ahead of Brexit](#)”, The Guardian, 22 September 2016

¹⁰ “Oxford University may break with 700 years of tradition and open a foreign campus after France offers Brexit sweetener”, *The Telegraph*, 20 February 2017

¹¹ “*Empires and allies*”, *Times Higher Education*, 18 October 2012

¹² [International and postgraduate fees survey, 2019](#), Times Higher Education

¹³ [Education at a Glance 2019](#), OECD. Indicators B6.3 and B6.5

2. What policies have had an impact on international/EU students?

There is no limit on the number of international students who can come to the UK to study.

The numbers of students coming to the UK to study has slowed down. The reasons for this are complex but the policies outlined below have been cited as contributory factors.

2.1 Net migration target

For several years it has been Government policy to reduce net migration (the difference between those who come to the UK for periods of at least 12 months and those who leave). Students who come to the UK to **study and stay for more than 12 months are 'migrants'** under the UN's definition and are included in the net migration target.

Many bodies, such as Universities UK, have campaigned for years to have international students removed from the net migration target.¹⁴ A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research in 2016 set out details of the Government's increased restrictions on international students and argued the case for removing international students from net migration figures.¹⁵

Various parliamentary select committees have also challenged including international students in the net migration target and most recently an amendment to the *Higher Education and Research Bill 2016* by Lord Hannay of Chiswick which would have removed students from the net migration target was passed in the House of Lords by a large majority following almost unanimous support from speakers.¹⁶ The amendment was later removed when the House of Commons considered the amendments to the Bill.

A report by the Office for National Statistics July 2016, [Population Briefing International student migration What do the statistics tell us?](#) however stated that some international students do not leave the UK when they should and this might provide a further reason for keeping students in the net migration target :

Although it is sometimes argued that net migration figures should exclude overseas students since students are normally 'temporary migrants' and would be counted out in subsequent emigration statistics, available data suggest that some of those people who say they come to study do not actually leave the UK at the end of their courses.

"International students should be removed from the net immigration target. The Government's refusal to do so is putting at the risk the higher education sector's share of the international student market. Removing international students from the target would be a simple way to offset some of the risks from leaving the European Union".

House of Commons Education Committee report, [Exiting the EU: challenges and opportunities for the higher education sector](#), 19 April 2017

¹⁴ Universities UK, [International students and the UK immigration debate](#), August 2014

¹⁵ IPPR, [Destination Education Reforming Migration Policy in International Students to Grow the UK's Vital Education Exports](#), September 2016

¹⁶ ["Peers defeat UK government on international student policy"](#), *Times Higher Education*, 13 March 2017

As Prime Minister, Theresa May, said that **students would not be removed from the net migration target**:

Whether or not international students are included in the net migration target is not a message about our country and how we welcome people. We welcome students coming to this country—we are very clear about that—but in the statistics we abide by the international definition used by countries around the world. We want to ensure that the brightest and the best are indeed able to come to the United Kingdom and get the value of a UK education. ([HC Deb 29 March 2017 c289](#))

Further information on this issue is available in library briefing SN06077, [Migration Statistics](#), 7 March 2017.

2.2 Post–Study Work Visas

In April 2012 the Tier 1 Post-Study Work Visa, which allowed Tier 4 students to stay on and work for two years after their studies, was abolished. The change was controversial and a report by the Higher Education Policy Institute in January 2017 said that the change in visa policy had resulted in a 20% reduction in enrolments at UK HEIs (higher education institutions).¹⁷ Recently new post study work routes have been created.

Graduate Route: two–year post–study work visa

On 11 September 2019 the Government announced the introduction of a **new two-year post-study work visa** for international students:

The new ‘**Graduate**’ route will be open to all international students – including those from India – who have valid UK immigration status as a student and have successfully completed a course of study in any subject at undergraduate level or above at an approved UK Higher Education Provider. The visa will allow eligible students to work, or look for work, in any career or position of their choice, for two years after completing their studies.¹⁸

Students graduating in the summer of 2021 and after will be eligible to apply for the new route.¹⁹ Under the new policy there will be no cap on the numbers of visas and graduates will be able to apply for jobs regardless of the subject they studied.²⁰

After the two years students on the Graduate route will be able to switch onto the **skilled work visa** if they find a job which meets the skill requirement of the route.

PhD students: three–year post study work in the UK

The news that the new Graduate Route will be extended for PhD students to allow them to remain in the UK for three years after study is a bold policy move which will increase the UK's competitive edge in the global competition for talented research student

[Universities UK](#)

¹⁷ Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), [The determinants of international demand for UK higher education](#), January 2017 p9

¹⁸ Gov.UK, [UK announces 2-year post-study work visa for international students](#), 11 September 2019

¹⁹ [“UK clarifies post-study work visa eligibility after ‘confusion’”](#), *Times Higher Education*, 17 September 2020

²⁰ [“UK work visas for foreign graduates to be extended to two years”](#), *The Guardian*, 10 September 2020

In July 2020 the Government launched the [Research and Development Roadmap](#). One of the proposals in the Roadmap is to allow international students who complete a PhD from summer 2021 to stay in the UK for **three years after study to live and work**.

This Government has also created a new **fast-track visa route for scientists**.²¹

Coronavirus visa flexibilities

The coronavirus pandemic could potentially have a big impact on the numbers of international students coming to the UK. In response to universities concerns about a big drop in international students, the Government announced some flexibilities around visas for overseas students:

The government is also working to ensure that existing rules and regulations, including visa regulations, are as flexible as possible for international students under these unprecedented circumstances. For example, on 16 June, the government confirmed that distance/blended learning will be permitted for the 2020/21 academic year provided students intend to transition to face-to-face learning as soon as circumstances allow. In addition, higher education providers will be flexible in accommodating applicants' circumstances where possible, including if applicants are unable to travel to the UK in time for the start of the academic year.

The new graduate route, due to be launched in summer 2021, provides an opportunity for international students who have been awarded their degree to stay and work in the UK at any skill level for 2 years. The government has also confirmed that those studying by distance/blended learning will be eligible to apply for the graduate route provided they are in the UK by 6 April 2021.²²

2.3 Brexit

It has been suggested that the result of the EU referendum vote in June 2016 has had an impact on student recruitment and it has been alleged that some students now perceive the **UK as less welcoming to foreign students**. This is a concern as it has been shown that when choosing a destination, international students are highly motivated by how welcome they feel.²³

An article in the *Financial Times* in July 2016 stated that a survey by Hobson's student recruitment consultancy had found that a third of international students questioned said that they would be less likely to come to the UK post Brexit.²⁴

A PQ on [6 July 2020](#) set out the actions that the Government is taking to make the UK attractive to overseas students:

Overseas Students: Written question - 65132

²¹ Gov.UK, [PM sets out vision to cement UK as a science superpower](#), 8 August 2019

²² [HC Deb \[Universities: Foreign Students\], 2 July 2020](#)

²³ Hobsons International Student Survey 2017 p13

²⁴ ["Third of foreign students less likely to come to UK after Brexit"](#), *Financial Times*, 28 July 2016

Daniel Zeichner on: 26 June 2020

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking abroad to demonstrate that Britain is open and welcoming to international students.

Michelle Donelan on: 06 July 2020

The government has been clear that our world-leading universities, which thrive on being global institutions, will always be open to international students. Engaging closely with other government departments and the higher education sector, the department is working to reassure prospective international students that the UK higher education is 'open for business', remains world-class and is a safe and tolerant place to study. This includes continued work with Study UK (the government's international student recruitment campaign led by the British Council), support for the sector-led #WeAreTogether campaign and a package of bespoke communications that will directly target prospective international students, making clear our world-leading UK offer.

Furthermore, on 22 June, with my counterparts in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, I wrote to prospective international students to outline the support and guidance that is available to international students who are considering studying in the UK from the autumn: https://study-uk.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/letter_to_prospective_international_students.pdf. This letter reiterates a number of flexibilities that the government has already announced for international students including, amongst other mitigations, confirmation that distance/blended learning will be permitted for the 2020/21 academic year, provided that international students' sponsors intend to transition to face-to-face learning as soon as circumstances allow, and steps to further promote the new graduate route.

The government is committed to continuing to improve our offer to international students, which is why we have announced the new graduate route, which will be introduced in summer 2021. The graduate route will be simple and light-touch and it will permit graduates at undergraduate and masters level to remain in the UK for 2 years and PhD graduates to remain in the UK for 3 years after they have finished their studies in order to work or to look for work at any skill level. This represents a significant improvement in our offer to international students and will help ensure the UK higher education sector remains competitive internationally.

The government is also in discussions with Universities UK and other sector representatives on a regular basis to ensure that we are united in welcoming international students to the UK. In particular, we expect international students - especially those who will be subject to the 14-day self-isolation period - to be appropriately supported upon arrival by their chosen university during these unprecedented times.

In addition, on Friday 5 June, the government announced Sir Steve Smith as the UK's new International Education Champion. Sir Steve will assist with opening up export growth opportunities for the whole UK education sector, which will include attracting international students to UK Universities. Alongside Sir Steve's appointment, our review of the International Education Strategy this autumn will respond to the new context and the challenges that are posed by

COVID-19 across all education settings to ensure we can continue to welcome international students in the future.²⁵

2.4 The Higher Education and Research Act 2017

The *Higher Education and Research Act 2017* contains a provision to make universities **provide more information specifically for international students**. Section 65 of the Act places a duty on higher education providers to publish higher education information and s65(8) states that when the Office for Students (OfS) determines what information is covered by this duty it must include information which would be helpful to international students. Under s65(9) the OfS may also consider it appropriate to ask providers to supply information on numbers of international students on HE courses.

2.5 The International Education Strategy March 2019

On 16 March 2019 the Government launched the [International Education Strategy](#).²⁶ The Strategy sets out how the Government aims to preserve and grow the UK's share of the global education market. The Strategy aims to:

- to increase education exports to **£35 billion by 2030**
- grow the numbers of international higher education students studying in the UK **to 600,000 by 2030**
- provide a welcoming environment for international students and develop an increasingly competitive offer by: **extending the post-study leave period**; considering where the visa process could be improved; supporting employment; and ensuring existing and prospective students continue to feel welcome.
- appoint an International Education Champion in 2019

On 5 June 2020, the Department for Education announced that Sir Steve Smith would be the International Education Champion – part of the International Education Strategy:

Sir Steve Smith will assist with opening up export growth opportunities for the whole UK education sector, tackling international challenges such as those posed to attracting international students and forging lasting global connections. The International Education Strategy, published in March 2019 by the Department for Education and the Department for International Trade, set out a commitment to review progress following its publication. The review, which we intend to publish this autumn, will ensure that the International Education Strategy responds to this new context and the challenges that are posed by COVID-19.²⁷

“International students are vital for a successful post-Brexit, industrial strategy fit for a global Britain. They make a significant contribution to driving economic growth and engaging the UK’s diplomatic and trade links on the world stage.”

[Universities UK Parliamentary Briefing, April 2017](#)

²⁵ HC Deb [[Overseas Students](#)] 6 July 2020

²⁶ HM Government, [International Education Strategy global potential, global growth](#), March 2019

²⁷ [HC Deb \[Universities: Foreign Students\] 2 July 2020](#)

3. Non-economic benefits of international students

The benefits of higher education are wide-ranging and cannot be solely calculated in economic terms.²⁸

How do international students benefit UK higher education?

A study by the Higher Education Policy Institute, [Now that's what we call soft power](#), in 2015 showed that international students generated significant **geopolitical benefits** for the UK as **55 world leaders** (Presidents, Prime Ministers and monarchs) **from 51 countries had attended higher-level education in the UK**. These personal connections with Britain are likely to be an important contributor to our **'soft power'** and help to build long-term social, political and trade links with other countries.²⁹

It has been suggested that the UK could lose its traditionally strong relationship with India if the number of students from the sub-continent continues to fall.³⁰

What do international students contribute to the UK HE experience?

International students add to the diversity of the student body and bring social and intellectual benefits to the UK as well as **creating a more global perspective**.

A study by the Higher Education Policy Institute, [What do home students think of studying with international students?](#)³¹ asked UK students for their views on international students; 87 per cent of students surveyed said that studying alongside their peers from overseas would give them a wider world view; 85 per cent said it will be useful preparation for working in a global environment; and 76 per cent said it will help them develop a global network.

The HEPI report also suggested that international students **enriched academic debate**:

Without a healthy number of international students, it is likely that some courses would be uneconomic to run, graduates would have a more limited outlook and classroom discussions would be excessively monocultural. Universities are more able to fulfil their core mission of

²⁸ BIS research paper No 146, [The Benefits of Higher Education Participation for Individuals and Society: key findings and reports "The Quadrants"](#), October 2013

²⁹ IPPR, [Destination Education Reforming Migration Policy in International Students to Grow the UK's Vital Education Exports](#), September 2016 p8

³⁰ "UK-India relationship 'at risk' as student numbers slide", Times Higher Education, 2 March 2017

³¹ HEPI report 76, [What do home students think of studying with international students?](#), July 2015

sharing and spreading knowledge when they have students and staff who bring experiences from different countries and cultures.

4. Impact of international students on universities

Which universities have the most overseas students?

WHICH UNIS HAVE THE MOST OVERSEAS STUDENTS?

Overseas students in UK universities 2018/19: Top 10

<i>ran/</i> by absolute number		number	% of students	<i>ran. by</i> % of students		% of students	number
1	University College London	19,635	48%	1	London Business School	76%	1,580
2	The University of Manchester	14,440	36%	2	Royal College of Art	71%	1,700
3	The University of Edinburgh	13,185	38%	3	LSE	68%	8,000
4	King's College London	12,385	38%	4	Imperial	53%	10,075
5	Coventry University	12,000	34%	5	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Med.	52%	605
6	The University of Sheffield	10,080	33%	6	University of the Arts, London	51%	9,695
7	Imperial	10,075	53%	7	Royal College of Music	50%	415
8	University of the Arts, London	9,695	51%	8	University College London	48%	19,635
9	The University of Glasgow	9,685	31%	9	The University of St Andrews	46%	4,820
10	The University of Warwick	9,580	37%	10	Cranfield University	45%	2,025

Source: [Where do HE students come from?](#), HESA

How many staff at universities are from overseas?

In 2018/19 there were 67,645 academic staff from overseas at UK universities. This was **31% of all academic staff**. 38,080 were from the EU and 29,565 from elsewhere. In 2018/19 Engineering & technology and the sciences had the highest overseas staff rates with 46% and 39% respectively.³²

5. Funding

5.1 Institutional income

What research income comes from the EU/other overseas?

Research income from the EU was worth £991 million to UK universities in 2018/19 or 15% of total research income. This includes grants and contracts from EU Government bodies, charities and the private sector.

³² [HE staff data: Where do they work, come from and go to?](#), HESA

Research income from all non-EU overseas sources was £570 million or 9% of all research income in the same year.³³

5.2 Which universities get the most

EU: Top 10 universities				Non-EU: Top 10 universities			
EU research income 2018/19				Other overseas reseach income 2018/19			
rank		£ million	% of research income	rank		£ million	% of research income
1	The University of Oxford	95	15%	1	The University of Oxford	104	17%
2	The University of Cambridge	70	12%	2	The University of Cambridge	73	12%
3	Imperial	59	16%	3	Imperial	48	13%
4	University College London	59	12%	4	London School of Hygiene & Tropical Med.	43	25%
5	Swansea University	53	56%	5	University College London	33	7%
6	The University of Edinburgh	40	14%	6	Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	27	33%
7	The University of Manchester	33	10%	7	The University of Edinburgh	21	7%
8	London School of Hygiene & Tropical Med.	33	20%	8	King's College London	16	8%
9	The University of Sheffield	26	14%	9	The University of Manchester	13	4%
10	The University of Birmingham	24	16%	10	The University of Warwick	11	8%

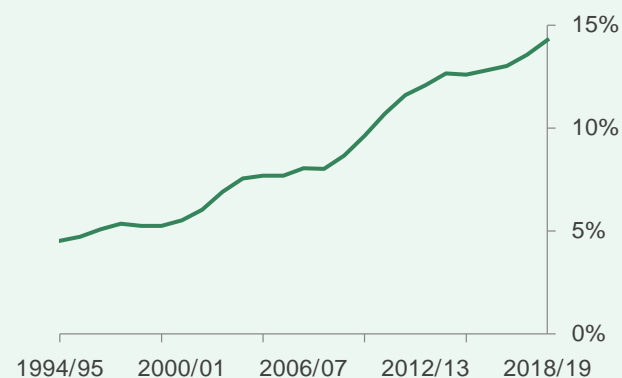
research funding from overseas?

Source: [What is the income of HE providers?](#), HESA

How much fee income comes from overseas?

Overall academic fees from non-EU overseas students were worth **£5.8 billion to UK universities in 2018/19** or **14.3% of their total income**. Trends are illustrated opposite and show a sustained increase in the importance of overseas fee income, up from below 5% in the mid-1990s.³⁴

Non-EU fee income trebled in importance since mid-1990s



5.3 Student support

What support is available for international students?

Only students categorised as home or EU students are eligible for publicly funded student support, there is **no funding available for international**

³³ [What is the income of HE providers?](#), HESA

³⁴ *ibid.*

students. Individual institutions however may provide scholarships for international students.

The [UK Council for International Student Affairs](#) (UKCISA) publishes information on the criteria for categorisation as a home/EU student.

I am a British citizen so why have I been classified as an international student?

The student support regulations state that students must meet two main criteria to be classified as a home student: firstly students must have the correct immigration status (right of abode, or indefinite leave to remain) **AND** they must meet a **three year residency requirement**. Students who do not meet either of these criteria can be classified as an international student even if they are UK citizens. The three year residency requirement may catch out ex-pats returning to the UK.

6. EU students

What support is available for EU students?

Under EU rules on free movement European students studying in another EU member state must be given the **same access to higher education as local students**. This means that EU students have the same **right to fee support** as local students.

In the UK therefore EU students currently have access to **tuition fee loans** on the same basis as UK students. EU students studying in the UK's regions must be treated the same as home students of that region, which means that EU students in Scotland do not pay fees. These EU rules however do not apply to a member states own internal arrangements so our devolution settlement means that English students can be charged fees at Scottish universities.

EU students are not generally eligible for maintenance loans but some students may qualify if they meet residency criteria.

How much do EU students take out in loans?

In 2019-20 a total of **£545million was lent to EU students** at English universities. The amount has increased in recent years particularly due to higher fees from 2012. An **estimated 69% of eligible EU full-time undergraduates took out fee loans** in 2014/15. A total of **£3.4 billion was owed by EU borrowers** at the end of financial year 2019-20; **2.4% of the total outstanding student loan debt**.³⁵

How many EU students repay loans?

As EU students have only been eligible for fee loans from 2006 there are a limited number of cohorts who have become liable to repay and only early evidence on any post-2012 cohort where loan amounts are much bigger.

EU students had £3.4 bn in outstanding student loan debt in March 2020.

[Student Loans in England: 2019 to 2020 - Part 1](#)

³⁵ [Student Loans in England: 2019 to 2020 - Part 1](#), SLC

Looking across all cohorts with at least one tax year processed³⁶ **18% had repaid their loans in full, 25% were currently repaying, 22% were earning below the earnings threshold** (in the UK or overseas) and hence not repaying and the remaining 35% were either not in employment, defaulted on repayment, had not provided details of their income, were not traced or were not liable to repay yet. Compared to home students EU borrowers were much more likely to have repaid in full, much less likely to be repaying (around half the rate for recent cohorts), more likely to be working, but earning less than the repayment threshold and much more likely to be in one of the 'other' non-repayment categories.³⁷

How do EU students repay their loans?

EU students **repay their loans directly to the Student Loans Company.**

Information on repayments of loans by EU students was given in answer to a parliamentary question in March 2017:

Students: Loans: Written question - 66121

Mrs Anne Main: 01 March 2017

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps the Government takes to reclaim student loans from graduates from non-UK EU countries who fail to repay those loans.

Joseph Johnson : 08 March 2017

The Student Loans Company (SLC) has arrangements in place to collect repayments from borrowers who move away from the UK. SLC establishes a 12 month repayment schedule based on the borrower's income and provides information on the methods of repayment available.

SLC sets up fixed repayment schedules for borrowers who do not remain in contact and will place those borrowers in arrears. Further action, including legal action, can then be taken to secure recovery.

The Department published a Joint Repayment Strategy in February 2016, which sets out how action will be taken to trace borrowers and act to recover loans where avoidance or evasion is identified. This publication can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/Government/publications/student-loan-repayment-strategy>.

[[HC Deb 1 March 2017](#)]

Will the Government continue to fund EU students post Brexit?

Under the Withdrawal Agreement the UK and the EU/EEA/Switzerland are in a transition period which will end on 31 December 2020. During this time EU/EEA/Swiss citizen students can **continue to come to the UK and study under the funding arrangements that applied before the withdrawal.**

On 28 May 2019 the Government [confirmed](#) that EU students who begin their degrees on or before the **academic year 2020/21** will be eligible for

Michelle Donelan
MP, 23 June 2020

³⁶ Up to the 2017 cohort who finished their courses in 2016 and first became liable to repay in April 2017

³⁷ [Student Loans in England: 2018 to 2019](#), SLC

home student fees and financial support and that **nothing will change for them throughout their degree.**

On 23 June 2020 Michelle Donelan, the Minister of State for Universities, [announced](#)³⁸ that from 2021/22 EU students **would no longer be treated as home student status** and they would therefore no longer be eligible for funding.

6.1 Erasmus +

How many students come to the UK on Erasmus + programmes?

31,900 higher education students came to the UK under the 2017 Erasmus+ 'Call'. This includes those on traineeships as well as those studying at UK universities. **The largest number came from France** with 8,100, followed by Germany with 5,200 and Spain with 4,300.³⁹

How many UK students are on Erasmus + programmes and where do they study?

9,720 UK students were involved in the 2016 Erasmus+ 'Call' for studies in participating programme countries. A further 7,328 were on traineeships through Erasmus.⁴⁰

In 2017/18 the most popular host countries for study placements were **Spain** (2,220), **France** (2,049), **Germany** (1,302), **Netherlands** (812), and **Italy** (711).⁴¹

A report by Universities UK international, [Gone International: Mobility Works](#), showed that Erasmus+ accounted for **55% of the international experiences of graduates** who had completed their courses in 2014/15. The report also found a correlation between mobility and improved academic and employment outcomes:

Six months after graduation mobile students were less likely to be unemployed and more likely to have had obtained a first- or upper second-class degree, be in a graduate level position, or to be working abroad.⁴²

³⁸ HCWS 310 [Student Support in England] 23 June 2020

³⁹ [Erasmus+ annual report 2018 –statistical annex](#), EC, Annex 18

⁴⁰ [Erasmus+ annual report 2018 –statistical annex](#), EC (Annex 15)

⁴¹ [Erasmus+ statistics](#) (Higher education mobility statistics)

⁴² Universities UK international, [Gone International: Mobility Works](#), p36

Will Brexit affect the UK's participation in the Erasmus+ scheme?

The UK will **continue to participate in Erasmus+ until the end of the current programme in 2020.**

Whether or not the UK continues to participate in Erasmus after the end of the transition period will **depend on the outcome of negotiations** on the [future relationship](#)⁴³ between the UK and the EU:

The UK will consider options for participation in elements of Erasmus+ on a time-limited basis, provided the terms are in the UK's interests. The Government is considering a wide range of options with regards to future cooperation, including potential domestic alternatives. [HC18876 [EU Grants and Loans](#), 2 March 2020]

For more information on Erasmus see the briefing paper [The Erasmus Programme](#)

A UK alternative to Erasmus+ ?

Commentators have said that if the UK loses access to the Erasmus+ scheme it is important that the Government commits to fund an alternative scheme. A replacement scheme to Erasmus+ was discussed during the House of Commons Education Committee's inquiry into the impact of Brexit on the higher education sector. The Committee's report, [Exiting the EU: challenges and opportunities for the higher education sector](#), 25 April 2017, gives an overview of the issues involved with a new scheme and potential costs on p221-22.

The Government's current position with regard to a replacement scheme for Erasmus+ was given in a [PQ on 20 July 2020](#):

Erasmus+ Programme: Written question - 73948

Emma Hardy: 14 July 2020

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answers of 12 June 2020 to Questions 56134 and 56135 on the Erasmus+ Programme, what steps he has taken to consult on the development of a domestic alternative to Erasmus+ scheme; and with whom he has held those consultations with.

Vicky Ford: 20 July 2020

In the event that the UK does not participate in the next Erasmus+ programme (2021-27), departmental officials have been preparing a UK-wide domestic alternative scheme should we need to have a contingency measure. As this scheme is still being developed and negotiations with the EU on UK participation in the Erasmus+ programme are ongoing, it is too early to set out the exact details of the scheme. However, I have discussed the development of the domestic alternative with my ministerial counterparts in the devolved administrations and hosted a roundtable in March with a range of higher education and further education stakeholders including representative and mission groups and Vice-Chancellors.

"I stress that the UK remains open to participation in elements of Erasmus+ on a time-limited basis, provided that the terms are in the UK's interests".

Minister for Universities,
Michelle Donelan
7 March 2020

⁴³ HM Government, [The Future Relationship with the EU The UK's Approach to Negotiations](#), February 2020 p23

Departmental officials have also been engaging with officials in the devolved administrations as well as sector bodies and institutions through a series of roundtables and interviews so far, speaking to representatives from across the education sector in all 4 nations to understand their views and ensure that this scheme can deliver a world-leading exchange programme.⁴⁴

7. Sources of information

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