



BRIEFING PAPER

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International and EU students in higher education in the UK FAQs

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Summary

In 2019/20 there were 538,600 overseas students studying at UK universities; 22% of the total student population. 143,000 were from the EU and 395,6000 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 four years have seen overseas entrants numbers reach a new high of 307,800 in 2019/20.**

The top sending countries for overseas students have changed over the last few years.

China currently sends the most students to the UK, almost 102,000 in 2019/20; this number has risen by 90% since 2011/12. In contrast the number of students from some major 'source' countries have declined, numbers from Malaysia and Nigeria have fallen by 26% since 2011/12.

There has been a **general drop in entrants from the major EU countries** since 2011/12; Ireland down by 43%, Cyprus 36%, Germany 29%, Greece 26% and France 18%. Italy and Spain were 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 will **not participate in the Erasmus+ programme** after the end of the current cycle and will develop a new UK mobility programme the **Turing Scheme.**

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 6 February 2021 the Government launched an updated [International Education Strategy](#) – which reaffirmed its aims to recruit 600,000 international higher education students annually and increase education exports to £35 billion a year 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 **2019/20 there were 538,600 overseas students studying at UK universities; 22% of the total student population**. 143,000 were from the EU and 395,600 from outside the EU.¹

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 four years, mainly from outside the EU, have seen overseas entrants reach a new high of 307,800 in 2019/20. There was an increase of 40,300 in the last year alone. The 2019/20 total was 39% of all first-year students at UK universities. 62,000 were from the EU and 246,000 from outside the EU.²

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 90% since 2011/12. They increased by more than 15,000 in 2019/20 alone. Numbers from the US have increased more steadily over most of this time, but were down by 7% in 2019/20.
- Indian student numbers fell by 44% between 2011/12 and 2015/16. They have increased steadily for the following few years before increasing dramatically in 2019/20 by 120%.
- There has been a more recent decline in numbers from Malaysia. New students from Nigeria fell rapidly in 2015/16 and 2016/17 before stabilising, then increasing by 35% in 2019/20.
- There has been a general drop in entrants from the major EU countries since 2011/12; Ireland down by 43%, Cyprus 36%, Germany 29%, Greece 26% and France 18%. Italy and Spain were exception with numbers up by 40%.
- Overall first year EU student numbers are down by 5% since 2011/12, but much of this cut happened in 2012/13 and numbers have increased up to 2016/17.

Top 10 countries of origin

First years 2019/20

China	101,855
India	39,360
United States	11,255
Nigeria	7,440
Hong Kong	6,700
France	6,330
Germany	6,155
Malaysia	5,810
Italy	5,695

Source: [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2019/20](#), HESA

Change in 1st years

11/12-19/20: Major non-EU countries

India	+141%
China	+90%
Hong Kong	+26%
United States	+11%
Canada	+9%
Thailand	+5%
Saudi Arabia	-3%
Malaysia	-26%
Nigeria	-26%

Source: [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2019/20](#), HESA

¹ The figures in this briefing aper on student numbers do not include higher education students who study at further education colleges or students at alternative (private) providers. There were 18,000 overseas students at alternative providers in 2019/20.

² HESA, [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2019/20](#)

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

In 2018 the US took 25% of international students who were studying overseas at universities in the OECD. The **UK was in second place with 11%** followed by Australia with 11%, Germany with 8% and Canada and France both with 6%. In the same year the UK had one of the highest rates of international students³ in the OECD with 16%. This was more than double the EU average and behind only Luxembourg (44%), Australia (22%) and Switzerland (17%).⁴

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.⁵
- 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 2018 higher education accounted for **£16.0 billion** out of a total £23.3 billion in international education exports and transnational education activity.⁶

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

³ As a proportion of all students at tertiary level

⁴ [Education at a Glance 2020](#), OECD. Indicator B6.1

⁵ [International Education –Global Growth and Prosperity: An Accompanying Analytical Narrative](#), BIS (pp29-62 especially)

⁶ [UK revenue from education related exports and TNE activity 2018](#), DfE

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- £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
- £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 2019/20 53% of non-EU students were on postgraduate courses compared to 30% 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; 91% of those from the EU and 94% of non-EU entrants compared to 76% of home students.⁷

In 2018/19 58% of Chinese students were studying at postgraduate level (mainly taught courses), a similar rate to those from the US (54%) and slightly below the proportion of Indian postgraduates (68%). The majority of EU students were undergraduates (69%).⁸

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.

Britain's 136 universities now have around 39 foreign campuses abroad, educating 26,000 students.⁹ 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).¹⁰

It has been suggested that a number of British universities are considering plans to open new branches inside the EU ahead of Brexit

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

⁸ [Where do HE students come from?](#), HESA

⁹ "[Dreaming of new spires British universities set up shop overseas](#)", *The Economist*, 25 August 2018

¹⁰ HE Global, [The Scale and Scope of UK Higher Education Transnational Education](#), Universities UK and the British Council, June 2016

as a way of maintaining partnerships with other EU universities and retaining and attracting staff who needed to work within the EU.¹¹ Oxford University may also create its first foreign campus in response to Brexit.¹²

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.¹³

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 universities¹⁴ 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	£14,936
Lab-based	£17,000	£17,041
Postgraduate taught		
Classroom	£15,100	£15,097
Lab-based	£17,500	£17,493
MBA	£20,500	£20,494

1.2 UK students abroad

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

In 2018 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 Germany (14%), the Netherlands (9%), Australia (7%) and Canada (5%).¹⁵

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

Library briefing, [Coronavirus: Financial impact on higher education](#), discusses the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on international students. The latest data on international student numbers are included in the briefing [Higher education student numbers](#).

A British Council webpage has [Covid-19: Information for international students](#).

¹¹ "[UK universities draw up plans for EU campuses ahead of Brexit](#)", The Guardian, 22 September 2016

¹² "Oxford University may break with 700 years of tradition and open a foreign campus- after France offers Brexit sweetener", *The Telegraph*, 20 February 2017

¹³ "["Empires and allies"](#)", *Times Higher Education*, 18 October 2012

¹⁴ [International and postgraduate fees survey, 2019](#), Times Higher Education

¹⁵ [Education at a Glance 2020](#), OECD. Indicators B6.3 and B6.5

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

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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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.

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

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

"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

¹⁶ Universities UK, [International students and the UK immigration debate](#), August 2014

¹⁷ IPPR, [Destination Education Reforming Migration Policy in International Students to Grow the UK's Vital Education Exports](#), September 2016

¹⁸ ["Peers defeat UK government on international student policy"](#), *Times Higher Education*, 13 March 2017

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).¹⁹ 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.²⁰

Students graduating in the **summer of 2021 and after will be eligible to apply** for the new route.²¹ 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.²²

A House of Lords PQ on 4 August 2020 confirmed that international students present in the UK **before 6 April 2021 will also be eligible** for the graduate route if they meet the other requirements of the route when it is introduced.²³

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.

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](#)

¹⁹ Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), [The determinants of international demand for UK higher education](#), January 2017 p9

²⁰ Gov.UK, [UK announces 2-year post-study work visa for international students](#), 11 September 2019

²¹ "[UK clarifies post-study work visa eligibility after 'confusion'](#)", *Times Higher Education*, 17 September 2020

²² "[UK work visas for foreign graduates to be extended to two years](#)", *The Guardian*, 10 September 2020

²³ [HL Deb \[Overseas Students: Coronavirus\] 4 August 2020](#)

Student route for applications

On 10 September 2020 the Government [announced](#) that a new route for international students to apply for visas, the Student route, would open on 5 October 2020:

Introducing these new routes now means that students will be able to benefit from the new streamlined process whilst still giving sponsors time to adapt after their autumn intake.

The routes treat all students equally, with international students, including those from Europe coming to study after the transition period ends, using the same, simplified route when it opens for applications.²⁴

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

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**.²⁵

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 2021.²⁶

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 argued

²⁴ Gov.UK, [New international student immigration routes open early](#), 10 September 2020

²⁵ GOV.UK, [PM sets out vision to cement UK as a science superpower](#), 8 August 2019

²⁶

by some 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.²⁷

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.²⁸

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

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

²⁷ Hobsons International Student Survey 2017 p13

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

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.²⁹

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](#).³⁰ The Strategy sets out how the Government aims

²⁹ HC Deb [\[Overseas Students\]](#) 6 July 2020

³⁰ HM Government, [International Education Strategy global potential, global growth](#), March 2019

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-19.³¹

“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](#)

2.6 Updated International Education Strategy February 2021

On 6 February the Government launched an [update to its international education strategy](#).³² It restated the ambitions set out in the original strategy, by 2030:

- to increase education exports to £35 billion per year
- to increase the numbers of international higher education students studying in the UK to 600,000 per year

Progress since the 2019 strategy included: the appointment of the **International Education Champion**, the introduction of a new **Graduate route for international students**, the introduction of a new **points-based immigration route**, with Student and Child routes, and the new **Turing Scheme** for overseas student placements which will start in September 2021.

The strategy proposes a number of areas which are aimed at helping to meet the headline 2030 aims on student numbers and value of exports:

- The International Education Champion
- Building lasting global partnerships

³¹ [HC Deb \[Universities: Foreign Students\] 2 July 2020](#)

³² HM Government, [International Education Strategy: 2021 update: Supporting recovery, driving growth](#)

- Enhancing the international student experience from application to employment
- A new international teaching qualification, 'International Qualified Teacher Status'
- Increase export opportunities for UK chartered professional bodies and UK special educational needs and disabilities providers

3. Non-economic benefits of international students

The benefits of higher education are wide-ranging and cannot be solely calculated in economic terms.³³

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.³⁴

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.³⁵

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?](#)³⁶ 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**:

³³ BIS research paper No 146, [The Benefits of Higher Education Participation for Individuals and Society: key findings and reports "The Quadrants"](#), October 2013

³⁴ IPPR, [Destination Education Reforming Migration Policy in International Students to Grow the UK's Vital Education Exports](#), September 2016 p8

³⁵ "UK-India relationship 'at risk' as student numbers slide", Times Higher Education, 2 March 2017

³⁶ HEPI report 76, [What do home students think of studying with international students?](#), July 2015

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 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 2019/20: Top 10

rank	By absolute number	Number	% of students	rank	By % of students	% of students	Number
1	University College London	20,170	32%	1	London Business School	80%	125
2	The University of Manchester	15,335	31%	2	Royal College of Art	75%	145
3	The University of Edinburgh	14,625	24%	3	LSE	68%	1,140
4	King's College London	13,475	7%	4	Imperial	54%	3,335
5	Coventry University	13,445	45%	5	University of the Arts, London	54%	910
6	The University of Sheffield	11,095	9%	6	LAMDA Limited	54%	4,745
7	The University of Leeds	10,760	35%	7	Royal College of Music	53%	1,980
8	University of the Arts, London	10,755	10%	8	London School of Hygiene & Tropical Med.	51%	8,170
9	The University of Glasgow	10,490	27%	9	University College London	49%	1,575
10	Imperial	10,455	30%	10	Royal Academy of Music	47%	45

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

How many staff at universities are from overseas?

In 2019/20 there were 70,195 academic staff from overseas at UK universities. This was **31% of all academic staff and 20% more than in 2015/16**. 38,410 were from the EU and 31,785 from elsewhere.³⁷ In 2018/19 Engineering & technology and the sciences had the highest overseas staff rates with 46% and 39% respectively.³⁸

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. Research income from all non-EU overseas sources was £570 million or 9% of all research income in the same year.³⁹

³⁷ [Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK, 2019/20](#), HESA

³⁸ [HE staff data: Where do they work, come from and go to?](#), HESA

³⁹ [What is the income of HE providers?](#), HESA

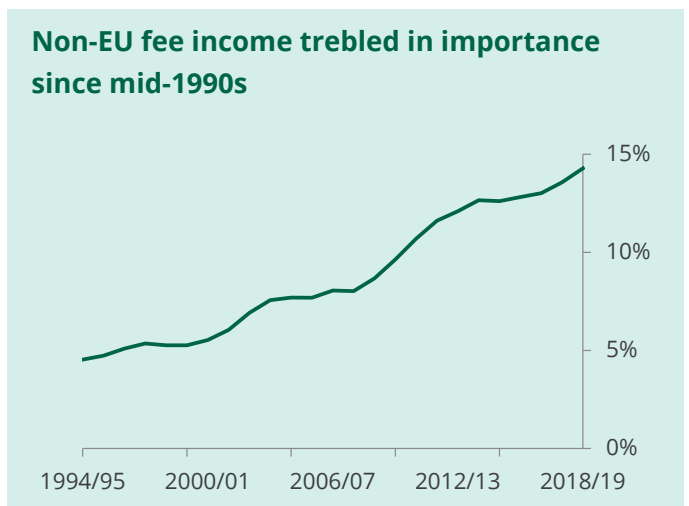
5.2 Which universities get the most research funding from overseas?

EU: Top 10 universities				Non-EU: Top 10 universities			
EU research income 2018/19				Other overseas research 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%

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.⁴⁰



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 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**.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

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 EU countries.

EU students have therefore had 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.

On 28 May 2019 the Government [confirmed](#) that EU students **starting university courses in the UK in the 2020/21** academic year will have **guaranteed home fee status and financial support for the duration of their course**:

Chris Skidmore announced that EU nationals who start a higher education course in England in the 2020/21 academic year will remain eligible for undergraduate and postgraduate financial support, Advanced Learner loans as well as FE and apprenticeships support, whether a deal for leaving the EU is in place or not.

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

The changes to funding arrangements for EU students are set out in the [Education \(Student Fees, Awards and Support\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2021](#). The Department for Education (DfE) have published guidance on the changes, [New eligibility rules for home fee status and student finance for the 021/22 academic year, December 2020](#). The guidance states that the changes **will not affect students starting courses on or before 31 July 2021**:

Academic year 2020/21

These changes will not affect students starting courses on or before 31 July 2021. If they are already eligible under the current system, they will remain eligible under the current system for the duration of their course.

Academic year 2021/22

From 1 August 2021, EU, other EEA and Swiss nationals and their family members who are not covered by the Withdrawal

Agreements will no longer be eligible for home fee status, undergraduate and postgraduate financial support and advanced learner loans from Student Finance England for courses starting in academic year 2021/22 or after. Children of Turkish workers arriving in the UK after 31 December 2020 will similarly not be eligible for home fee status and student financial support for courses starting on or after 1 August 2021.

EU students with pre-settled and settled status

The UK's EU Withdrawal Agreements preserve existing rights to non-discrimination and equal treatment for persons who have exercised their EU law rights to reside in the UK before the end of the transition period. These amendments are intended to ensure that such persons with 'protected rights' will **continue to be eligible for home fee status and student finance on broadly the same basis as domestic students from academic year 2021/22**. EU students who have **settled** or **pre-settled status** in the UK will therefore be treated the same as home students if they start courses on or after 2021/22 if they meet set residency requirements.

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**.⁴¹

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

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

How many EU students repay their 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.

Looking across all cohorts with at least one tax year processed⁴² **20% had repaid their loans in full, 23% were currently repaying, 24% were earning below the earnings threshold** (in the UK or overseas) and hence not repaying and the remaining 33% 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.⁴³

⁴¹ [Student Loans in England: 2019 to 2020 - Part 1 and 2](#), SLC

⁴² Up to the 2018 cohort who finished their courses in 2017 and first became liable to repay in April 2018

⁴³ [Student Loans in England: 2019 to 2020 - Part 1 and 2](#), SLC

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](#)]

6.1 Erasmus+

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

29,797 higher education students came to the UK under the 2018 Erasmus+ 'Call'. This includes those on traineeships as well as those studying at UK universities. **The largest number came from France** with 7,200, followed by Germany with 4,900 and Spain with 4,500.⁴⁴

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

10,133 UK students in higher education participated in the 2018 Erasmus+ 'Call' for study placements abroad. A further 8,172 were on traineeships through Erasmus.⁴⁵

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).⁴⁶

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

⁴⁴ [Erasmus+ annual report 2019 –statistical annex](#), EC (Annex 18)

⁴⁵ [Erasmus+ annual report 2019 –statistical annex](#), EC (Annex 15)

⁴⁶ [Erasmus+ statistics](#) (Higher education mobility statistics)

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.⁴⁷

Will the UK participate in Erasmus+ post Brexit?

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

On 24 December 2020 the Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that the UK **would not continue to participate** in the Erasmus programme and that the **UK would develop a new replacement scheme – the Turing scheme.** A DfE press release on 26 December 2020, "[New Turing scheme to support thousands of students to study and work abroad](#)", contains information on the scheme.

Information on the new UK mobility scheme is on the [Turing Scheme](#) website.

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

7. Sources of information

Universities UK [International](#)

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Universities UK, [International facts and figures 2020](#), October 2020

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UK Council for International Student Affairs, [UKCISA Briefing on international students](#), May 2017

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