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# Why do people come to the UK - Study?

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Data relates to the year ending September 2025 and all comparisons are with the year ending September 2024 (unless indicated otherwise).

## 1. Sponsored study visas

Overall sponsored study visa grants have remained steady over the last year, despite a decline in grants to dependants of students.

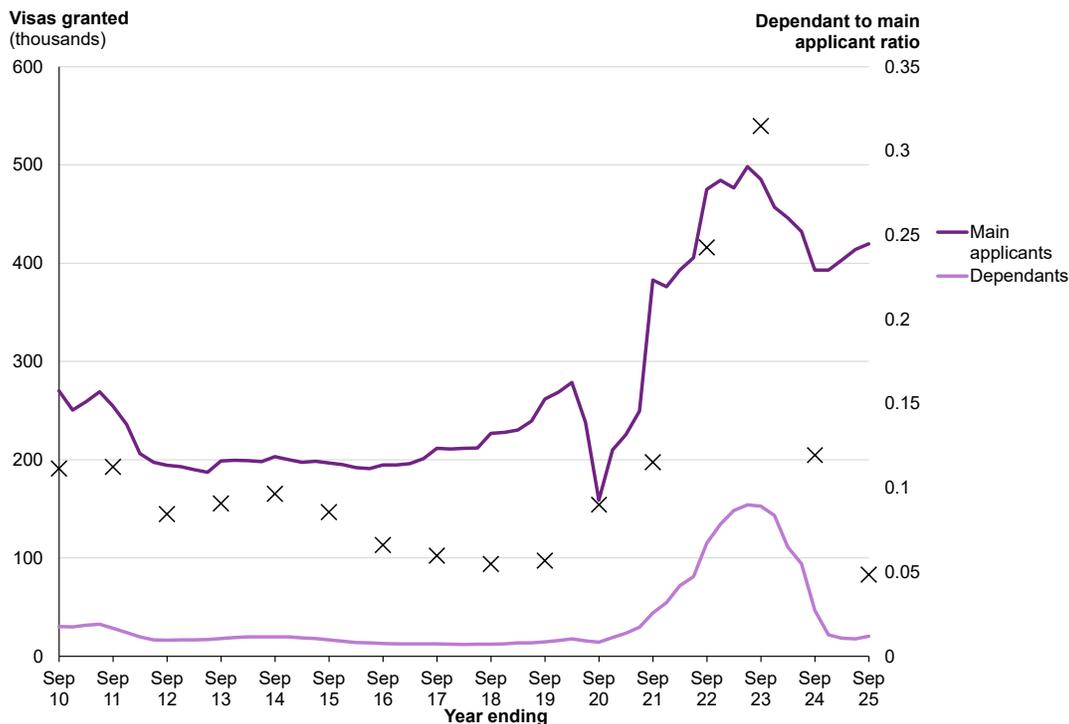
In the year ending September 2025, there were 439,924 sponsored study visas grants, similar to the previous year but 31% fewer than the peak in year ending September 2023. This included 419,558 main applicants – 7% more than in the year

ending September 2024 – and 20,366 dependants – 57% fewer than the previous year. The number of sponsored study visas granted to dependants have been low since January 2024 following policy changes restricting students ability to bring dependants, and were 87% lower in the latest year compared to year ending September 2023, before the policy changes were introduced.

Between 2011 and 2016 sponsored study visa grants to foreign students and their dependants were relatively stable at around 200,000 per year with the majority (92%) being main applicants. After 2016 the numbers steadily increased, reaching 284,721 in 2019. Following a fall during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of visas issued increased sharply, to a peak of 652,072 in the year ending June 2023. This increase followed the lifting of COVID-19 related travel restrictions, along with changes to the Immigration System following the UK’s departure from the EU, including the introduction of the Graduate route allowing eligible students to remain in the UK for 2 to 3 years. At the same time, the [International Education Strategy](#) introduced a target for the UK to receive 600,000 international students per year by 2030.

The number of visas issued have since decreased, falling to 439,924 in the year ending September 2025, largely due to there being fewer dependants accompanying main applicants. The decrease followed a policy change limiting who can bring dependants for courses starting on or after 1 January 2024. The restrictions may also have influenced the number of main applicant visas granted, which also decreased over the same period, albeit to a lesser extent. Policy changes are one of a number of factors that affect visa application volumes.

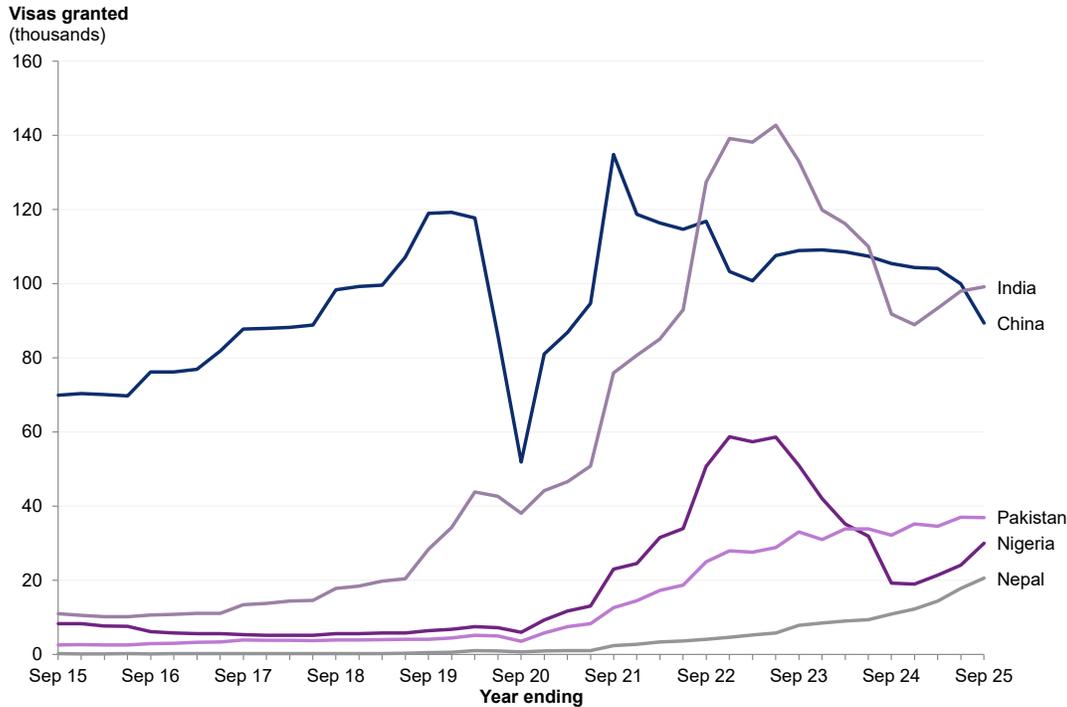
**Figure 1: Sponsored study visas granted by applicant type, year ending September 2010 to year ending September 2025**



Source: [Entry clearance visa applications and outcomes – Vis D02](#)

Figure 1 shows that following the increase between 2020 and 2023, the number of study visas fell from record levels in 2024 and has remained fairly stable since. Since the year ending March 2025 there has been around one dependant for every 20 main applicants, down from approximately 6 dependants for every 20 main applicants in the year ending September 2023.

**Figure 2: Sponsored study visas granted to the top 5 nationalities (main applicants), year ending September 2015 to year ending September 2025**



**Source:** [Entry clearance visa applications and outcomes – Vis D02](#)

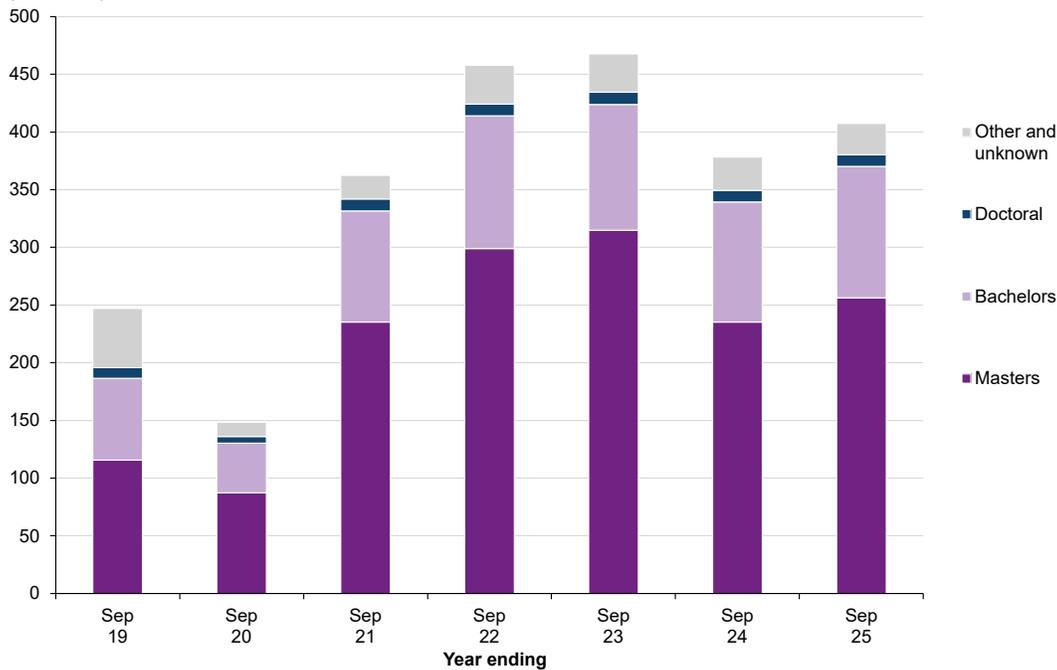
Figure 2 shows Indian nationals were the most common nationality being granted sponsored study visas with 99,128 visas issued to main applicants in the year ending September 2025 (24% of the total). These were closely followed by Chinese students with 89,397 (21%) visas granted. The third most common nationality was Pakistan with 36,924 (9%) study visas granted.

In the year ending September 2025, grants to Chinese nationals were 15% less than the previous year and 25% less than their peak in 2019. Notable increases in the latest year include Nepalese students (up 89% to 20,572) and Nigerian students (up 56% to 30,009).

Previously, the United States had been a top 5 nationality for sponsored study grants for main applicants, however, their numbers have remained relatively stable since 2020, and have been replaced by Nepal in the top 5. This may be due to higher education institutions targeting students from a range of different countries, including Nepal.

**Figure 3: Student visas granted to main applicants by course level, year ending September 2019 to year ending September 2025**

Visas granted  
(thousands)



Source: [Sponsored study visas by course level - Edu\\_02](#)

### Notes:

1. 'Other and unknown' includes visas issued to courses below bachelors level, pre-sessional English courses, courses not able to be identified, and a small number of visas which couldn't be matched to a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies.
2. Does not include child student routes.

Figure 3 shows that the trend in sponsored study visas in recent years has been mainly driven by those coming to study for a masters (accounting for over 60% of study visas over the last 5 years). The number of grants to students coming to study at masters level increased each year following the pandemic and the UK leaving the EU, but fell in the last 2 years – down 19% to 256,303 in year ending September 2025.

After masters, the most common level that international students came to study was bachelors with just over 100,000 grants on average in each of the last 5 years and 114,012 grants in the latest year (28% of the total).

## 2. Extensions of Study

Study-related extensions remained stable for main applicants and continued to grow on the Graduate route, while dependant extensions declined

following the January 2024 policy changes restricting eligibility.

In the latest year, just under 35,000 main applicants who were already in the UK were granted an extension of stay in the UK to study, enabling individuals to continue their studies or, for those not previously studying, to switch onto a sponsored study route. This was like the previous year.

During the same period, over 5,500 dependants of individuals studying in the UK were granted an extension of stay, although this represents a fall of 15%. This reduction may reflect the changes introduced in January 2024, restricting most international students from bringing dependants to the UK. The grants observed in the latest year likely relate to those who remain eligible under the current rules, such as students on postgraduate research (PGR) programmes, including PhDs.

Chinese (11,327), Indian (6,192), and Nigerian (3,987) nationals were the most common nationality extending on the student route in the latest year. Together, these three nationalities accounted for over half of all sponsored study extensions, reflecting the higher numbers of these nationals granted study visas in recent years.

Extensions onto the Graduate route increased by 10% to over 237,000 in the latest year, although this was a much smaller increase than the 67% rise seen in the previous year. The Graduate route allows eligible international students who have successfully completed an eligible UK degree to remain in the UK for up to 2 years (3 years for PhD graduates) to work or look for work. Grants under this route have increased as many of those coming to the UK to study in 2022-24 when student visas peaked will be coming to the end of their studies and are now eligible to move onto the Graduate route.

## 2.1 Additional insights from the Migrant journey: 2024 report

The [Migrant journey: 2024 report](#) shows that only 14% of non-EU nationals who initially arrived on a study visa between 2007 and 2014 continued to hold valid or indefinite leave 10 years after arrival; however, more recent student cohorts appear more likely to remain in the UK beyond the completion of their studies.

The 2020 cohort was the first able to transfer directly to the Graduate route. For the 2020 and 2021 arrival cohorts, 57% and 59% respectively continued to hold valid or indefinite leave three years later, compared with 39% for the 2019 cohort and an average of 34% for students arriving between 2011 and 2018.

In 2024, 87% of those extending onto a study route previously held another study visa, while a further 10% had previously held a work visa, indicating that most extensions relate to continued study rather than movement from other routes.

## 3. About these statistics

The statistics in this section provide an indication of the number of people who have an intention to enter the UK for study reasons. Further information on the statistics in this section can be found in the [user guide](#). Before 2021, due to freedom of movement for European Union (EU) nationals, the vast majority of UK immigration control statistics related to non-European Economic Area (EEA) nationals. From 2021, unless otherwise stated, the statistics in this release relate to both EEA and non-EEA nationals.

Entry clearance visas allow an individual to enter and stay in the UK within the period for which the visa is valid. Data in this section refers to the number of Entry clearance visas granted for study reasons within the period. If an individual was granted a visa more than once in a given period, this has been counted as multiple grants in the statistics.

Year-on-year comparisons of the number of decisions can be affected by quarterly fluctuations in the data. These fluctuations can be examined in the quarterly data in the published tables. Year ending comparisons will also include impacts resulting from the travel restrictions put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3.1 Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies

In order to be granted a sponsored study visa, a main applicant must get a 'Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies' (CAS) from their educational provider as evidence of an unconditional offer to study a course with a licensed student sponsor. Around 9 in 10 sponsored study visa applications are for the Higher Education Sector (such as universities), which has accounted for most of the growth in students in recent years.

### 3.2 Extension of temporary stay in the UK

Extensions of temporary stay in the UK relate to individuals inside the UK extending or changing the status of their right to stay in the UK. An individual is required to apply for an extension or change in status before their existing permission to enter or stay in the UK expires.

The statistics in this section show the number of grants and refusals on applications for extension of temporary stay in the UK. One individual may have made multiple applications for an extension, so may account for multiple decisions. Data in this section accounts for the outcomes of reconsiderations and appeals. The statistics

do not show the number of people applying to extend their temporary stay in the UK, nor do they show how long an individual stayed in the UK following their extension.

### 3.3 Other sources

The Home Office also publishes monthly updates on study applications, from 2022 onwards - see [‘Monthly statistical releases on migration’](#) for further information.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publish [long-term international migration estimates](#). These are statistics under development that estimate the number of people immigrating to and emigrating from the UK for 12 months or more.

In March 2025, HESA published its latest [‘Higher Education Student Statistics UK’](#) for the academic year 2023 to 2024. HESA publishes data on new entrants to UK higher education providers for both EEA and non-EEA nationals.

In December 2024, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) published their [fifth annual report](#). This report includes analysis of how the immigration system is being used within and across the nations of the UK.

## 4. Data tables

Data on student immigration can be found in the following tables:

- [Entry clearance visas summary tables](#)
- [Detailed Entry clearance visa datasets](#)
- [Sponsorship summary tables](#)
- [Detailed sponsorship datasets](#)
- [Detailed education datasets](#)
- [Admissions summary tables](#)
- [Extensions summary tables](#)
- [Detailed extensions datasets](#)
- [Migrant journey summary tables](#)
- [Migrant journey: 2024 dataset](#)

#### **We welcome your feedback**

If you have any comments or suggestions for the development of this report, please provide feedback by emailing

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