

NUS Briefing

Immigration Bill – Lords 2nd Reading

The Immigration Bill could mean international students would not choose or recommend the UK as a place to study according to a recent NUS survey - which is a significant worry to the health and sustainability of our further and higher education systems. The government should look to address concerns with NHS charges, landlord vetting and appeal rights so that we ensure our immigration policy is genuinely evidence-based and practical.

Summary

NUS has serious concerns with the government's approach to international students – which is already acting to undermine the perception of the UK as an attractive place to study. An NUS survey of 3135 international students (conducted between 4 January and 31 January 2014) found that 51% of non-EU students found the UK government unwelcoming.

International students form the most significant proportion of non-EU immigrants into the UK, with over 40% of visas issued to Tier 4 students. As such, these proposals will impact them on a higher scale than other groups of migrants. Students from the EU will also be impacted by the measures, as they, and indeed all students, will be subjected to immigration checks within rented accommodation sector.

This is despite the lack of evidence that international students make considerable use of the NHS, or that any substantial number remain in the UK after the expiry of their visa. The UK has been supported immensely by the continued revenue from international students, in addition to the wider cultural and diplomatic benefits that they bring.

International students have also contributed substantially to the UK's world-renowned research and these proposals risk disproportionately punishing students at PhD level.

Importance of international students

International students contribute a great deal to the social and economic fabric of the UK by:

- creating and sustaining strategic education partnerships around the world
- facilitating knowledge exchange and intercultural awareness
- building relationships which enable UK business to compete globally
- contributing £12.5 billion per year to the UK economy

The Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) calculated that international students provided £3.2 billion to the UK economy in 2013 from fee income alone, which amounted to 11.6 per cent of all fee income to English Universities. HEFCE further predicted a real-term increase of that amount by 24.5 per cent over the next three years.

When fees in further education and the private education sector are taken into account, along

with the economic contribution of international students to local economies from the purchase of goods and services, this figure is much higher. **The British Council reports that the most recent estimate of the economic contribution of international students to the UK is £12.5 billion per year.**

A 2013 report by Oxford Economics commissioned by the University of Sheffield found that **international students contributed a net total of £120.3 million to Sheffield in 2012/13.** A separate Oxford Economics study has also identified contributions in 2012 from international students of £88 million to Exeter and £104 million to the South West Economy – supporting 2,880 jobs.

NUS believes that the benefits international students bring to the UK are cultural and social as well as economic. The presence of international students on UK campuses enriches the student experience. For example, two-thirds of non-EU international students in higher education responding to an NUS-HSBC survey on the student experience reported belonging to a university club or society – significantly higher than UK or EU-domiciled respondents.

NUS research – international student perceptions

The government's confused approach to student visa policy is already having a negative impact on the perception of the UK as a place to study. International students are a highly mobile group, and it is clear that the UK is already coming to be seen as a less attractive place to study.

Currently, the UK is the second most popular destination for international students (after the US), according to the OECD. However, the UK share of this growing market has fallen from 10.8 per cent in 2000 to 9.9 per cent in 2009. In addition HESA figures released in January

2014 show the first ever decline in international student numbers in Higher Education. The fall of 1% changes to a fall of 4.5% if you remove students from China, one of the only countries where numbers are increasing.

An NUS survey of 3135 international students conducted between 04 January and 31 January 2014) found that:

- Of non-EU students surveyed- **501% think the UK Government is either not welcoming or not at all welcoming** towards international students. This was significantly higher for students from India (62%), Japan (65%) and Nigeria (63%)
- **16% would not recommend the UK** as place to study to a friend or relative. This was significantly higher for students from India (35%) and Nigeria (37%)
- PhD students were consistently more likely to be critical of the impact of the immigration bill with **66% stating that the UK Government was either unwelcoming or very unwelcoming towards international students.**

International students and the Immigration Bill – NHS charges

NUS joins the British Medical Association (BMA) and the Royal College of General Practitioners in their assertions that the concept of charging fees for the NHS is unworkable. We join the BMA in their concern that frontline medical staff will spend more time checking the status of NHS contributions than on care. The cost of charging and administering fees is likely to be beyond the sum of the fees gathered.

NUS has particular concerns with how this policy will impact international students:

- **74% of the non-EU students surveyed, who would be subject to the charge, said that an additional charge of £150 per year of study**

would make it more difficult or impossible for them to study in the UK.

- While the bill provides only for scope, the consultation documents suggested the NHS fee would be per person, per year and paid for at the point of application for the visa. For a PhD student coming to study for 4 years with their partner and 2 children, at the proposed cost of £150 per year, this would cost £2400 plus visa costs at the point of application. This cost is far greater than any other country and would exclude most students from choosing the UK as an option. **NUS's survey indicated that of those students who brought dependents 15% indicate they would not be able to study in the UK with this charge. Overall, 82% of those with dependents say that free access to the NHS was important to their choice to study in the UK.**
- NUS are concerned that any increase in the visa fee will discourage international students from studying in the UK. NUS would welcome solutions which do not raise the visa fee for an international student. Current visa fees range from £298-£781, and additional family members incur additional equal cost. The government has also just announced a 40% increase in visa for some additional family members.
- NUS feels the concept of contribution should be considered with caution. The NHS has never been a system where access to services was based on contribution. Under the consultation proposals, only those paying for a visa would be subject to the fee, however, those applying for a visa are the migrants controlled by the process to make the most contribution. International students will be entering the UK with a substantial maintenance

fund, proved through the visa process, and paying an average of £36,000 in tuition. International students will work during their studies, and migrants on other visas will be working full-time. They will be making a substantial contribution to the UK economy and tax purse from which the NHS is funded. There are few others who contribute on average £20,000 a year without even working. (£12,000 tuition, £8000 maintenance)

International students and the Immigration Bill – landlord status checks

NUS is greatly concerned over the suggestion that private landlords check immigration status before providing accommodation - landlords are not border agents. NUS is already concerned that the unregulated nature of the private rented sector has caused serious welfare concerns for students. It is unclear how this additional and arbitrary layer of regulation would be enforced given how under-enforced the existing regulation in the sector remains. If there are landlords unable to provide a minimum standard of accommodation it is unlikely they will be capable of providing accurate immigration checks. The British Property Federation has noted the complex collection of documents that landlords will need to check and has raised concerns over the propensity for discrimination if these policies are pursued.

NUS has noted a number of concerns for international students:

- **40% of international students from the NUS survey stated that the introduction of landlord checks would negatively impact their decision to study in the UK. NUS are also very concerned about PhD students in particular as 51% of students stated that the introduction of landlord checks**

would negatively impact their decision to study in the UK.

- International students are already monitored more than any other group of migrants due to the perceived risk by institutions of losing their Highly Trusted Sponsor Status and requirements from the Home Office. Additional monitoring by landlords is counter-productive. The additional burden of providing immigration documents for anyone with legitimate student status is redundant. NUS would welcome solutions which exclude anyone who can verify their student status, and do not increase the burden on specific student accommodation.
- NUS, with many sector organisations and housing bodies, are very concerned by the potential of this policy to increase the already existing discrimination within the housing sector. Advertisements for private rented accommodation regularly have "No Students" included, and the BBC London investigation which pointed to overt racism in the private rented sector cause concern from many students that landlords will simply avoid any student they feel they may have to check immigration status, including those that appear "international".
- **21% of international students said that their international background already had a negative impact on their ability to find accommodation. This rises to 32% of international students who have brought a spouse and/or children with them while they study.**
- NUS is also apprehensive about policies which will make it more difficult for the vulnerable or homeless to achieve housing, as many will not have the available paperwork to prove their citizenship or immigration status.

Appeal rights

NUS joins the UK Council for International Student Advisors (UKCISA), who has raised concerns about the removal of the right of appeal for in-country refusals, removal and curtailment decisions and its replacement by administrative review. NUS notes the current issues with visa applications, mainly caused by administrative error on behalf of the student or Home Office officials, and considers any withdrawal of in-country appeals premature at best. Until the Home Office can reduce the number of refusals due to error and successful appeals by providing a quality service to international students, there is little to be gained by reducing the number of appeals.

NUS campaign – 'Don't close the door'

Over 6000 people have so far signed a petition against contributions to the NHS and over 850 students have sent letters to their MP, Home Secretary, Theresa May, and the Minister for Immigration, Mark Harper, which raise concerns at the treatment of international students and the unfair impact of this bill.

NUS would welcome the opportunity to provide you further information on the impact on international students of the proposals in the immigration bill.

Further Information

For any further information on the bill please contact Lewis Cooper, NUS Public Affairs Manager (lewis.cooper@nus.org.uk/07585969585)

