



Response to the National Union of Students International Students' Committee

Thank you for your e-mail of 23 April. Migration Watch UK is an independent think-tank which focuses on the public policy issues involved in migration. As we are not part of the government we have no role in individual cases of the kind you highlight. These are part of the operational work of the UK Border Agency.

Our broad approach to policy in this field is that genuine foreign students should be welcome in Britain in view of their contribution both to academic life and to the economy. However, we believe that we must also have regard to the impact on our society of net migration at its present scale. The latest population projections show that the population of England will increase by 10 million in the next 25 years. Approximately 2/3rd of this increase will be due to net migration. This, no doubt, is the reason why successive opinion polls have shown that 75% of the public want to see immigration reduced, over 50% "by a lot".

The relevance to foreign students is that, if they stay on here, they contribute to net migration. You suggest that one solution would be for foreign students to be taken out of the migration statistics altogether. Unfortunately, the main effect of this would be to destroy the credibility of a major government pledge to the electorate. In 2010 almost 300,000 visas were issued to non-EU students and, indeed, student immigration was the largest component of migrants recorded in the International Passenger Survey. It is, in any case, not necessary to take students out of the numbers as they are also recorded as they leave, thus counter-balancing those who arrive.

As mentioned above, those who stay on, legally or otherwise, do add to net migration. There is no question of "demonising" foreign students. It is simply that there is clear evidence of abuse of the student route. A recent National Audit Office report estimated that around 50,000 bogus students entered the UK in 2009, the first year of operation of the Points Based System. Furthermore, since the Home Office introduced a stricter regime of compliance and accreditation for colleges which enrol international students, around 450, 1 in 5, have lost their licence. It is surely in the interest of international students themselves to support measures to eliminate abuse of this kind which can only be harmful to the reputation of Higher Education in the UK.

The economic benefit of foreign students is not in doubt. Its magnitude will become clearer when the government's impact assessments are reviewed in the light of the recent recommendations from the Migration Advisory Committee as to how these impacts should be calculated.

Whatever the outcome, it will need to be balanced against the wider objectives set out above.

It is our practice to engage in the public debate on immigration by producing research which you will find on our website. We trust that our position on the issues concerned has now been clarified by this letter.