



Why international students must not be removed from the net migration figures or from the net migration target

International Students: MW 441

1. The value of the Higher Education sector to our economy is not in dispute but its future depends on its reputation which has been damaged by abuse of the student route.
2. The government has had a significant success in driving out such abuse and in starting to improve the statistics about student migration. It should build on this, play it straight with the public and not go back to previous disputes.
3. The first year of new exit checks suggest that the IPS has been undercounting the outflow but it is wrong to suggest that 97% have gone home on time. This figure refers to those whose departure was recorded of whom 97% were doing so on time. In 2015 / 2016, a further 60,000 students did not leave as originally expected but instead obtained an extension to their visa for marriage or further study. Analysis of recent years suggests that students who eventually settled could account for between 10,000 and 25,000 of annual net migration. Indeed, of those granted settlement in 2015, some 26,799 individuals had initially come to the UK via the study route.
4. The public know that students add to pressure on accommodation and public services while they are here. Understandably, they are opposed - by a margin of 16% according to one poll (reported [here](#)) and 19% (according to [another](#) poll) - to removing students from migration figures and would see such a move as an attempt to camouflage their impact. The Labour Force Survey shows that over a million foreign-born people in the UK in early 2016 had first arrived to study.
5. Some claim that students do not add to net migration. This is simply incorrect. As the Home Office has [noted](#): "International students do add to net migration both initially & over the longer term. Not all students depart the UK when they have completed their studies and significant numbers are granted settlement."
6. There is nothing to be gained from removing students from the target. The press would simply add the numbers back and accuse the government of fiddling the figures. This would be a significant blow to the government's reputation on a sensitive issue.
7. Furthermore, any such change would become a slippery slope. Other interest groups would seek similar treatment to avoid scrutiny of the immigration consequences of their policies. Work permits are one example, as are Intra Company Transfers which are entirely temporary yet numbered 36,000 in 2016.

8. The “benefit” in terms of appearing to reduce net migration would be very limited - a maximum of 10% of current levels of total net migration which is running at about 250,000 a year. Meanwhile, key bodies such as the Royal Statistical Society have expressed their strong opposition to removing students from the net migration figures.
9. The fundamental point is that there is not now and never has been any limit on the number of genuine students who may come to the UK to study. Similarly, there has never been a limit on the number of foreign graduates who can stay on and work in a graduate occupation that pays at least £20,800 a year.
10. Any negative impression overseas has, therefore, been largely generated by the activities of the academic lobby. The sharp fall in numbers since 2010 has been very largely due to a reduction in bogus applicants, especially in the Further Education sector where nearly one thousand colleges have been closed.
11. There is a hugely positive story to tell when it comes to universities. UK universities lead the global pack for international student satisfaction (see [here](#)). Applications for visas to study at universities by non-EU citizens increased by 24% between 2010 and 2017 while, within that, applications for Russell Group Universities rose by 60%. Non university applicants from outside the EU fell by 67%. This suggests that the quality of applicants has been improving steadily – a real success for policy.

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