Annual policy review

2021-22

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Contents

Introduction **2**

1. The changing landscape of UK HE **3**

1.1 International Education Strategy 2021 4
1.2 The Graduate route 5
1.3 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) ceases international calls 5

2. Headline data for international students in the UK **6**

2.1 The state of international HE in the UK 2020-21 7
2.2 Undergraduate international students in UK HE by nation 9
2.3 Most popular subjects 11

3. The student experience **12**

3.1 Non-continuation rate of first year full-time BSc students: 2017-18 to 2019-20 entry cohorts, HESA 13
3.2 International students' satisfaction with their academic course, National Student Survey (NSS) 14
3.3 Graduate outcomes, HESA 15
3.4 International graduates' reflection on activity by classification of their first degree, HESA 16

4. Summary of evidence: key points from existing reports **17**

4.1 International facts and figures 2021, Universities UK International (UUKi) 18
4.2 Student academic experience survey 2021, AdvanceHE and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) 19
4.3 The costs and benefits of international HE students to the UK economy, HEPI, UUKi, and London Economics 21
4.4 Paying more for less? Careers and employability support for international students at UK universities, HEPI and Kaplan International Pathways 22
4.5 International student futures: developing a world-class experience from application to onward career, University Partnerships Programme (UPP) Foundation Student Futures Commission 24
4.6 The China question: managing risks and maximising benefits from partnership in HE and research 25
4.7 Natural partners: building a comprehensive UK-India knowledge partnership 27
4.8 Why aren't we second? Part 2, UUKi and IDP Connect 28
4.9 Students' perceptions of belonging and inclusion at university 29

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Introduction

This annual policy review aims to bring together all major sector updates related to international students in one place, covering the period January 2021 to March 2022.

The 2021 update of the UK Government's International Education Strategy (IES) set the tone for the UK higher education (HE) sector's focuses in 2021-22. The update emphasised the importance of growth in the number of international students coming to the UK and of taking steps to enhance the competitiveness of the UK's offer – in particular, on post-study work rights and employability opportunities.

As we reflect on this year's review, it is clear that the UK's international education sector continues to develop and grow, despite many obstacles and barriers that may have deterred international students from studying in the UK. It is a testament to the sector's adaptability and resilience that it has not only retained but increased the number of international students during a global pandemic and a rapidly changing immigration system.

By highlighting current facts and figures and measuring future trends, we hope that this report will be an invaluable source for colleagues across the sector and serve as a testament to their hard work, reflected in the data within.

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1

The changing landscape of UK HE

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1.1 International Education Strategy 2021

The UK Government's IES was updated in January 2021 to reflect the dual impact of the UK leaving the EU and the Covid-19 pandemic. Its aim was to support sustainable growth and the sector's recovery.

The refreshed strategy placed a new focus on enhancing the international **student experience** and dedicated a section to this (section 2.2) – something that UKCISA members had been pushing for. It emphasises collaboration across the sector to further support international students from the time of application to graduate employment, and it provides a progress review since 2019 when the original IES was launched.

The 2021 update also highlighted recent visa changes, the launch of the Turing Scheme for outbound mobility, and concrete measures that will be taken to achieve the targets of 600,000 international students in the UK and a £35bn export of education by 2030.

Contained within the document are 14 actions necessary to divide the required work into more manageable steps to follow as a sector. Two of these actions explicitly name UKCISA to lead on them:

Action 5: Studying in the UK

UKCISA is to work with the Office for Students (OfS) to lead a new project "to find 'what works' in ensuring international students can integrate and receive a fulfilling academic experience in the UK". Not only will the project consider international students, but also how they affect the learning experience of home students.

Action 6: Graduate outcomes and employability

UKCISA is to form a working group (the International Student Employability Group – ISEG) involving the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Universities UK International (UUKi) and other relevant sector employer groups to support international student employability. This action aims to build an understanding of the labour market's needs and to identify ways in which international students can be supported to fill those gaps and the barriers that prevent them from doing so.

1.2 The Graduate route

Following the IES, a new flexible Graduate route for international students was introduced in July 2021. It provides two years for undergraduate or master's students (three after a PhD) to stay in the UK to work, or look for work, upon graduation.

The Graduate route allows international students to take longer to find a job in the UK. It does not require sponsorship from an employer, so it is a good option if seeking employment with small charities and SMEs that may not be able to pay the cost of employing an international graduate through the skilled worker visa. The visa is available for students of any skill level, and graduates can change jobs throughout this two-year period. Self-employment in the route was lobbied for by UKCISA, ensuring further flexibility and appeal for graduates.

This visa route allows students to remain in the country upon graduation and find employment in the same environment in which they have studied, giving them flexibility and time to apply for a job that they enjoy. The Graduate route is already proving to be attractive, and recent data from UCAS shows significant increases in non-EU recruitment, including from markets that suffered following the removal of the previous post-study work route.

This scheme has come with increased reporting for institutions, which must be communicated to to all eligible students, regardless of whether they intend to apply for the scheme.

1.3 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) ceases international calls

At the end of 2021, HESA ceased calls to graduates with international mobile numbers to gather survey responses, relying only on email and social media. HESA has previously collected the majority of international graduate outcomes data through international calling.[1] This data loss diminished the response rate and therefore overall quality of the data, evidenced by the initial pulse surveys of institutions taken.

This lack of data will affect our understanding of these numbers as a sector. This could impact the UK Government's targets, goes against the objectives set out in the IES and makes it difficult to write and shape policy without fully understanding the needs of the international student community. UKCISA has been working with the sector and HESA to find a solution to this data loss.

1 To read more about the Graduate Outcomes survey, please go to section 3.3.

2

Headline data for international students in the UK

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2.1 The state of international HE in the UK 2020-21

The UK has hit the 2019 and revised 2021 IES target for recruiting 600,000 international students almost a decade early. In 2020-21, the number of international students in UK HE, including all modes of study, reached 605,130.

605,130
international students studied in UK HE in 2020-21

International students accounted for
22%
of the overall student population

16%
were non-EU students

6%
were EU students

When considering only the 562,990 full-time international students, the percentage of them in the overall student population increases to 26%.

International students accounted for
17%
of undergraduate full-time students (1,707,255)

11%
were non-EU students

6%
were EU students

At the postgraduate level, non-UK students accounted for
56%
of the HE population (468,575)

49%
were non-EU students

7%
were EU students

At doctoral level, non-UK students accounted for 48% of the total number of students in the UK.

Most of the growth in 2020-21 is attributed to an increase in students continuing their studies from their second year onwards. These students grew by 18% compared to last year, whereas the increase in new entrants was just 3%.

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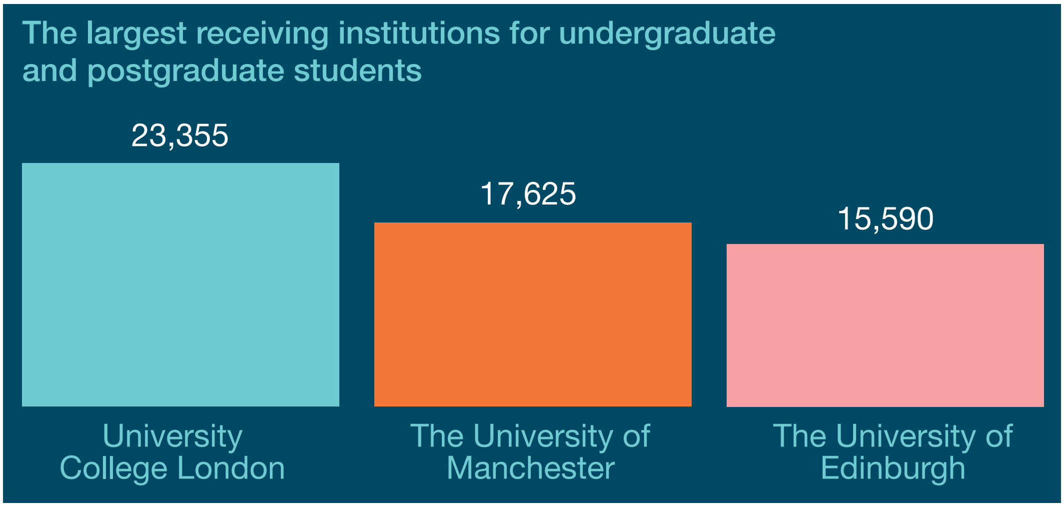
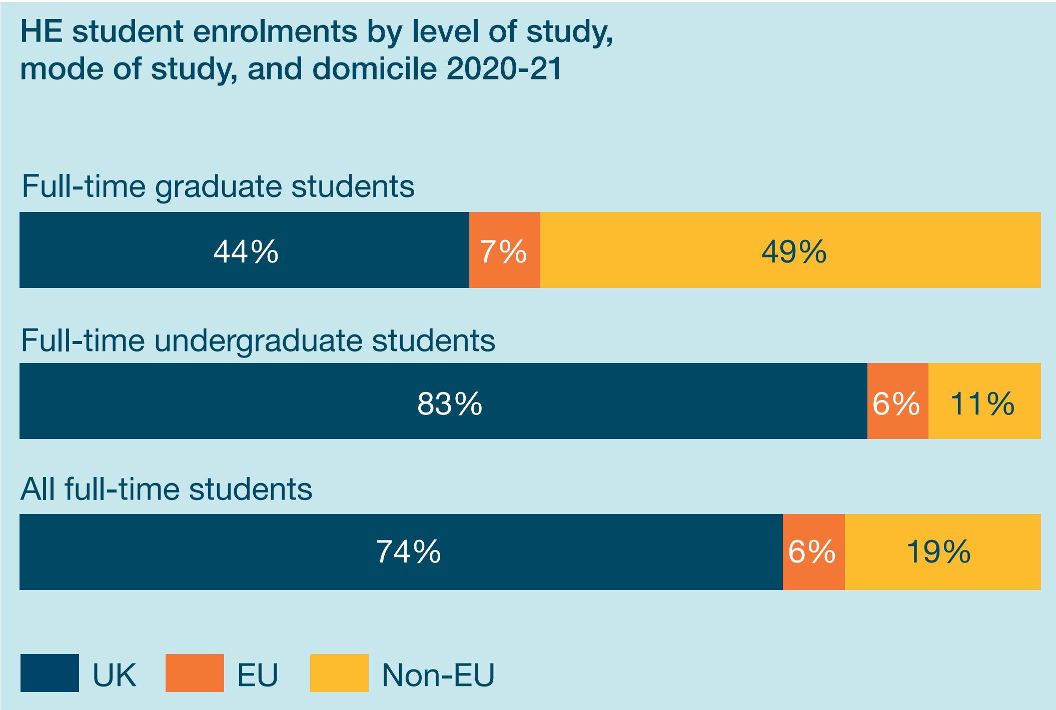




Sources: Calculations from HESA (2021) HE student data: where do HE students come from?, table 11
Data from UUKi (2021), International Facts and Figures 2021

UCAS data for the 2021-22 recruitment cycle suggests a significant decline in applications from EU students, which had already fallen by 3% in 2020-21. It is likely that next year's HESA data for 2021-22 will show a reduction in full-time international entrants to first-degree programmes.

The declining number of EU students can be attributed largely to the increased tuition fees that these students must now pay, due to Brexit, and the added cost of a required visa. This contrasts with a 17% rise in applications from non-EU students, demonstrating that this group of students are responsible for the continued rise in international student numbers.

2.2 Undergraduate international students in UK HE by nation

Non-EU undergraduate students studying in each nation

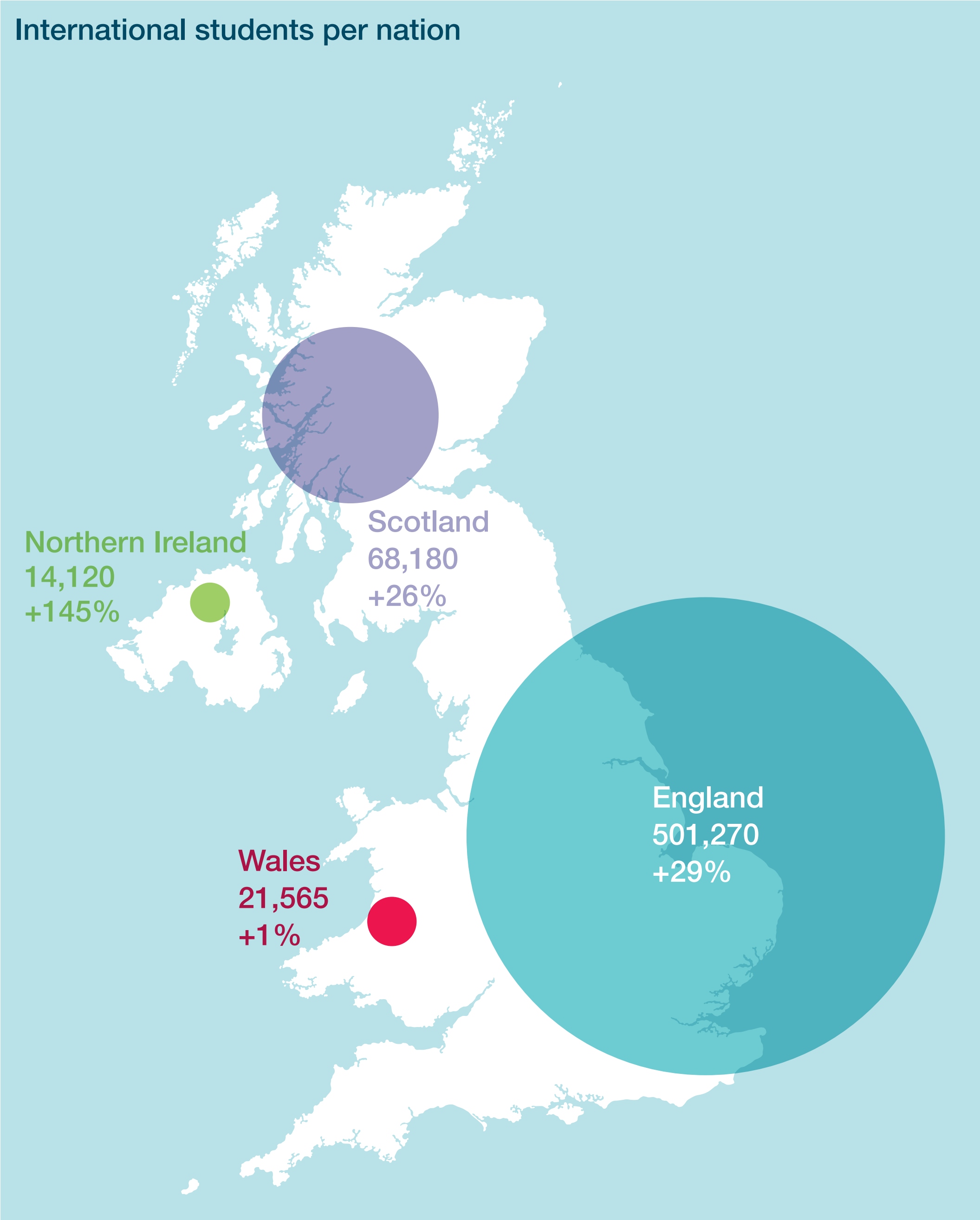
Nation	2017-18	2020-21	Percentage growth
England	387,700	501,270	29%
Scotland	54,345	68,180	26%
Wales	21,350	21,565	1%
Northern Ireland	5,765	14,120	145%
UK total	469,160	605,130	29%

* UK total given on the HESA website may differ from what the four nations add up to due to rounding differences

There has been a 29% increase in the number of international students coming to study in the UK since 2017-18. This is primarily due to the rise in international students studying in England, who made up 83% of the total number of international students in the UK in the year 2020-21. Both England and the UK have had constant growth in the numbers of international students for the past five years.

Scotland's numbers have also risen considerably since 2017-18, with a particularly high growth rate of 11% in 2019-20 and 2020-21. Northern Ireland has seen the highest growth of all the nations, increasing by 145% in the past five years.

Wales is the only nation to remain stagnant in growth, even decreasing in 2020-21 by 2%.



Sources: Calculations from HESA (2021) HE student data: where do HE students come from?, table 11

Data from UUKi (2021), International Facts and Figures 2021

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2.3 Subjects studied

Most popular subjects in 2021

International students in the UK	Business and management (17,270 students)	Social sciences (7,580 students)	Engineering and technology (6,605 students)
Women	Psychology (1,850 students)	Law (2,985 students)	Design studies (1,890 students)
Men	Computer science (2,460 students)	Business and management (2,165 students)	Business studies (2,190 students)

*The data above is from the UCAS end of cycle undergraduate data 2021.

Although the target of 600,000 was met in 2020-21 (HESA statistics), there was a noticeable drop in international students in 2021. For nearly all the subjects taken by non-UK students, there was a spike in intake of students from 2019 to 2020, and then a decrease in 2021. As this spike in 2020 was during the start of the pandemic where there was economic uncertainty, people were more likely to pursue education for stability. This indicates that for 2021-22, there may not be as many international students studying in the UK and we could see a drop in future numbers.

There is a particular shift in the popularity of language subjects taken by international students between 2020 and 2021 – non-EU Gaelic studies students increased by 500%, while the biggest growth in EU students was in American and Australasian Studies, and 'other' English studies (both by 100%).

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The student experience

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3.1 Non-continuation rate of first year full-time BSc students: 2017-18 to 2019-20 entry cohorts, HESA

Student success can be measured in many ways.[2] Below, the data reflects the entry cohorts of students for 2017-18 to 2019-20. These cohorts of international students are those who will graduate in 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23, respectively. Looking into the first year of these cohorts allows us to see how many people do not continue their studies to the end of their degree. These statistics include the first five months of the Covid-19 pandemic until 31 July 2020.

Non-continuation of entry cohorts	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20*
Non-EU students	3.0%	3.9%	4.6%
EU students	5.0%	6.4%	6.4%
UK students	6.8%	7.7%	6.6%

Source: calculations for the full-time first-degree entry cohort of HESA 'Non-continuation: UK performance indicators' 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20.

When comparing these numbers, there is an increasing trend of international students deciding to not continue with their studies in the UK from 2017-18 to 2019-20. This is the case for all figures, going up on average 1% regardless of EU, non-EU, or domestic UK students for 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Notably, the domestic students' non-continuation rate declined in 2019-20 compared to previous years and compared to non-EU students' non-continuation rates which continued to increase. In HESA's summary for non-continuation rates, it states that this shift could be partially attributed to a general trend of increased enrolment and continuation in HE during periods of economic uncertainty and instability in alternative pathways outside education.[3] International students studying remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK may be a contributing factor to the opposite trend seen for their non-continuation rates.

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2 Many organisations work with HESA stats, such as student success and satisfaction, to analyse various areas of the overall student experience. Education Insight is one such organisation that calculates the Global Education Index which reflects each higher education institution's engagement in international topics and strategies.

3 HESA (2022), UK Performance Indicators: Non-continuation 2020-21

3.2 International students' satisfaction with their academic course, National Student Survey (NSS)

The NSS is an annual survey that collects undergraduate final year students' opinions on the quality of UK higher education courses. The survey delves into various aspects of the student experience and provides a valuable insight into what students like and don't like about their course.

Question 27 of the National Student Satisfaction Survey posed the question: 'Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course'.

Region of domicile	Agreement rate (2019)	Agreement rate (2020)	Agreement rate (2021)
EU (excluding UK)	81.28%	80.33%	75.15%
Rest of world	84.05%	83.74%	77.74%
UK	83.76%	82.68%	75.20%

Sources: Office for Students NSS 2019, 2020, and 2021 results. For the question, please see NSS 2021 core questionnaire.

When matching this data to the table in 3.1, it is clear that the satisfaction of the course is linked to the non-continuation rate. As the satisfaction decreases year on year, the non-continuation rate increases. This suggests that until the satisfaction rate starts to increase, the non-continuation rate will continue to grow.

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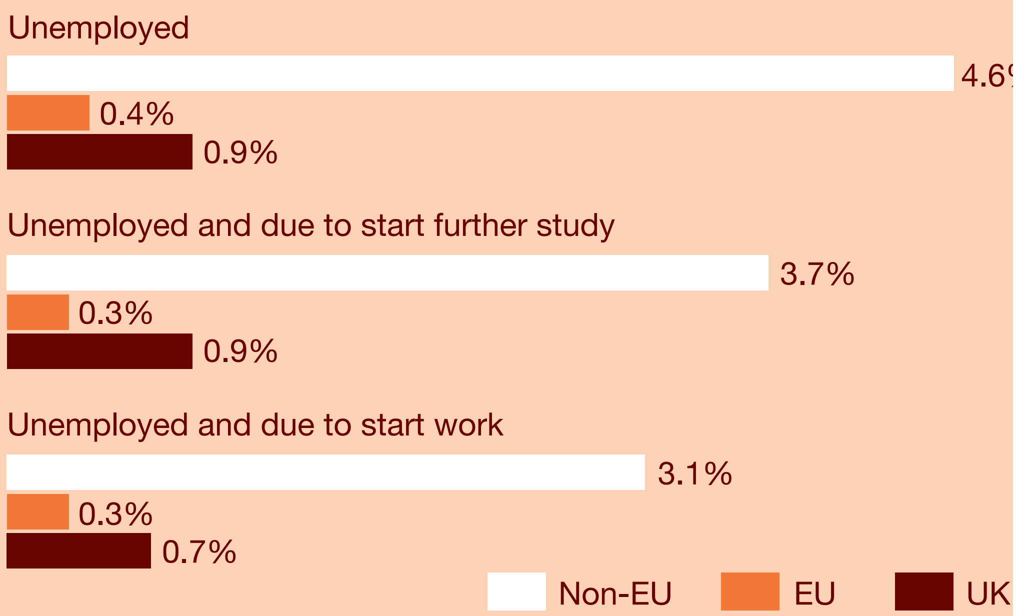
3.3 Graduate outcomes, HESA

The Graduate Outcomes annual survey captures graduates' activities approximately 15 months after completing their studies in the UK. It provides a wide range of data on life after graduation including domicile and industry of work (domestic and international), as well as reflections on their degree and career. Replacing the Destination Leavers from Higher Education survey, the first entry cohort to be surveyed was in 2017-18.

It is worth noting that quality data gathered from the HESA Graduate Outcomes survey on international students will start to decrease as the international student calls have ceased (as per the details in section 1.3 above).

One of the first questions in the Graduate Outcomes survey is whether the graduate is employed or engaging in further study after completing their previous degree.

Graduate outcomes for 2018-19 entry cohort



Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes Data. For detailed analysis, see HESA Graduate Outcomes data

In the table above, it is clear that non-EU students in the 2018-19 cohort are less likely to be employed than EU and UK students. This could be due to a number of factors, such as visa barriers (including sponsorship) in the UK, or a lack of careers support in gaining a basic understanding of the UK (or global) labour market. This is supported by the data which shows that unemployed non-EU students are higher than those unemployed and due to start work.

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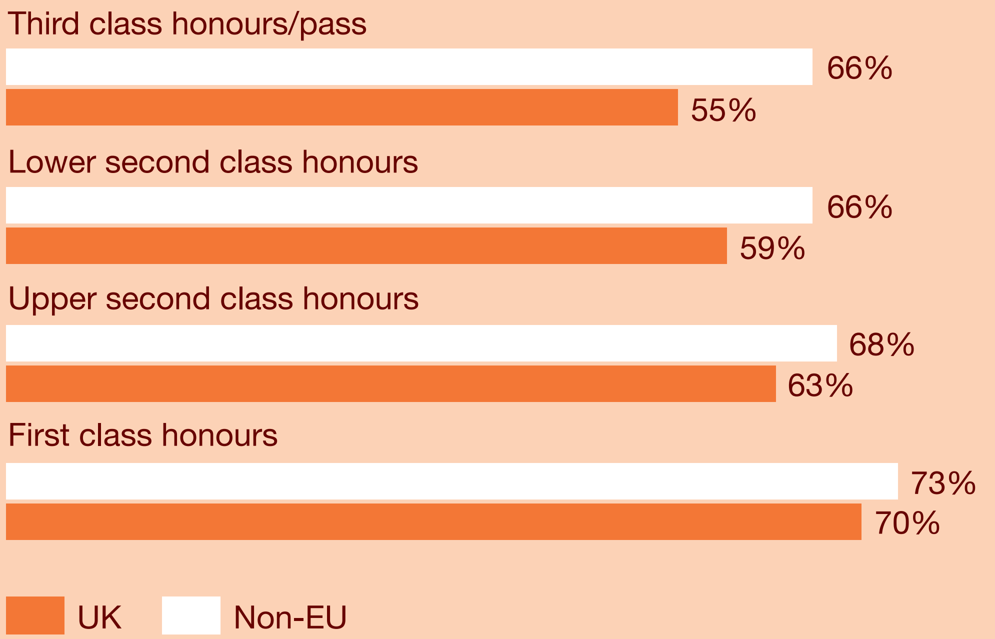
3.4 International graduates' reflection on activity by classification of their first degree, HESA

As part of the Graduate Outcomes survey, graduates of the 2018-19 entry cohort were asked to summarise their feelings about their activities at the time of the survey. The chart below displays their reflections on the statement: 'I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity'. Respondents shared their opinion on a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

International graduates displayed higher levels of agreement than domestic students when reflecting on their current activity and whether it utilised what they had learned while studying in the UK. The disparity between UK and non-UK graduates is three percentage points for those with first-class honours favouring non-UK graduates (73% and 70%, respectively). However, it widens to 11 percentage points for those with third-class honours (66% and 55%, respectively, for non-UK and UK graduates).

International graduates' reflection on use of degree by current activity



Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes data (2021)

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Summary of evidence: key points from existing reports

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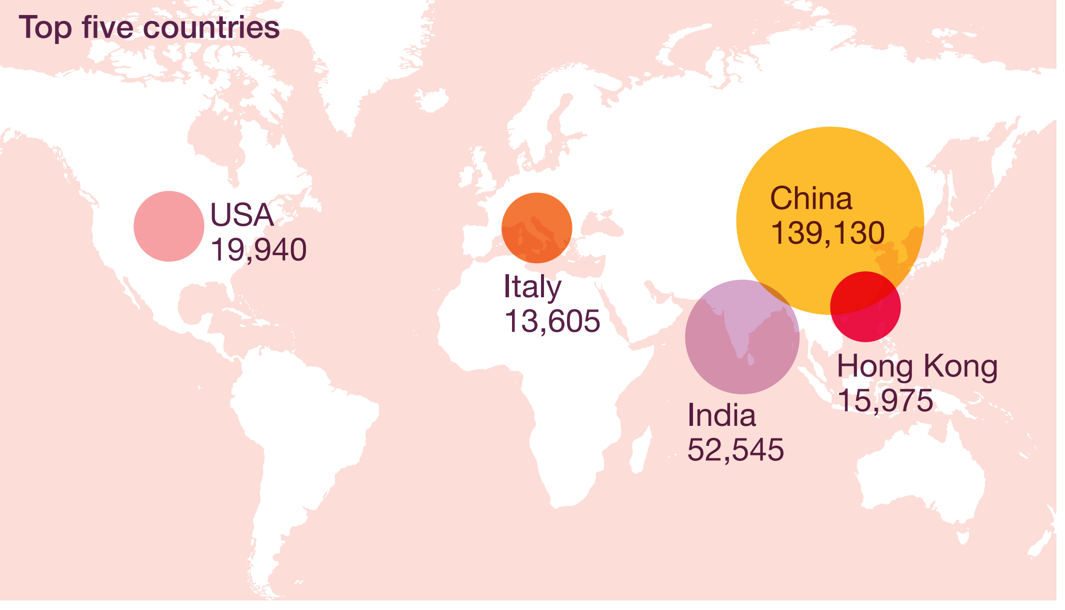
4.1 International facts and figures 2021, Universities UK International (UUKi)

The annual UUKi report on international facts and figures brings together 2019-20 statistics on international students and mobility opportunities. This report is a useful resource for the sector, making it easier to find leading statistics in one place. Within it, data details the countries that send the greatest number of international students to study in the UK, the subjects that international students study, and the general state of transnational education in the UK.

There were 538,615 international students in 2019-20. They made up 27.5% of the student population of the UK. Compared to competitor countries, growth in the number of international students in the UK is small. The increase was 4% between 2017-18 and 2018-19. By comparison, the growth was 17% in Australia, 11% in Japan, 14% in China, and 12% in Russia.

China, India, the USA, Hong Kong, and Italy sent the most students to the UK in 2019-20. Students from China made up over 20% of UK's international students.



The countries with the fastest-growing rates of students studying in UK between 2018-19 and 2019-20 were India, Nigeria, Portugal, and Pakistan. The number of students from India increased by 97%, Nigeria by 20%, and Portugal by 18%.

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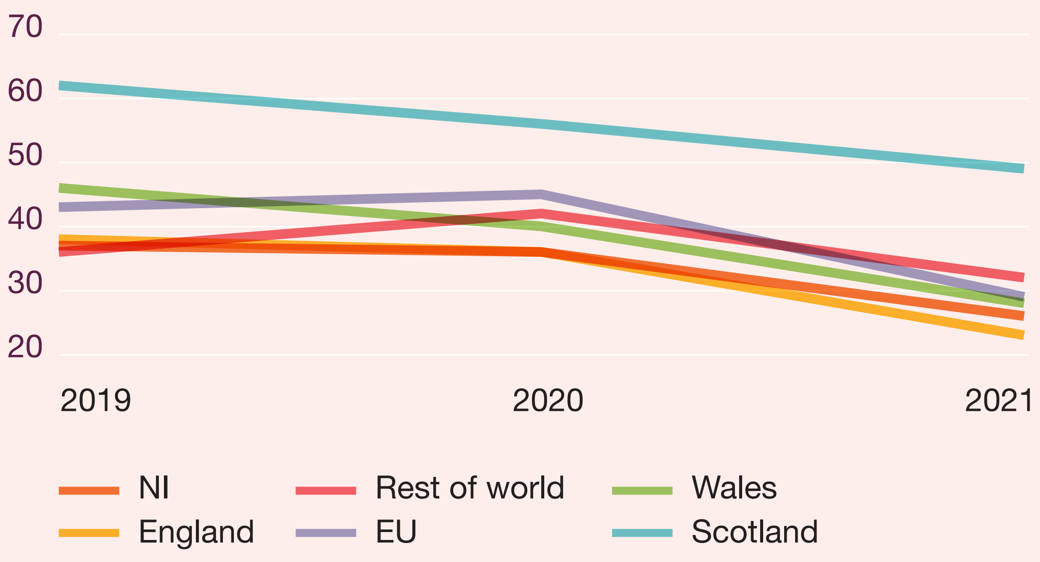
4.2 Student academic experience survey 2021, AdvanceHE and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)

Advance HE and HEPI encourage the sector to learn from the experiences of the pandemic, listen to students and their needs, and focus on mental health and online provision to shape how HE is delivered, while taking into account the reasons for low satisfaction with the student experience in 2020-21. This survey provides the sector with key measurements of higher education institution (HEI) performances, through the eyes of the students, indicating areas to work on for improved student satisfaction in years to come.

Although the figures are skewed towards educational experiences during a pandemic, and therefore a unique set of circumstances to be living and learning in, there are valuable points to be drawn from the survey, which had 10,186 responses from students in the UK (4% being non-EU students and 7% being EU students)[4].

Value for money



Just one in four students (27%) felt that they received a good-value education in 2021. This compares to 44% of the students who perceived poor or very poor value.

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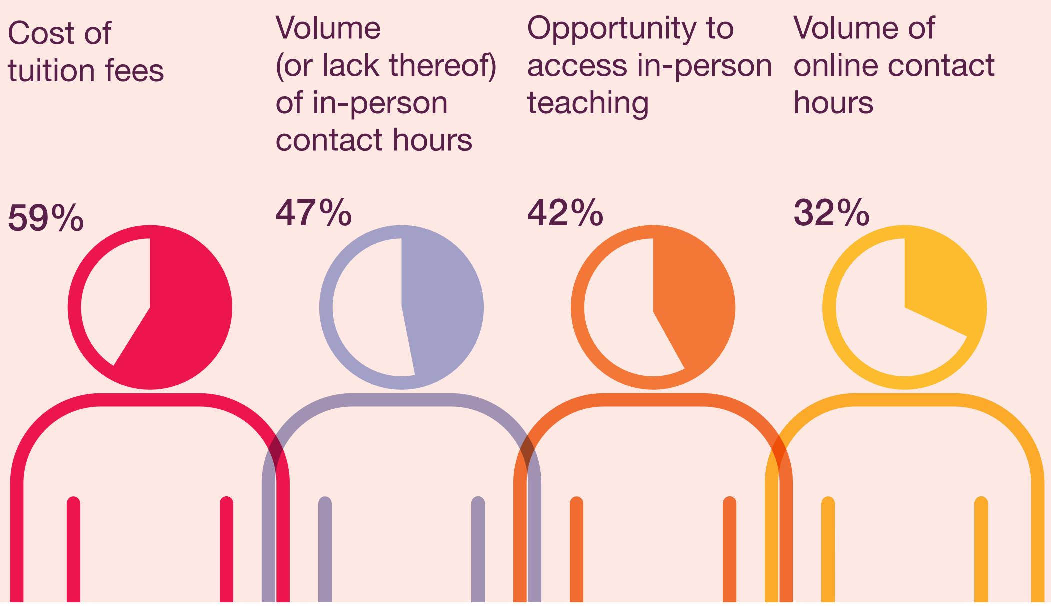
4 The results were weighted to make the responses representative of the whole student population.

Declines in the perceived value of HE are across all domiciles, with 50% of students in Scotland feeling most optimistic about 'value-for-money', followed by 33% of non-EU students reflecting the same opinion.

Opinions on government funding

Students outside the EU were less likely than home and EU students to believe that the government should pay more than half or all the costs of their education. However, there was a marked increase in discontent with fees from 46% in 2020 to 56% in 2021. This was driven by a number of factors:

Reasons for discontent with HE fees in the UK



There has not been an increase in drop-out rates for students, suggesting that they are not regretting their choices of course and institution. More likely, they are unhappy with the general learning experience of the pandemic. This is backed up by students indicating their dislike for online learning and preference for in-person teaching.

4.3 The costs and benefits of international HE students to the UK economy, HEPI, UUKi, and London Economics

This report produced by HEPI and UUKi analysed the economic benefits of international students to the UK economy. It focused on the 2018-19 international student cohort and analysed the economic impact throughout the full duration of their studies in the UK.

The combined direct, indirect, and induced economic benefits of international students to the UK economy totalled £94,000 per EU student and £109,000 per non-EU student. Over the entire international 2018-19 cohort, the total benefit was estimated at £28.8 billion. This total benefit increased by 19% since the 2015-16 cohort. Most of these differences were driven by higher tuition fees charged to non-EU countries and an increase in enrolment of non-EU students and EU postgraduate students.

Total benefits associated with the 2018-19 cohort by domicile and type of benefit.

Type of benefit	EU	Non-EU	Total
Fee income	£2.4bn	£12.5bn	£15.0bn
Non-fee income	£3.5bn	£9.6bn	£13.1bn
Visitor income	£0.1bn	£0.6bn	£0.7bn
Total	**£6.1bn**	**£22.7bn**	**£28.8bn**

Note: Values are rounded to the nearest £0.1 billion. All estimates are presented in 2018-19 prices and discounted to reflect net present values. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source: London Economics' analysis

Costs associated with students were estimated at £22,000 per EU student and £7,000 per non-EU student. For non-EU students, this cost was made up entirely of public service provision. For EU students, additional costs included student support for tuition fees or tuition fee grants.

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The net economic impact per student was estimated at £71,000 per EU student and £102,000 per non-EU student.

The net impact of non-UK students has increased from £21.7 billion in 2015-16 to £25.9 billion in 2018-19. There was a 17% increase in international student numbers and a 19% increase in their economic impact. This was driven by an increase in tuition fee income due to higher fees charged to non-EU students and EU postgraduate students.

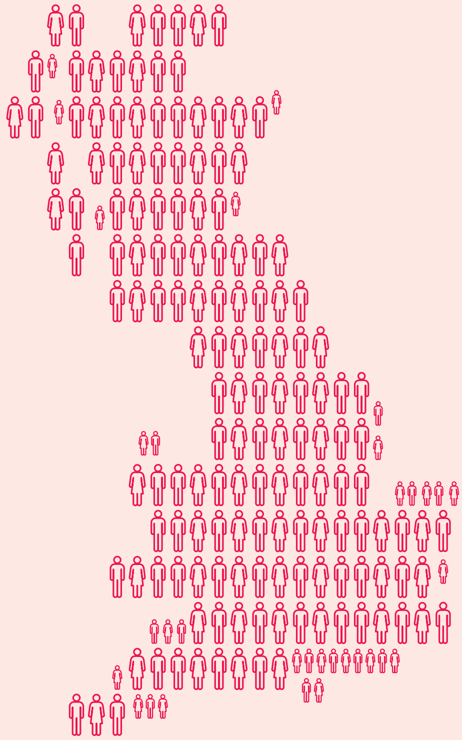
4.4 Paying more for less? Careers and employability support for international students at UK universities, HEPI and Kaplan International Pathways

HEPI and Kaplan International Pathways worked with the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) and Cibyl to produce a report on employability support offered by HEIs and international students' perceptions. The sample pool of students used was made up of 38% bachelor's degree students and 45% from taught master's degree programmes.

International students need support when entering the labour market in a country in which they are unfamiliar with. More so, HEIs cannot be experts in every labour market around the world, so may struggle to advise students and graduates on getting jobs in countries other than the UK.

The report gives several suggestions for the sector and governments to consider when striving to improve employability services, including supporting international students to find work experience and giving them career information pre-arrival.

71% of international students say they plan to stay in the UK to work after graduation



The key results on career needs are reflected in the data below:

- 82% of international students stated that careers support was either ‘important’ or ‘very important’ when choosing a university in the UK.
- 92% of students said that employability skills were ‘important’ or ‘very important’.
- Only 52% of international students thought that their university was doing well in supporting international students.
- Students who felt that their courses had not covered employability skills were twice as likely to say that, in hindsight, they would have picked a different institution to do the same course (18% versus 8%).
- International students expected careers support to continue after graduation, with 51% of students agreeing this should be offered to alumni for between one and five years after graduation.
- 71% of international students said that they planned to stay in the UK to work after graduation.

4.5 International student futures: developing a world-class experience from application to onward career, University Partnerships Programme (UPP) Foundation Student Futures Commission

In January 2022, the UPP Foundation Student Futures Commission from the International Students Sub-commission published its own report on enhancing the international student experience in the UK.[5] It delved into international students' expectations of studying and future ambitions, detailing recommendations for the sector, governments, and sector bodies to ensure that international students get the most out of a UK education.

The findings were based upon the analysis gathered in the *Paying more for less? Careers and employability support for international students at UK universities?* publication (see 4.4 above) and are as follows:

1. At the pre-arrival stage, international students said that they experienced anxiety and that **communications** needed to be more responsive, especially when detailing costs of studying in the UK.

2. During their studies, international students said that they wanted **more careers support, more social and cultural interaction, and information about the support that is available** to them. They suggested that universities could have a dedicated international placement officer to help with placements and internships. Additionally, they suggested a review of all support on offer for international students.

3. Post-university, international students wanted more **graduate employment information** both in the UK and in their home countries, including on visa options for graduates. Suggestions included providing a dedicated employment service during the early stages of careers and ensuring that all universities have access to robust employment data.

5 HEPI, *2021 HEPI Soft-Power Index: UK slips further behind the US (again)*, Press release, 2 September 2021

The recommendations set out in these findings are as follows:

- Communicating to the labour market regarding the Graduate route as part of the UK International Education Strategy.
- Monitoring the international competitiveness of the Graduate route offer in relation to key competitors and encouraging a better representation of international students in the UK's Graduate Outcome survey.
- Working with HEIs and sector bodies towards the development of a national resource which facilitates international graduates finding employment in their home country.

4.6 The China question: managing risks and maximising benefits from partnership in HE and research

Authored by Jo Johnson, Jonathan Adams, Janet Ilieva, Jonathan Grant, Jess Northend, Niall Sreenan, Vivienne Moxham-Hall, Kristin Greene, Seema Mishra

China is currently developing its HE at a rapid rate, soon to overtake the USA on the amount that is spent on research and development, as well as the potential for being the most relevant research partner for the UK.

However, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of how China operates, especially with growing geopolitical tensions in and between the country and others. To safely make the most of the partnership, the UK must measure, manage and mitigate any potential risks inherent in the ways in which collaborations and partnerships are run, while being aware of the reliance and economic benefit the UK has on Chinese students studying in the UK.

China is the largest country of origin for the world's internationally mobile students.

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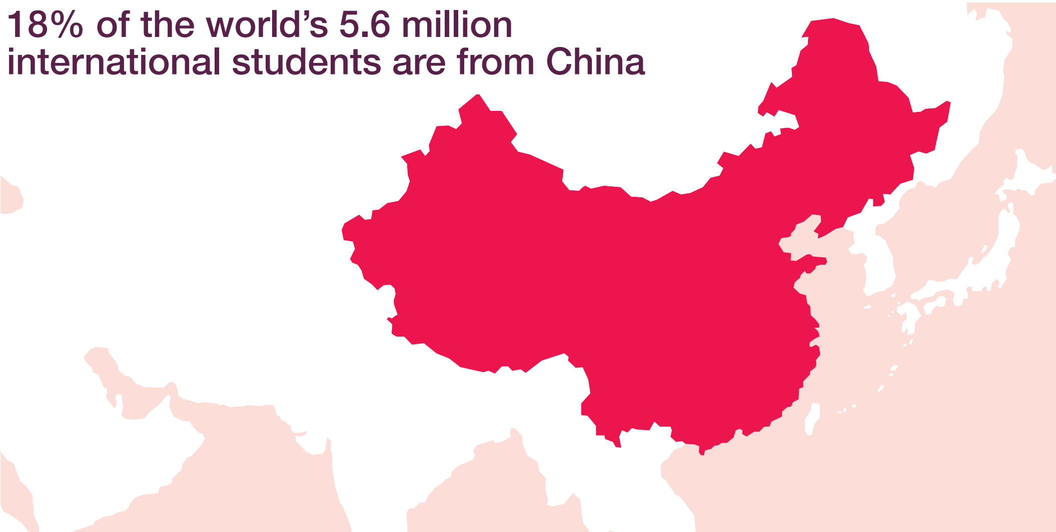
18% of the world's 5.6 million international students are from China



The China question: managing risks and maximising benefits from partnership in HE and research looks at the impact that Chinese students have on the international student market in the UK:

The UK is the third largest host country for Chinese students after the USA and Australia.

There were 115,000 full-time students from China in 2018-19 (an increase of 34.45% since 2014-15). They represented 24% of the overall international students in the UK.

The net value of UK HE exports from the hosting of full-time Chinese students was approximately £3.7 billion in 2019.

86% of Chinese students in the UK are self-funded and most likely come from middle-class families with career ambitions. Another 10% of the students are on institutional tuition fee waivers.

Students from China make a significant academic and cultural contribution to life on campus. In 2019-20:

- Chinese students had the lowest non-continuation rate of 2%. This compares with 7% for UK students and 5% for the EU.
- NSS 2020 shows that students from China have the highest student satisfaction – 89% of them agree on overall satisfaction. Their experiences were the least impacted by the pandemic – there was a small decrease of 0.32%. NSS results for China are significantly higher than the UK (83%), EU (80%), and non-EU students (excluding China) (82%).

With China being at the forefront of the country-specific research conducted within the UK in the past number of years, *The China question: managing risks and maximising benefits from partnership in HE and research* is not the only relevant report published in the 2021-22 period.

The HEPI report, *Understanding China*[6], builds upon the foundations that this previous report lays out, delving into how to increase our individual and collective national understanding of the country that is a competitor in more than just HE, and how to use our HEIs to do so. There are numerous recommendations made throughout the report, designed to be taken by a mixture of individuals, organisations, institutions, and government bodies.

4.7 Natural partners: building a comprehensive UK-India knowledge partnership

Authored by Jo Johnson, Shashank Vira, Janet Ilieva, Jonathan Adams, Jonathan Grant

Following on from 4.6, this companion report maps the education and research relations with India, a country with demographics and an economic potential that could enable it to become a knowledge partner for the UK of equal importance to China.

Indian students are often described as 'value-maximisers' as they are highly responsive to post-study work visas, scholarships, and tuition fee waivers.

Indian students make a significant academic contribution to the number of students studying STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics)-related subjects:

- They represent 44% and 45%, respectively, of the non-EU master's students in mechanical engineering and production and manufacturing engineering.
- They also account for more than half of the non-EU students in computer science (53%), information systems (52%) and software engineering (50%).

A significant proportion of the students who started doctoral studies in 2019-20 were sponsored by their UK institution: 39% of the students received such funding, and a further 2% had their tuition fees waived. This makes India one of the countries with the most significant proportion of doctoral students supported by their UK institution. Having these funding options paired with UK post-study work visa opportunities is what drives an increasing number of Indian students to study in the UK.

6 HEPI (2022) *Understanding China*

4.8 Why aren't we second? Part 2, UUKi and IDP Connect

This research analyses the UK's student recruitment performance against a competitor set of countries. The report draws policy recommendations for how the UK can become a more attractive study destination for international students.

From 2010 to 2018, the UK lost a market share in 16 of the 21 top-sending countries and territories. While, at the time of the report, the UK was the second largest study destination after the USA, the OECD's *Education at a Glance* (2021) shows that the UK slipped to joint third place with Australia in 2019.[7] This is the first time since the start of the UNESCO OECD Eurostat (UOE)[8] data on global mobility that the UK fell into third place as an international study destination.

The report makes four key recommendations, calling for the UK government and HEIs to collaborate to maintain the UK's international competitiveness and appeal to international students. Those are:

1. Improve the promotion of the UK as a welcoming, diverse, and accessible study destination.
2. Ensure the success of the Graduate route.
3. Reduce financial barriers for international students through the creation of more diverse and innovative funding opportunities.
4. Support the improvement of English language ability.

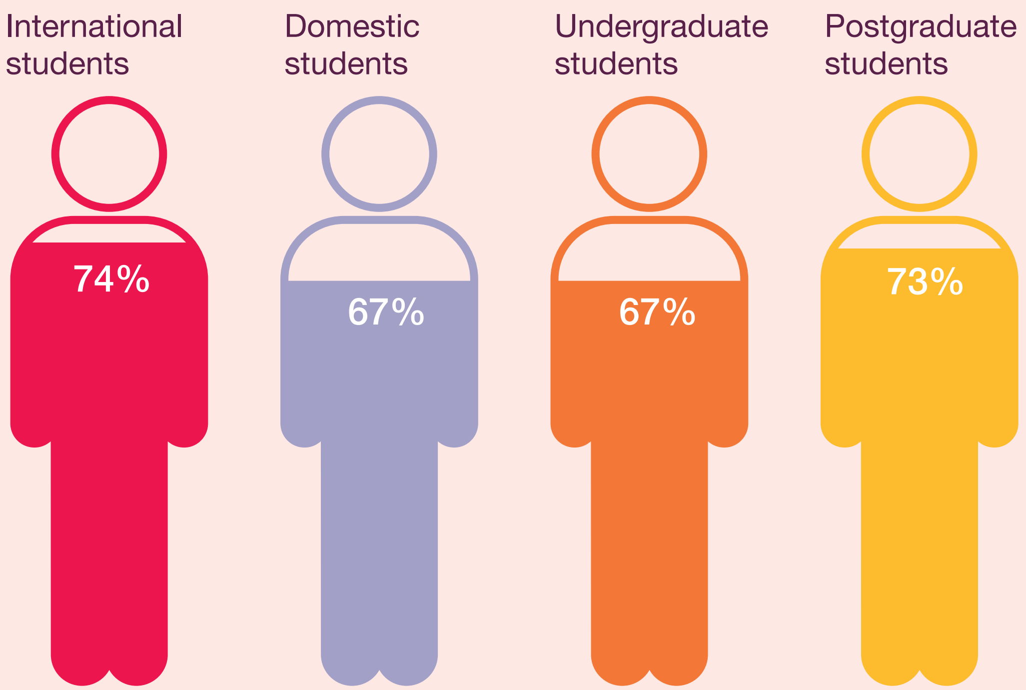
7 OECD (2021) *Education at a Glance*.

8 UOE joint data collection mainly covers the period from 1998, although some data on enrolments, graduates, and education finance are available from 1990 or 1995.

4.9 Students' perceptions of belonging and inclusion at university

2021 and 2022 saw a focus placed on the feeling of 'belonging' that a student has in their university environment. The study collected over 1,500 international student opinions (30% of all students surveyed) and took place during November 2021, when lockdown in the UK had ended.

Percentage of students who answered 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the statement: 'I feel like I belong at my university'



When asked about the overall feeling of belonging, international students responded more positively (74%) than domestic students (67%). Postgraduate students in the UK also found the greatest sense of belonging among all student qualification groups. On average, 69% of all students in the UK agreed that they belong at their university, meaning that international students scored higher than average and were more likely to feel a sense of belonging than domestic students.

Similarly, 68% of international students and postgraduate students responded more positively when asked the question 'I feel happy at university' than any other group asked. These groups also scored above average compared to other groups when asked how welcoming they felt their university was, and how inclusive they perceived their institution to be. This last point is of particular importance when considering that the more culturally and geographically diverse groups of people felt the institution was more inclusive than the domestic students. This could be attributed to the fact that international students often bring their own culture and sense of belonging to their new place of study.

Looking at how academic confidence and belonging relate to each other, 63% of all students in the UK agree or strongly agree that they feel confident about their academic skills. When looking specifically at international students, they again scored above average at 70%.

For international students, there is a general correlation between a higher sense of belonging, sense of happiness at university, and confidence in their academic abilities. International students scored above average for all three of these points, where domestic students scored below average for all three questions.

Thanks to Janet Ilieva, Founder and Director, Education Insight for key analysis in this review.

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