



# Briefing for students' unions

## What is UKCISA?

We are the UK Council for International Student Affairs and are the UK's national advisory body serving the interests of international students and those who work with them.

We aim to:

- Increase support for international education and raise awareness of its values and benefits
- Promote opportunities for – and identify and work to reduce obstacles and barriers to – greater student mobility
- Encourage best practice, professional development and the highest quality of institutional support for international students throughout the education sector

Every university in the UK is a member plus over 200 Further Education (FE) colleges and an increasing number of students' unions.

## How does UKCISA support students and students' unions?

The UKCISA website is recognised as having the most comprehensive collection of advice and information for international students on all aspects of coming to the UK to study - with particular emphasis on the

rules and regulations covering for instance fee status, student support and, for non EEA students, visas. It also covers work, during or after study, health service and accommodation issues, rules governing partners and families, driving licences, etc.

We also aim to represent the interests and concerns of international students to government, picking up on issues which come to us via our advice lines or are raised during training or in discussions with other education membership bodies.

For both elected officers and staff in students' unions that are members, however, we provide an additional range of advice and training. This includes:

- Access to our schedule of training events on topics including immigration, fees status, advisory skills, and much more
- Access to one of our local 'members forum' events to discuss and debate current concerns
- Free access to our online learning toolkit, "Understanding International"
- Occasional training events specifically for students' union officers and staff run in association with the NUS
- Free good practice guides on topics such as running volunteering, mentoring and orientation programmes, cross-cultural training resources

- Access to the members' area of our website, which includes an active members' discussion forum
- Regular e updates on all aspects of international student policy and good practice

## How does UKCISA work with the NUS?

UKCISA and the NUS work closely together to ensure effective support for international students in the UK. The NUS work directly with elected student officers and students' union staff, whilst UKCISA's focus is often with staff working in universities, colleges and students' unions. We collaborate to run events for students' unions and in recent years we have sponsored the annual NUS/UKCISA Internationalisation Awards. The NUS International Students' Officer is also a member of the UKCISA Board.

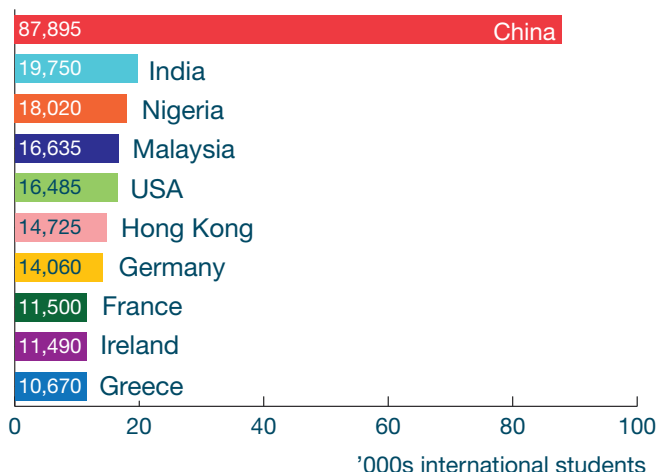
## Where do elected officers and staff fit in?

You play a vital role in your union, supporting a combined total of over 430,000 international students in UK higher education (and many others in further education colleges). While many students' unions do not give individual advice, it is important that unions are aware of the issues affecting your international students. By becoming a UKCISA member you will ensure that you keep up to date even if you are not directly involved in advice work.

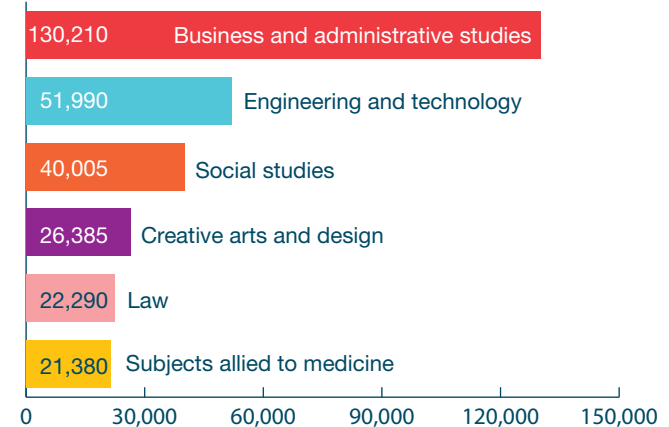
## How many international students are there in the UK?

International students make up 18% of all students in UK higher education, 69% of full-time taught postgraduates and 48% of full-time research degree students.

Figures for HE (the figures for FE are not centrally collected) show that the top 10 sending countries in 2013-14 (source: HESA) were as follows:



Most popular courses for international students are:



The number of international students coming to the UK had, until recent years, been growing by some 5% annually but this has now reduced to only very modest increases in each of the last 2-3 years, largely as a result of much tighter visa policies. The UK remains however (quite easily) the second most popular destination for international students in the world, after the USA, but ahead of Australia, New Zealand and Canada and still way ahead even of those European countries who are increasingly offering courses in English.

## Satisfaction rates

Numbers of surveys tend to agree that the vast majority of international students (usually at least 85%) are largely 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their experience in the UK although there is often some sensitivity over fees, living costs and, more recently, the ability to work part-time during studies or full-time afterwards. Many large institutions now use the same survey (the International Student Barometer) to assess satisfaction ratings amongst their international students so that they can compare performance with other institutions. This goes into very considerable detail on all aspects of life and studying in the UK and students' unions may like to check that they are part of any discussions on the findings which can often lead to more resources and improvements to key areas.

## What policies are affecting numbers?

One of the reasons for the slowdown in 'growth' is, of course, the UK government's concern that net migration (the difference between those who come to the UK for periods of at least 12 months and those who leave) is currently too high and that students, who they categorise as 'migrants' under the UN's definition, contribute to this overall figure. There has also been a perception that some students in the past – and especially in lower level and private colleges – have abused the system and come to the UK more interested in work than study and that some non-EU students may not be leaving the country once their visas have expired.

There were also, last year, instances of widespread fraud in an English language test leading to some 70 colleges losing their licences (and 6,000 students therefore losing their courses) and similar action against 3 universities.

This has all led to a further tightening of the system and concerns that the stricter rules may make the UK less (or appear to be less) welcoming to international students although the Prime Minister has continued to say that 'there is no limit' to the number of student visas which can be issued; and UK institutions continue to give 'Winternationalisation' (including International student recruitment) very high priority.

## Myths and misconceptions

A number of common misunderstandings, often perpetuated in news articles, can hinder sensible debate on international student policies. Here are six commonly held misconceptions:

1. *"Any organisation calling itself a college can recruit non-EEA students"*  
No. Since the introduction of Tier 4 of the Points Based System any college wishing to recruit non-EEA students must first be inspected and accredited by an Education Oversight body approved by the Home Office and only then can they apply to be included in the Home Office's Register of Sponsors, making their students eligible for visas.
2. *"Once students obtain visas, no-one knows where they are and if they even register at universities or colleges"*  
No. Since the new system was introduced visas are tied to the institution which issued the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS). Those institutions are then required to report to the Home Office any students who do not arrive and register. If they do not do so adequately, they can lose their licence and no longer recruit non-EEA students.
3. *"Once students have arrived and registered, they then don't turn up to study"*  
No. Institutions now have to monitor attendance and progress and report any students to the Home Office who are not participating adequately. If they do not do so, they can lose their license and no longer accept non-EEA students.
4. *"Students take housing and/or other UK state benefits"*  
No. A non-EEA student has, by law, 'no recourse to public funds', and therefore no entitlements to any housing or state benefits.
5. *"Students often work rather than studying, taking permanent British jobs"*  
No. Non-EEA students have limited work entitlements, if any. Depending on the terms of their

visa, they may only work for 10 or 20 hours per week during term time and full-time in holidays, and those in public or private colleges may not work at all. No Tier 4 student may work for themselves or fill a full-time permanent vacancy.

Students who wish to stay on and work after studying must apply for a visa to do so. The main route, Tier 2, allows students to stay on for graduate level jobs only if they will be paid more than the stipulated minimum salary for the relevant profession and only with a Home Office licenced employer.

6. *"Students do not, as they should, go home after their studies have been completed"*

No. Research released by the Home Office in September 2010 showed that of those who arrived as students in 2004, 79% had left the country by 2009. 6% were still studying and the balance (15%) had either, quite legally, married a UK citizen or moved into a work category. More recent studies have reached similar conclusions and a survey in 2013 found that only 6% of a sample of students applying to study in the UK were attracted by the idea of staying on.

## What have been the most significant recent changes to the rules for international students?

The Rules and Guidance for Tier 4 students are extremely complex and it is vitally important that only those who are qualified to do so, give any detailed immigration advice to individuals. As general background however:

- The Post-Study Work (PSW) scheme which allowed any Tier 4 student to stay on and work (at anything) for 2 years after their studies has been abolished. Instead there are a number of much more limited schemes - transfers to Tier 2 for those who have an offer of a 'graduate job' at a 'graduate salary' of at least £20,800 with a licensed sponsor; transfers to Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneurship) for those with acceptable business plans; or the Doctorate Extension Scheme, for those with PhDs, etc, who can apply to stay on to work for 12 months.
- Minimum levels of English have been defined by the Home Office, Secure English Language Tests (SELTs) have been introduced and only two providers authorised to undertake them in a much reduced network of centres.
- Tier 4 sponsors must now ensure that no more than 10% of those to whom they give offers (or CASs) have their visas refused - or risk losing their licences.
- All Tier 4 students must now show when applying to extend their visas for a new course that the course represents 'academic progression' from one level to a higher one (with some minor exceptions for some university students in exceptional circumstances).



- From November this year, no Tier 4 student over the age of 18 may stay in the UK for longer than 2 years at sub degree level or 5 years, at degree level and above (excluding PhDs) – again with certain exceptions for some university students.
- All Tier 4 students must now pay an Immigration Health Charge of £150 for each year of study.
- Landlords must now check the immigration status of tenants (although students in university-owned or -managed accommodation are exempt).
- Appeals against visa refusals have now been replaced with 'administrative reviews'.
- Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs) have been introduced for newly arriving students, who are now merely granted a 30 day visa, during which time they must arrive in the UK and collect (or have collected on their behalf) their BRP (showing the full length of their visa) either from a Post Office or from their university, college or school.
- Part-time work rights for students at FE colleges have recently been abolished (for new students) and, from November 2015, those college students who wish to extend their visas for further study (or to seek work) will have to return home to re-apply.

## What will be the key issues facing international students in the future?

The Home Office requires all institutions to check very carefully that all their Tier 4 students have the correct qualifications to study and the correct leave (or visa) to be in the UK and that they are attending and progressing adequately. You may wish to check with your institution their current policy on 'attendance monitoring' and that this is clearly explained and understood by students.

Every university and college now needs to record much of this information so that it can be audited by Home Office staff and students' unions may like to ensure with their institutional managers that they are included in any initial meetings when inspections take place.

The 10% visa refusal rule will mean that institutions may be much more cautious when issuing formal offers and the likelihood of tighter Home Office inspections - and the fear of losing a licence - may make many undertake their other 'compliance' duties (including checking students attend and progress adequately) far more carefully.

The amount of money required by all students when applying for - or to extend - a visa is being increased by some 20% and the 'established presence' concession (allowing those already in the UK to show reduced amounts) is being abolished which could affect, in particular, PhD students.

The tighter 'academic progression' and 'maximum years of study' rules may be obstacles for some students.

It is thought that the next round of policy changes could focus on English language levels and the degree to which institutions might be held responsible for any students who do not leave the country once their visas expire. The Migration Advisory Committee has been asked to advise whether the minimum salary levels for Tier 2 should be increased quite significantly which would make it even harder for Tier 4 students to move into the Tier 2 work category and there has also been a suggestion that spouses of international students might only be able to do 'skilled' work.

Finally, of course, there will be a referendum by 2017 on whether the UK should stay in the EU – a question which could have very considerable implications for both EU and non-EU students, their fees and funding (and international links more widely).

## How can my students' union join UKCISA?

We have two membership options for students' unions. Our full package is largely for those unions who give detailed immigration advice and need access to our free members' advice line. 'Membership lite' is available free to all others who want to contribute, with us, to the general debate and keep in touch and help to influence national and local policy developments.

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UKCISA is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (Company Number: 4507287) and a charity registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales (Charity Number: 1095294). Its registered office is at 9–17 St Albans Place London N1 0NX.

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**Events for or relevant to students' unions will be arranged during the year (including local 'members forum' events in Edinburgh, Bristol, Manchester and London).**

**So keep in touch for further details at [www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk)**