

## Kickstarting the recovery or international student recruitment: what do we need from government?

Please note, this document was published in June 2020. Since then, some of these asks have been achieved (✓) with updates in blue.

International students bring over £6.9 billion income to UK universities in tuition fees,<sup>1</sup> and contribute over £26 billion to the wider UK economy.<sup>2</sup> Education is an export sector of growing importance to the UK with the higher education alone generating over £13 billion of export revenue in 2016, an increase of 41% since 2010.<sup>4</sup>

The range of measures announced by government to protect students and the higher education sector from the impact of coronavirus in early May 2020 included supporting international students by considering how the International Education Strategy can be updated to respond to the impact of the coronavirus outbreak.<sup>5</sup> Action is needed urgently on this issue to allow the UK to continue to receive international students and kickstart the recovery of its education export industry.

This action – by government and the sector working together and supported by an updated International Education Strategy - must address the following barriers to international student recruitment:

- Getting to the UK
- Confidence in health/safety and the student experience
- Competition from other destinations, including financial incentives.

The following proposals are designed to address each of these barriers in turn. Urgent action is needed on the actions proposed under headings *Getting here* and *Confidence*.

### Three step recovery plan for UK's higher education exports

#### 1. Getting here

- Get the visa system working again:** If UKVI offices and Visa Application Centres remain closed in some countries, introduce alternative mechanisms to process visa applications online and collect biometric information on arrival, extend Covid-specific flexibility measures. [The majority of UK visa application centres are now open around the world](#)
- Ensure that students can start courses online with confidence:** extend the window for making visa applications to six months from the current three to create a mechanism which

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Documents/uuk\\_achieving-stability-higher-education-april-2020.pdf](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Documents/uuk_achieving-stability-higher-education-april-2020.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/briefing-economic-impact-of-international-students.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/773167/SFR\\_Education\\_Exports\\_2016.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/773167/SFR_Education_Exports_2016.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-support-package-for-universities-and-students>

gives students confidence that they will have a valid visa when the time comes to travel to the UK.

- iii) **Ensure online study does not disqualify students from Graduate Route:** students who study part of their course online and spend less than 11 months in the UK as a result, should not miss out on the Graduate Route. ✓  
[The government has confirmed that those unable to start physically in the UK due to Covid-19 will still be eligible to apply for the Graduate route if they are in the UK by 6 April 2021.](#)
- iv) **Delay implementation of visa system in Europe** to January 2022 to avoid imposing new barriers for EU students. Ensure students starting online this autumn are eligible for pre-settled status.
- v) **Clearly communicate visa changes, self-isolation and other health requirements** as soon as practically possible.

## 2. Confidence

- i) Work with universities to develop, announce and communicate **clear plans for the self-isolation of international students**, should it be necessary if the border measures are still in place in the autumn ✓
- ii) Set out clear **guidance on how the health, safety and wellbeing of students will be protected this autumn**, underpinned by a university sector-owned protocol. ✓  
[See UUK 'Principles and considerations: emerging from lockdown'](#)
- iii) **Amplify the #WeAreTogether campaign internationally** via British Embassies, the British Council and the DIT network, using current students and alumni to reassure prospective students on the quality of their experience. ✓
- iv) Charge the new **International Education Champion** with leading sector efforts to offer the world's best international student experience, and to communicate it internationally.
- v) Working with the sector to coordinate and **promote hardship funds** for existing international students that experience financial difficulties.

## 3. Maximising the UK's competitiveness

- i) **Increase Graduate Route length** to 3 or 4 years and promote it intensively. ✓  
[The Graduate route has been extended to 3 years for PhD students.](#)
- ii) **Increase investment in Study UK** from existing levels to £20m a year, with improved governance and sector involvement, especially in countries where it is not currently activated.
- iii) Hold **EU fees/ loan** arrangements as they are for 2020/21.  
[Fee change announcements for 2021/22 have now been made in England, Scotland and Wales.](#)
- iv) Co-invest, with universities, in **targeted scholarships** on the GREAT model and promote these internationally.
- v) Work with other governments to ensure that UK **degrees studied partially or fully online are recognised.**
- vi) Explore mechanisms to offer **government backed loans** on commercial terms to international students from selected countries.
- vii) Consider **waiving Tier 4 visa fees** for one year only. In the longer term ensure our visa fees are competitive.
- viii) Create new **Graduate Export Placement Scheme**, to help UK business build export markets, drawing on the language skills, knowledge and networks of the UK's international graduates.