

NUS Briefing

NUS Survey of International Student's Perceptions towards the Immigration Bill

The Immigration Bill could mean international students would not choose or recommend the UK as place to study according to a recent NUS survey of over 3100 students. International students were also critical of key proposals within the bill with many worried of the impact of NHS levies and landlord status checks.

Summary and Key Findings

Perception of the UK

- 50.7% of non-EU students surveyed think that the UK Government is either not welcoming or not at all welcoming towards international students.
- This is higher for students from Turkey (61.3%), Japan (64.5%), Nigeria (62.8%), India (62%), Pakistan (56.1%), for PhD students (65.8%) and for those with dependents (57.5%).
- 19.4% of non-EU students would not recommend the UK as a place to study for a friend or relative.
- This is higher for students from India (34.5%), Nigeria (36.8%), Pakistan (38.5%), PhD students (23.5%) and those with dependents (32.1%).

Proposed NHS Levy

- 74.4% of non-EU students surveyed said that the introduction of a £150 NHS levy would make it either not possible or more difficult to study in the UK.
- This is higher for PhD students (82.6%) and those with dependents (82.2%).

- 15% of those with dependents stated that it would not be possible to the UK.
- 73.2% of non-EU students stated that access to free healthcare was either important or very important in their decision to study in the UK.
- This was higher for students from China (85.7%), Malaysia (85%) and for those with dependents (82.1%)

Proposed Landlord Checks

- 40.4% of international students stated that the introduction of landlord status checks would negatively impact their decision to study in the UK.
- This was higher for PhD students (51.2%) and those with dependents (50%).
- 28% of international students stated that their international background has had either a negative or very negative impact on their ability to find accommodation
- This was higher for PhD students (39.2%) and those with dependents (48.5%)

Survey Background and Methodology

The survey ran between the 4th of January and the 31st of January 2014 through NUS' networks, partners and through its member Students' Unions. Only responses from EU and non-EU students were accepted.

In order to understand the impact of individual policies of the Immigration Bill- NUS outlined the proposed policies clearly in the survey introduction in a neutral manner. It then asked:

- Two questions relating to access to healthcare and NHS charges.
- Two questions relating to accommodation and the proposed landlord checks.
- Two questions relating to international student's perceptions of the UK.

In total, 3135 valid responses were received from a broad range of institutions and nationalities. Of which:

- 765 respondents were EU students and 2370 were non-EU students.
- 871 were Undergraduate students (UG), 710 were Postgraduate Taught (PGT) and 453 were Postgraduate Research students (PGR or PhD). 1071 students identified themselves as another degree type
- 169 stated that they had brought dependents with them to the UK.
- NUS also had a large enough sample size to view individual results for 17 categories of nationality.
- These included EU/EEA (721), United States (342), China (331), Other (214), India (221), Malaysia (180), Nigeria (143), Singapore (114), Hong Kong (79), Pakistan (67), Canada (67), Brazil (47), Russia (46), Mexico (43), Turkey (32), Japan (32), South Korea (30).
- The "Other" category for nationality are those students that do not fall within the top sending countries.

- Where students are mentioned in this briefing, this refers only to non-EU students unless otherwise specified.

NUS research – international student perceptions

NUS asked students two questions relating to student's perception of studying in the UK.

First, "do you feel the UK government is currently welcoming international students?"

- Of students surveyed- 50.7% think the UK Government is either not welcoming or not at all welcoming towards international students.
- This was significantly higher for students from India (62%), Japan (65%) and Nigeria (63%).

	Not at all welcoming or not welcoming	Neither welcoming or unwelcoming	Welcoming or very welcoming
Japan	64.5%	19.4%	16.1%
Nigeria	62.8%	22.6%	14.6%
India	62.0%	18.8%	19.2%
Turkey	61.3%	25.8%	12.9%
Pakistan	56.1%	18.2%	25.8%
S. Korea	55.2%	27.6%	17.2%
Singapore	54.0%	25.7%	20.4%
Hong Kong	53.9%	32.9%	13.2%
Mexico	53.5%	37.2%	9.3%
Other	52.2%	23.9%	23.9%
Average	50.7%	26.4%	22.9%
China	49.5%	27.6%	22.9%
Russia	46.5%	30.2%	23.3%
Canada	45.5%	28.8%	25.8%
US	42.8%	26.6%	30.5%
EU/EEA	35.9%	29.7%	34.3%
Malaysia	33.7%	39.9%	26.4%
Brazil	27.5%	22.5%	50.0%

- PhD students were consistently more likely to be critical of the impact of the immigration bill with 66% stating that the UK Government was either unwelcoming or very unwelcoming towards international students.

	Not at all welcoming or not welcoming	Neither welcoming or unwelcoming	Welcoming or very welcoming
PGR	65.8%	20.1%	14.1%
PGT	51.3%	26.7%	22.0%
UG	44.7%	29.4%	25.9%

- Those that had brought dependents with them were likely to be critical as well (57.5%).

	Not at all welcoming or not welcoming	Neither welcoming or unwelcoming	Welcoming or very welcoming
Yes	57.5%	25.7%	16.8%
No	50.3%	26.2%	23.5%

Second, "would you recommend the UK as a place to study to a friend or relative?"

- 19% of students would not recommend the UK as place to study to a friend or relative.
- This was significantly higher for students from India (35%) and Nigeria (37%).

	Yes	No	I don't know
Pakistan	53.8%	38.5%	7.7%
Nigeria	39.7%	36.8%	23.5%
India	51.5%	34.5%	14.1%
S. Korea	55.2%	24.1%	20.7%
Average	63.2%	19.4%	17.4%
China	58.0%	19.2%	22.7%
Other	63.2%	18.2%	18.7%
Russia	65.1%	16.3%	18.6%
Turkey	74.2%	16.1%	9.7%
Hong Kong	65.8%	15.8%	18.4%
Canada	72.3%	12.3%	15.4%
Mexico	67.4%	11.6%	20.9%
Singapore	69.0%	11.5%	19.5%
US	75.4%	10.8%	13.8%
Malaysia	72.3%	10.7%	16.9%
Brazil	80.0%	10.0%	10.0%
Japan	64.5%	9.7%	25.8%
EU/EEA	81.6%	6.5%	12.0%

- PhD students were again more critical of the Immigration Bill. 23.5% of PhD students would not recommend the UK as place to study to a friend or relative.

	Yes	No	I don't know
PGR	53.4%	23.5%	23.1%
PGT	61.6%	22.3%	16.1%
UG	67.7%	15.4%	16.9%

- This was also true for those with dependents. 32.1% would not recommend the UK as place to study to a friend or relative.

	Yes	No	I don't know
Yes	51.2%	32.1%	16.7%
No	64.4%	18.3%	17.2%

International students and the Immigration Bill – NHS charges

First, "how would an increase of £150 per year of study in your upfront (visa) fee impact your ability to study in the UK?"

- 74% of students surveyed, said that an additional charge of £150 per year of study would make it more difficult or impossible for them to study in the UK.

	It would make it more difficult to study or I would not be able to study	It would make it easier to study or would not impact my ability to study	I don't know
Mexico	88.4%	9.3%	2.3%
Canada	80.6%	19.4%	0.0%
Malaysia	78.9%	16.1%	5.0%
Singapore	78.9%	19.3%	1.8%
US	77.5%	17.5%	5.0%
S. Korea	76.7%	20.0%	3.3%
India	75.8%	17.5%	6.6%
Average	74.4%	18.1%	7.50%
Nigeria	74.1%	13.3%	12.6%
Hong Kong	73.4%	19.0%	7.6%
China	70.4%	19.0%	10.6%
Other	66.4%	22.4%	11.2%
Pakistan	65.7%	25.4%	9.0%
Japan	65.6%	28.1%	6.3%
Turkey	65.6%	25.0%	9.4%
Russia	65.2%	30.4%	4.3%
Brazil	63.8%	17.0%	19.1%
EU/EEA	51.7%	32.9%	15.4%

- This was again higher for PhD students. 82.6% suggested that the change would make it more difficult to study. Worryingly, 13% said that the introduction of a NHS levy meant that they would not have been able to study.

	More difficult to study or would not be able to study	Easier to study or would not impact ability to study	I don't know
PGR	82.6%	11.5%	19.0%
PGT	74.6%	18.0%	15.8%
UG	72.2%	20.6%	15.8%

- NUS' survey indicated that of those students who brought dependents 15% indicate they would not be able to study in the UK with this charge. Overall, 82% of those with dependents say that free access to the NHS was important to their choice to study in the UK.

	More difficult to study or would not be able to study	Easier to study or would not impact ability to study	I don't know
No	73.9%	18.8%	7.3%
Yes	82.2%	14.2%	3.6%

Second, "how important was free access to healthcare to your decision to study in the UK?"

- 73% stated that access to free healthcare was either important or very important in their decision to study in the UK.
- This was higher for China (86%), Malaysia (85%) and Turkey (91%).

	Important or Very Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Unimportant or Very Unimportant
Turkey	90.63%	6.25%	3.13%
China	85.71%	9.73%	4.56%
Malaysia	85.00%	11.11%	3.89%
Mexico	81.40%	9.30%	9.30%
S. Korea	80.00%	20.00%	0.00%
Japan	78.13%	6.25%	15.63%
Pakistan	76.12%	11.94%	11.94%
Hong Kong	75.95%	20.25%	3.80%
Nigeria	75.69%	14.58%	9.72%
Other	75.35%	16.74%	7.91%
India	74.64%	20.10%	5.26%

Average	73.20%	17.60%	9.30%
Brazil	72.34%	12.77%	14.89%
Canada	70.15%	14.93%	14.93%
Russia	60.87%	17.39%	21.74%
EU/EEA	56.96%	27.30%	15.74%
Singapore	53.51%	27.19%	19.30%
US	52.63%	30.70%	16.67%

- 50.6% of PhD students felt that access to healthcare was very important in comparison to only 40.7% of Undergraduates.

	Important or Very Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Unimportant or Very Unimportant
PGR	76.4%	13.9%	9.7%
PGT	73.6%	16.9%	9.4%
UG	71.0%	19.3%	9.7%

- There was again a stark difference between those with dependents and those without.

	Important or Very Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Unimportant or Very Unimportant
No	72.1%	18.4%	9.5%
Yes	82.1%	9.5%	8.3%

Selected Open-Ended Comments on NHS Proposals

- "For many students, the cost of living in London is so incredibly high that any additional costs are an extreme burden. As a student on a scholarship, I would have seriously reconsidered attending LSE if there were additional fees, as the visa and flight costs were already incredibly hard to afford." PGT student from the United States
- "I am on a Mexican scholarship of £770 a month, this increase in the use of the NHS will make it virtually impossible to live and study here in the UK. It's a nonsense payment since international students already are paying extra fees for tuition." PGR student from Mexico.

- "I feel that international students contribute more than enough to the British economy not only through fees and living costs but also through tax and tourism. Therefore adding an additional fee only further hinders the demographic that keeps most universities in this country in business. I believe the government is using international students as a scapegoat when it comes to the issue of immigration. The financial burden of studying in the UK is already great but the reputation of it is what continues to attract people. However other countries have equally attractive higher education and so I feel that this proposal may push students to seek for their higher education elsewhere." UG student from Malawi.
- "£150 fees are not worth paying. International students have been paying far too high compar[ed] to domestic and European students already. Access to healthcare in the UK is bureaucratic and protracted even comparing to a developing country like Thailand. Paying additional fees on top of the surcharge of international rate of tuition fee is extremely discouraging. I believe international students would steer towards the US instead." PGT student from Thailand.
- "It would be a disaster-we are already treated like criminals, I've been detained at the airport on more than one occasion simply because I'm American, pay higher fees, and pump so much money into the economy via outrageous rent, food/shopping, etc. I'm incredibly resentful and bitter by how this government treats us, and if it wasn't for the fact that my fiance is English, I never would have studied in the UK due to lack of post graduate visa and fees that are starting to inch up on American universities (which in my opinion are much better). I've found England to be a hateful, xenophobic country and studying here has been an incredibly frustrating and disappointing compared to the US." PGT student from the United States.

International students and the Immigration Bill – landlord status checks

NUS asked two questions regarding the proposals for landlords to check immigration status. The first question was, "how easy or difficult it has been to find quality accommodation while you have studied as an international student in the UK?"

- 28% of international students (EU and non-EU) stated that their international background has had either a negative or very negative impact on their ability to find accommodation. 52.4% stated that it had no impact and 20% stated that it either had a positive or very positive impact.
- This was significantly higher for PhD students (39.2%) than other students.

	A negative or very negative impact	No impact	A positive or very positive impact
PGR	39.2%	50.0%	10.8%
PGT	26.1%	49.4%	24.5%
UG	24.5%	53.8%	21.7%

- This was significantly higher for those with dependents as well (48.5%).

	A negative or very negative impact	No impact	A positive or very positive impact
No	25.3%	53.3%	21.3%
Yes	48.5%	31.1%	20.4%

Second, students were asked "the UK government is proposing that all landlords check the immigration status of tenants, including student accommodation, private lets and lodgers. If this was in place when you were choosing where to study, how would it have impacted your choice to study in the UK."

- 40% of international students from the NUS survey stated that the introduction of landlord checks would negatively impact their decision to study in the UK.

- 51% of PhD students stated that the introduction of landlord checks would negatively impact their decision to study in the UK.

	negatively impact choice	It would not impact choice	positively impact choice	I don't know
UG	37.7%	44.5%	4.4%	13.3%
PGT	40.6%	42.2%	4.6%	12.5%
PGR	51.2%	31.1%	2.7%	15.0%

- This was again higher for those with dependents with 50% stating that it would have a negative impact.

	negatively impact choice	It would not impact choice	positively impact choice	I don't know
No	40.0%	42.4%	4.3%	13.2%
Yes	50.0%	28.6%	5.4%	16.1%

Selected Open-Ended Comments on landlord status checks

- "Despite being a Swedish citizen, having a polish surname has inhibited my ability to find quality accommodation, most likely because of the negative views towards Eastern Europeans in the UK" UG student from Sweden.
- "Some Landlords in the Uk are pertinent on not letting their houses to students from my home country, probably due to some frivolous past experience, if this is implemented, many students from my home country will be left stranded on streets before they can find quality accommodation, and this might be seen as an act of 'mirage' racism." – PGT student from Nigeria.
- "I was homeless and hopping around couches for THREE WEEKS when I first arrived ... if there had been any more barriers, I don't know what I would have done. It definitely has a negative impact on studying and on the impression of England in general." – PGT from the United States.

NHS charges – Additional Open Ended Comments

- *£150 per year of study as part of the upfront visa fee for international students is unjustifiable. I do not think that enforcing a bill on international students to pay a fee upfront for UK healthcare will be of benefit to the UK healthcare system or the education sector in the long run. I believe it will be tremendously off-putting to future applicants to apply to the UK versus other countries of equal educational standards who charge per healthcare visit/insurance rather than ask for a fee upfront. Although the free healthcare previously afforded by the UK to international students did not greatly influence my decision to study here, given a choice I would prefer to pay per visit to a doctor/medical practice rather than to pay a high premium for healthcare before I even enter the country. If this bill had been in place during my university application days, I believe I would have been forced to consider studying in a different country. For a student such as myself who is currently undertaking a 5-year degree in veterinary medicine, a course which in itself costs around a tenth of a million pounds just for tuition fees excluding accommodation and living costs, hearing that I may have to pay such fees for healthcare that I may not even use is disheartening. Especially considering that those fees will likely be of little direct benefit to myself or other students, international or otherwise. The value and benefit international students bring to the UK both in education centres and the work sector should not be forgotten in the bid to lessen the burden of healthcare on the UK's finances. There is much goodwill that currently exists between the international student community and the higher education sector in terms of us paying non-subsidised fees in exchange for obtaining the education and student experience the UK is known for. I am afraid that with the passing of this bill, this feeling of goodwill that underlines the symbiotic mutualistic relationship*
- *and understanding between the international student community and the UK education sector will be severely undermined.” UG student from Malaysia.*
- *“Adding fees to healthcare is a deterrent, particularly for US students. International fees in the UK are already beginning to compete with fees back in the US and are becoming less of a bargain and enticement for Americans to come to the UK. The country has begun to act like Ryanair by putting charges on everything and now it's come to the end of the checkout process where you see that you're actually paying just as much as British Airways, or in this case, a US college. I have paid hundreds in UK taxes via income and consumer taxes during my five years in the country while only costing the NHS pennies in return for my one sick visit. It's actually insulting to see this bill, as if I or my fellow international students come to the UK just to take advantage of the free healthcare. The UK needs a diverse, international cohort of minds to keep up its academic reputation. Soon the country will only have a wealthy, diverse international cohort of minds if it chooses to nickel and dime its international students for all public services used.” PGT student from the United States.*
- *“The yearly tuition for international students is really egregious, especially taking into account currency exchanges. To charge international students additional funds for healthcare would substantially increase the stress of studying here (for purely financial reasons).” PGT student from Canada*
- *“As an International students, the tuition fee is really high already, we need to pay several thousand more pounds, which is not a small amount of money. We pay food, clothing and basically every thing here and we do not have tax refund. We have already contributed a lot to this economy and for us the cost is very high already. I know what will happen in the future. If this proposal can pass this time. Then more proposals which will take money from*

international students will appear in the future. This time it is 150, next time may be 1500 or more. We need to stop this right now. To be honest, I felt that this nation has already take a lot advantage from international students and NHS is one of the several benefits we can have here. I just want to say, if the UK government keep doing things like that, the image of studying in UK will be erode. Actually, there are many other abroad places for us to choose, like USA, Japan or other Euro countries. UK government showed an information that they do not welcome international students. For example, they cancelled the PSW visa which can allow some international students to work here. It feels like, Uk government just want us to spend money here and let us go. However, the policies of USA are more open.” PGT student from China.

- *“International students already pay outrageously higher tuition fees than local students and most of us live by from scholarships funded by our governments or by International research councils, and as such not only we do not pose an economic burden to the country but also inject thousands upon thousands of pounds to the economy of this country without taking away jobs from British citizens and with little return. International students cannot apply for benefits and as such cannot be considered as a drain of the state resources and any cost that we represent to the NHS is more than covered by our economic contributions. Furthermore, at least in the case of mexican students, our sponsor expects full time commitment to the programme of study and doesn't allow us to take on a job to overcome all this increasingly painful economic hurdles this country wants to impose. Not to mention that any output of our research and hard work would be considered as a British accomplishment, and will be of benefit firstly to Great Britain, yet all the increasing hostilities towards foreigners from part of the current government makes us feel unwelcome, unwanted and regretful of ever coming to this country to study.” PGR student from Mexico.*

- *“Especially considering that I'm studying Medicine, and would like to work in the NHS, and pay a ridiculously high amount in fees that contribute much more to the economy than any 'benefits' I receive and rise each year by a proportion that is higher than the inflation rate...I see this additional fee as extremely discriminatory and will definitely make international students seem unwanted even though we pay so much money in fees, which then put in a large contribution to the economy. We are not piggy banks, our parents have worked hard to save up money just to afford us a better education. As it is, universities in the UK don't offer any substantial scholarships for international students and admission is based on ability to pay, not just on academic ability and ability to excel and contribute to the institution. Students will then be much more interested in studying in America, where many colleges and universities offer financial assistance even to foreign students, meaning that fees end up costing less than in the UK.” UG student from India.*

Landlord Status Checks – Additional Open Ended Comments

- *I think it would have made it harder for me to find a landlord. Such as this year I applied for visa extension and I only had 1 month left of my last visa but I signed a contract for 12 month with my landlord. I think I would be able to do this if they had to check me first. Visa process is enough stressful and became very hard and to add this on a top of it, it would make me think twice before applying to UK. Other countries like US has as good education as UK, so maybe I would have chosen that country as it is more accessible.”* PGT student from Turkmenistan
- *“There is a high chance of landlords refusing renting a place if the visa is expiring in less than six months. Circumstances could be different, especially those on masters degree graduate depending on finishing dissertation. Checking visa will complicate house hunting.”* MBA student from Uzbekistan
- *“I am honestly becoming irritated by the way foreigners are being treated in the UK. If I was not already enrolled in a programme in the UK, I would choose somewhere else, where I would not be harassed for being a foreigner.”* PGR student from Bostwana
- *“Being an international student makes difficult to find accommodation, because landlords ask for the complete year rent in advance. This is an economical problem, at the same time is suspicious and risky when having to pay off-shore. If on top of that, I am obligated to send immigration and personal information to unknown landlords, that would definitely affect my decision to study in the UK. The responsibility of checking immigration status should not be given to non-government entities, because of the implications this has, along with the personal information issue implied. Individuals may pose as tenants to international students, and the government may not be able to control them.”* PGT student from Mexico
- *“I go to Oxford. Very little would have affected my decision to come, because it is the best university in my field and that is all that matters to me. Obviously increasing fees makes my life more difficult, but the real tragedy here is that many people will be desperate enough to attend a university like Oxford despite these fees and so the government can get away with whatever they like.”* PGR student from Canada.
- *“Its very unfortunate to write this here, but in my experience as an international student I have found British landlords to be racist. I don't mind someone checking my details for their safety as an international, its completely acceptable. however, having double standards is extremely annoying. first of all, if my credentials are being checked I would also like to check those of the landlord. Secondly, if I have undergone an extremely rigorous background check when I apply for visa to the UK, I don't see why an individual should check my immigration status and collect my information. At the rate the UK govt is asking agents in the UK to collect information on immigrants I feel that half of Britain may already have access to my personal information. Immigrants who want to settle in the UK will find a way irrespective of these rules and regulations. However, the skilled immigrants who come to the UK to study or develop the economy are the ones who will choose other countries over the UK.”* PGR student from India.
- *“This is a terrible idea because most landlords will not want the hassle of checking immigration and simply not rent to foreign students (I can already visualise adverts saying: 3 bedroom to let, student accommodation, UK and EU students only). Letting agencies already make us pay an entire year's rent upfront so private landlords are our only hope right now and if they do this we will literally not be able to find a place to live (unless we can fork out a year's rent upfront)”* – UG student from Russia.

Further Information

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