

POLICY STATEMENT

EU students: securing the best opportunities for students, universities and the UK economy post-Brexit

- In 2016/17, **134,835 EU students** were enrolled at UK universities.¹
- Each individual EU student **contributes around £87,000** to the UK economy, with the **net economic impact being £68,000**.²
- For every 15 EU students, a **net economic impact of £1m** is generated.³
- EU students are estimated to **generate around £5.1bn** for the UK economy.⁴
- The presence of EU students in the UK **supports nearly 35,000 jobs**.⁵

EU STUDENTS IN BRITAIN

EU students studying in the UK bring to the country enormous cultural, academic and economic benefit. The importance of these students to universities and their fellow students is significant, with many courses at both undergraduate and post-graduate level supported by students from the EU. Equally important is the impact on the regions they study in, meaning that every part of the UK benefits from their presence.

With the UK's exit from the EU, there will clearly be changes to how established relationships operate, across a range of sectors. However, to build on the opportunities Brexit can bring, it is vital that the UK creates policies that produce real benefits to the country, one of which should be on creating an attractive offer to EU students to continue to study, improve, and invest, across the UK.

UK universities exist in a hugely competitive international market and giving up such a large proportion of market share to direct competitors would be damaging to UK higher education and its standing across the world. Britain's universities are an enormous benefit to the UK, and to their regions, and the government should seek both to protect them and build on their successes at this crucial time for the country.

¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he>

² According to a report from the Higher Education Policy Institute and Kaplan International Pathways, using analysis conducted by London Economics <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Economic-benefits-of-international-students-by-constituency-Final-11-01-2018.pdf>

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/eu-students-vital-to-regional-economies.aspx>

RESPECTING THE VALUE OF EU STUDENTS

It would be hugely damaging to re-classify EU students as International students after Brexit. In that event of such a change, economic modelling suggests a drastic drop of 47% in the number of EU students coming to study in the UK, with modern universities likely to be hardest hit by such a reduction.⁶

The UK government moved quickly to quell potential instability surrounding the funding for research and innovation, offering universities a guarantee that that it would “underwrite” any project allocated funding under the EU’s Horizon 2020 programmes that continued beyond the departure date.⁷

The value of EU students is such that the government should commit to a similar guarantee. Easing instability among universities and students about their financial security means that people are willing to invest time and money in the UK. The benefit to the economy requires the government provide certainty and commits now to allowing EU students to study in the UK under the same arrangements currently in place.

Any EU student enrolling on a course in a UK university during the transition phase should be guaranteed a) that the fee will be the same as applied to home students and b) that they will have access to funding support.

RECIPROCAL STUDENT EXCHANGE

It is possible to argue that once the UK is out of the EU it logically follows that all previous preferential relationships with the EU, such as on student exchange, should cease.

However, the UK government has been clear that the UK and EU will continue have a special and unique relationship, and that this would be reflected in the negotiations and in subsequent policy. The Brexit White Paper⁸ commitments to a mobility scheme and to Erasmus+ are indications of that. Maintaining and extending successful trading arrangements built up over time – which is exactly what the presence of EU students in the UK reflects – should be a cornerstone of the new relationship.

On student exchange, other areas of the world have realised, as EU nations have, that there are enormous benefits to making student exchange across borders easy and attractive. Australia and New Zealand, for example, appreciate the huge value of student exchange at such close geographical proximity, and the benefits that it brings. As such, they have adapted their immigration rules to attract these benefits. New Zealand citizens are entitled to study at Australian tertiary institutions without requiring a student visa, and they are also charged domestic student fees rather than international student fees. The same is true for Australian citizens in New Zealand.

The UK government should commit to reciprocal student exchange as part of its new relationship with the EU. Anyone from an EU nation enrolling at a UK university should be guaranteed a new ‘European student status’ reflecting similar terms to home UK students concerning university fee levels. These terms would be reciprocated by EU nations for UK students studying on the continent who would also pay the local fee, not revert to full ‘international student’ status.

⁶ <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The-determinants-of-international-demand-for-UK-HE-FULL-REPORT.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/safeguarding-funding-for-research-and-innovation>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-future-relationship-between-the-united-kingdom-and-the-european-union>