

International Students and Immigration: *Tackling myths and misconceptions*

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**Lifelong
Education
Institute**

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Panellists

- **Lord Jo Johnson**, Executive Chairman, **FutureLearn**
- **Dr Tania Lima**, Director of Global Engagement, **King's College London**
- **Prof. Steven McGuire**, Dean, **University of Sussex Business School**
- **Dr Marius Ostrowski**, Executive Director, **Lifelong Education Institute**

"It was extremely insightful to hear from the panel of experts at the International Students and Immigration: Tackling Myths and Misconceptions event earlier this month where they discussed the current issues facing our international student community within the Higher Education sector. The panel discussed the positive impact of embracing the international student community which aligns with my experience as a Student Engagement Officer at King's College London which has highlighted not only the importance of celebrating our diverse student demographic but also the positive contribution that international students have brought to our universities and research."

Francesca Auchterlonie, Student Engagement Officer, **King's College London**

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Professor Steven McGuire, Dean, University of Sussex Business School

“International students make a valuable contribution to university life, enriching the student experience for everyone. They also make a significant contribution to our economy and broader society. Universities need understand their responsibilities to these students and to the communities that host them. The UK higher education system is stronger and better for the presence of students from around the world.”

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Executive Summary

Debates on the future of international students in the UK are becoming increasingly prominent and interwoven with discussions around immigration. This has especially been the case concerning the UK Government's objective to reduce immigration numbers and become all the more noticeable since July 2023, when the UK Government gained Royal Assent for the Illegal Migration Act to be written into law. In this thinkpiece, the Lifelong Education Institute (LEI) explores the subject of international students and evaluates how current and new legislation is unfairly targeting them and in particular their families or dependants. It concludes with key reflections on how international students, and international academics, are far from being a problem. Instead, they are valuable economic and research contributors to British higher education institutions and society as a whole.

Recommendations

1. Recognise the vital contributions made by international students, and international academics, to the development of new partnerships and the continuation of innovative knowledge production across a wide range of fields.
2. Ensure the means to secure the UK's legacy as a global hub for the production of high-quality research through international collaborations based in the UK.
3. Introduce a clearer and easier visa process for incoming international students in order to bolster the international profile of UK institutions.
4. Acknowledge the need for clearer transparency and communication between incoming students and employers in order to secure sponsorships.
5. Highlight the importance of international students to the UK's domestic economy.
6. Secure the ability for students and academics to bring spouses or partners who work in high-skilled sectors.
7. Develop further inquiries into whether international students or academics are more likely to have spouses or family members who work in high-skilled sector themselves.
8. Give clear emphasis to the publicity around visa denial stories and how they adversely affect the family unit, especially when an academic is already in the UK but dependants are unable to follow.
9. Dispel the misconception that dependants are unable to support themselves while in the UK and are a burden on the welfare state.
10. Reclassify international students in the Tiered Visa system so as to better recognise the level of expertise and skills that they bring into the UK.

1. Introduction

On 20 July 2023, the UK Government gained Royal Assent for the Illegal Migration Act to be written into law. This new Act seeks to curb migration in line with the Conservative Party's 2019 pledge to reduce the levels of UK net migration. While this Act is predominantly geared towards halting *illegal* immigration and restricting the criteria through which someone can claim asylum in Britain, it has also had other notable consequences.

Proposals within this new legislation have identified the entry numbers of international students, and in particular their families, as an issue and a burden on the UK economy through a perceived exploitation of the benefit system. This has led to international students and their dependants being generally portrayed in a negative light in the public eye and in the media. The prominence of immigration and migration, over emigration, in recent Government pledges reflects the salience of these debates at a national level and shines a light on both the Conservative Government's policy vision and public consciousness on the topic. Within public discourse, migrants are typically placed under a single undifferentiated umbrella term, often being associated with boats and illegal crossings, as well as with other many unfair stereotypes. They are therefore also presented as a blanket hindrance to achieving the UK's net migration target.

This thinkpiece by the Lifelong Education Institute (LEI) focuses on rewriting this inequitable view. It argues that the Government is providing an inaccurate and simplistic depiction of the diverse categories of migrants entering the UK, and that international students and their dependants should be viewed as positive contributors to British society. International students arrive with a firm commitment and desire to further educate themselves. They make important contributions to the education sector through their input in high-level research and teaching in higher education institutions. This, in turn, enhances the UK's capacity to deliver diverse, high-calibre training and upskilling.

Confining international students and academics to a hard monolithic migrant identity and failing to acknowledge their individual contributions to UK academia risks underestimating the positive value they can bring to the UK. The common narrative which requires rewriting is the popular myth that international students are 'taking' domestic students places within UK institutions. This is untrue. This thinkpiece therefore provides a detailed overview of this particularly pressing issue for the UK university sector. It furthermore explores how international students and academics' precise contributions are valuable to the UK Higher Education (HE) sector and are key additions in promoting knowledge exchange and skills development in the UK economy. Universities are diverse institutions and this profile fosters multiculturalism across disciplines to create globalised networks.

2. International Students and Immigration

This section explores various challenges faced by international students, and academics, with regard to current and new legalisation regarding immigration into the UK. It examines the different routes of entry, including via student visa applications to graduate routes, and highlights the difficulties which can arise in their bringing their families with them to the UK. It also seeks to emphasise the important economic and research contributions international students and academics make to British society and its academic institutions.

2.1 Student Visas and Entry Pathways

Student visas are the main entry pathway for international students to gain access to study at UK universities as well as other avenues of higher education. They are the “magical pieces of paper” which provide entry into the country, but also likewise permit active admission into courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

[Student Visa applications](#)

In the 2021/2022 academic year, ending in September 2022, 463,315 sponsored study visas into the UK were granted. This was the highest annual number of study visas to be granted on record. It represented both a clear recovery from the lower numbers of study visas granted during the COVID-19 pandemic and was also a marked increase on pre-pandemic levels. With regard to the spectrum of nationalities of students, who were applying and entering the UK, the proportion of full-time postgraduate students from non-EU countries rose to 59%. This was an increase of 10% on the previous cohort. Although this can be attributed to the lifting of post-pandemic travel restrictions, it additionally showcases the desirability of UK institutions as destinations of further study and the development of new research.

[Entry requirements to the UK](#)

Entry requirements and other instructions for international students into the UK are detailed on Government websites, universities help pages, chat forums and so on. Whilst these guides are useful, there is nevertheless still a long way to go to improve a system which can be both convoluted and challenging. This can equally be the case when it comes to international students, and academics, gaining the opportunity and ability to bring their families and dependants to join them in the UK.

Figure 1: Core Information, international students accompanied by dependants.

<p>What are the main conditions for the student?</p>	<p>Student must have been studying as a full-time student for a minimum of nine months OR be fully sponsored by their government for a programme of study that is longer than six months in duration.</p>
<p>What are the main requirements for bringing dependents?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have evidence of their familial relationships, such as through the provision of a marriage or civil partnership certificate and/or birth certificates for children. ▪ Capacity to pay the various other costs are attached to visa applications and healthcare surcharges. ▪ Ability for dependents to financially support themselves and not require or rely on welfare assistance.

Student Visas and Dependants

Limiting avenues into the UK, such as by increasing restrictions on this kind of student visa is reducing the accessible pathways that academics, and any family they may have, need to enter the UK and consequently its higher education system. The Government argues that 24% of the total number of all sponsored study related visas granted were to the dependants of students, i.e., their partners and/or children. This figure is calculated through analysing the number of visas that were issued to people who were linked to a student studying in the UK. The significance of this number is that nearly a quarter of all visas issued towards sponsored students were not students themselves. This had led to a multitude of accusations being made in the British media and also used by the Government to target international students and their dependants. Views have likewise been expressed as to how their family members are “immorally” accessing the UK as they are a “dependent” and thus cannot contribute to the UK economy due to this label. These misleading and unfair perceptions lie at the centre of the UK Government’s attempt to justify the curbing and restricting of migration. They also continue to foster media portrayals of international students and their dependents as a burden on the UK taxpayer.

The new restrictions apply to all international students studying at undergraduate and at Master’s levels that wish to bring family or partners with them to the UK to study at level 6 or 7. Consequently, they are now also deterring mature students from pursuing higher education in the UK due to the hurdles they face to bring family members along with them. While restrictions on dependents, however, do not apply to students studying as doctoral and post-doctoral researchers, they do still face a difficult visa journey in order to enter the UK. This thus hinders students and academics’ entry into the UK higher education sector as a result of the hurdles and barriers an individual must overcome in order to bring dependents to the UK.

Further analysis would also be valuable into assessing the types of dependants who are skilled workers and how they can integrate themselves into the UK economy. This research needs to be conducted alongside the applications of international students and academics in order to see which sectors can be aided through the skills of their dependants. In this way, the image of the immigrant being a burden on the UK taxpayer can be accurately dispelled through the provision of evidence of the high levels of skills which internationals can bring through their connection to an international student. If this is

shown to often be the case, then the entry of dependants, who may be medical doctors, nurses, architects, engineers, and so on, would be a further addition to the UK economy. This would likewise consequently benefit the UK through its desire to import specific skill sets.

2.2. Graduate Routes

The graduate visa route is becoming increasingly common as a mechanism through which international students are able to remain and work in the UK. This is following the completion of their course and it is a manner through which international academics, in particular, are making valuable contributions to both British higher education, knowledge production, and the UK economy.

Figure 2: Graduate visa pathway.

What is it?	This is a work visa for those who hold a degree or relevant qualification from a UK university.
What are the core application requirements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Successful completion of course. ▪ Hold a Student Visa which is still valid. ▪ Make the application from inside the UK. ▪ Pay the Immigration Health Surcharge
What are the main conditions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work as either employed or self-employed. ▪ Job can be at any level or skill. ▪ This is not a sponsored route. ▪ Application for the Graduate route can only be once. ▪ Cannot extend a Graduate route visa.

Postgraduate visa pathways

Currently, postgraduate international students are placed in the Tier 4 visa category of the UK immigration system as adult students. This visa category permits these students to work a maximum of twenty hours per week during academic term time, in either paid or unpaid roles. This classification places them below “unskilled workers” at Tier 3, skilled workers at Tier 2, and high-value migrants-entrepreneurs, investors, exceptional talent, and international graduate entrepreneurs-at Tier 1. This is a tiered system which continues in place despite the wide and varied academic backgrounds and transferable knowledge and skills that international students can bring to the UK.

Furthermore, international students make up 45.4% of all postgraduates. However, their importance goes beyond merely their high representation in the student community, and also extends into their working environments. As *Figure 2* shows, the most significant aspects of education which a graduate can present to an employer lie primarily (1) within their level of study, and (2) if the subject studied is relevant to the job role. In other words, these students come to the UK to learn, but they bring to the UK not only their knowledge and proficiencies, but also a substantial economic benefit to UK academic institutions and beyond, by working and contributing to the UK’s economy while they are here.

More recently, during the first quarter of 2023, the highest number of Graduate Route visas was granted than in any quarter to date, with a figure of 46,336. This type of visa gives students permission to stay in the UK for at least two years after their successful completion of a British undergraduate or

postgraduate degree. Holding a PhD or other doctoral qualification allows students to stay for three years after the completion of their course, so as to find work within the UK and the chance to progress onto other types of worker visa to stay in the UK. The Graduate visa had a rejection rate of 1–2%, implying that most students that choose to apply can fortunately indeed access the graduate route without significant issues.

In comparison, the UK system is making the transition from the Graduate visa route to that of a Skilled Worker much more challenging for internationals. This is through having to negotiate sponsorship deals with UK employers, proving their ability to support themselves, and also prove that they can support any dependants that may arrive with them. This has therefore enforced the perception that the UK labour market can be a hostile and unreceptive place for internationals to find work. The myth that internationals do not contribute to the UK's economy only has truth in so far as that they cannot easily access the economy in order to contribute to it.

[Financial capacities and requirements for dependants at postgraduate level](#)

The strong emphasis on independent financial capacity in entry conditions makes it correlatively less likely that international students and their dependants will actually be a drain on public resources, or indeed be a burden to the UK system. On average, *one* student bringing *one* dependant in London must prove that they can afford £17,000 for course costs, £12,000 to support themselves, £705 in healthcare and a base of £7,500 for their dependant. This totals an average of £37,205 to apply to study in the UK as a base figure. The sheer financial cost of coming to the UK, supporting one's family, and fulfilling the above criteria therefore reflects a significant level of dedication that international students must have to conduct their studies at UK institutions. This should be better recognised.

At postgraduate level, in order to bring family members or dependants to the UK for the first time, a student is required to fulfil specific conditions. International students must prove that:

- They have been studying as a full-time student for a minimum of nine months OR be fully sponsored by their government for a programme of study that is longer than six months in duration.
- On average, an international student at postgraduate (master's) level must pay £17,100 a year to study in the UK. This figure can range from £9,000 to £30,000 per year of study and is variable by institution and/or course.
- They have evidence of their familial relationships, such as through the provision of a marriage or civil partnership certificate and/or birth certificates for children.
- They are able to pay the various other costs are attached to visa applications and healthcare surcharges. The table below (Figure 3) denotes the healthcare surcharges international students are expected to pay over the course of their studies at each level of study as part of their associated study costs in the UK.
- Each application for a student visa is £490 per application from inside the UK, £719 if outside of the country for 3 years and anything over three years at £1,420. A Fast Track application option is available at £990 for a response within 5 days of the initial application.
- Their dependants are able to financially support themselves and not require or rely on welfare assistance. An applicant must first prove that they can financially support themselves before evaluating their dependants.

- Students must first prove that they can fund their course and support themselves for the first 9 months of their studies regardless of level of study. The Government expects this to be £1,334 per month for courses in London and £1,023 for courses elsewhere in the UK.
- In addition to this, for each dependant a postgraduate student or sponsored study student brings with them to the UK, they must have £845 for courses in London or £680 for courses outside of London per month, per dependant.

Figure 3: International Healthcare Surcharge fees for international students in the UK.

Course	Expected International Healthcare Surcharge Fee
3 year (Undergraduate) degree	£1,645
4 year (Undergraduate) degree	£2,115
9 month (Master's) course	£470
10 month (Master's) course	£705
11 month (Master's) course	£705
12 month (Master's) course	£705
PhD (full time) course	£2,115

Pathways into the UK labour market

As detailed and explored above, the Graduate Visa route is a common route for internationals to be able to reside in the UK following completion of their degrees. Nevertheless, another pathway into the UK labour market exists. This is the Skilled Worker pathway which involves another avenue of application and contrasts from the Graduate route in several ways.

Figure 4: Graduate Visa vs Skilled Worker Pathways

Key Issues	Graduate Visa	Skilled Worker Visa
Is sponsorship required?	No	Yes
Is there a minimum salary threshold?	No	Yes
Is there a minimum skill level needed?	No	Yes
How long is the visa duration?	2 years 3 years (for PhDs)	Up to 5 years
How many times can you apply?	1	No limit
Can you bring dependants?	Yes	Yes
Can it lead to settlement?	No	Yes

According to the Association of Graduate Advisory Services (AGCAS), 72% of undergraduates successfully establish themselves in a graduate role. 54% of these succeed within 3 months of graduating, 33% within 3 to 6 months and 14% after 6 months. In relation to international students, many attempt to enter the UK workforce through the guidance of their university’s careers services. University support, in the form of a universal advisory board, or events specifically targeting international students are often run either by an employer or their university departments. These are key to making entry into the graduate route more accessible and also simpler to navigate for graduates.

This can be further supported through communication channels between university career services and graduate employers, with a dedicated advisory board setting out clear guidance around the legal processes which students have to traverse in order to enter the British labour market, well-defined guidance from the Government which can be accessed by the individual learner, education institutions, and employers, as well as employer support and engagement with both international graduates and universities. AGCAS further notes that ‘positive transitions into the labour market are impacted by these initial experiences including transparency from employers about their ability to provide sponsorship, employers’ level of experience employing and working with international graduates’. This implies that it is not just universities that have an instrumental role to play in guiding international students within the UK graduate labour market.

Relationships between students, universities, and employers

Building connections between education institutions and employers is vital and can be achieved using platforms such as the UCAS Myriad portal to provide accessible platforms for both students and employers. Through these connections, institutions, employers and platforms will benefit from relationships with the education sector around the transitions required for international students to become integrated into the UK labour market from a graduate visa. Employers with the ability to

provide information and support for routes into the labour market will also find it easier to facilitate international students within their companies than those which do not have sufficient resources.

Transitions into the labour market are often hindered by the ability of the employer and the individual to navigate issues such as the negotiating of visas, sponsorships, and housing, among several other barriers that international students have to overcome in order to find entry routes into employment. One third of the UK's academic faculty members are also internationals themselves. While this can aid in advising international students on visa application routes, it is important to consider what else can be done. Advances in this area will help lead to further success for students in obtaining a Graduate visa and also add to the appeal of studying and working at UK higher institutions, through having dedicated and knowledgeable support systems.

Highly skilled people already exist in the UK in the form of international students. The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) finds that 'the majority of graduate respondents (63%) had studied at the Higher degree level, mainly by taught course (MA, MSc, MBA), followed by Undergraduate degree level (23%) and Higher degree, mainly by research (10%).' The labour market requires talented people, and we only need to look towards the NHS to see the extent to which the UK workforce needs support. In June 2023, the NHS reported 112,000 vacancies, equating to roughly 8.5% of its total workforce. Currently, the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, backed by the government looks at internal development through degree apprenticeships to access a wider pool of talent. The UK needs to reevaluate its skills centres international graduates will typically converge in cities where infrastructure is predominantly focused. Through dispersing clusters of skilled individuals will allow the UK to address skills shortages and connect local networks to metropolitan hubs and global networks through the presence of internationals.

Though this is a long-term plan, in the short term, if dependants have relevant qualifications, they can help to fill the skills gap while the next cohort of students complete their studies. This further emphasises the need for clearer processes to bring trained and experienced people into high-impact sectors. Providing education to employers on the struggles that international graduates face to enter the UK workforce is the only logical course of action. The Government must recognise the skills that are on offer from international students within UK academic institutions and work alongside universities to help educate employers on sponsorship and visas in order to simplify routes for international graduates into the UK workforce.

2.3. Economic Contributions

International students are some of the biggest contributors to the UK economy. On a national scale:

- £37.3 billion net impact is generated by international students.
- Of this, within the academic cohort, £3.9 billion is associated with EU-domiciled students.
- The remaining £33.5 billion is associated with non-EU-domiciled students from Africa, South America and Asia.

In other words, despite the Government's current initiatives in relation to migration, international students have a net positive impact on the UK economy. Between the academic years 2018/19 to 2021/22, international students bolstered the UK economy through their course fees and living expenses from £31.3 billion to £41.9 billion. International students create £37.4 billion in net impact,

calculated by Universities UK by analysing the income internationals bring to the UK vs the costs of hosting these students.

Following the UK's departure from the European Union in 2020, the Government should be evaluating a new approach to welcome and encourage, and *not deter*, international expertise from studying, working or making their home in Britain. The substantial economic impact that international students have on the UK economy makes the general public £560 better off per British citizen, roughly equal to an added £58 million for each Parliamentary constituency.

With the UK GDP estimated by the Office of National Statistics to have shown no growth in Quarter 3 of 2023, and forecasts estimating a slowing growth from 0.4% in 2023 to 0.3% in 2024, the economy is becoming increasingly unstable. The Government should give careful consideration to the contributions that international students can make, and concentrate its efforts on creating a receptive process to appeal to internationals to study, work, and live in the UK.

To restrict the entry of dependants, apart from restricting a family's fundamental right as protected by the UN Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16: 'the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State to stay and be together', it would prevent many students and academics from coming to the UK. This would additionally force difficult decisions, lead to possible rejections of study or work opportunities, and destabilise a system which has proven advantageous for both parties.

International students are an intrinsic good to the UK. Fees from international students supplement those gained from domestic students as well as providing important contributions to university revenue. Nevertheless, new legislation could impact this system if the UK sees a decrease in the number of international students choosing to come to the UK to study. The UK would therefore also risk losing its widely admired system, if it cannot attract students to support inward investment, and consequently receive the revenue which international students supply to UK infrastructure through their course fees, living costs and health surcharges as previously discussed.

2.4. Research Contributions

The UK is a globally recognised location for international students and academics to work on world-renowned research, publications, and teaching. In 2022, the UK was the largest producer of international co-authored publications followed closely by Australia, then France. Though in terms of all scholarly output, the United Kingdom sits in 3rd position behind China in 1st and The US in 2nd. In the academic year 2021/22, according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 5,645 internationals who commenced research, teaching or both in higher education institutions, and only 40 of international staff who did not contribute to research, teaching or both. In contrast, leavers from UK institutions in the academic year 2021/22 were at 2,350, all of which were from teaching, research or both.

Through a comparison of these statistics between entrants and leavers from UK HE institutions on a yearly basis, there is a greater influx of educated individuals entering the UK who are actively researching and/or teaching while they are in UK institutions than leavers. These students range from undergraduate students (Level 6) to doctoral researchers (Level 8) and beyond. As a result, the majority of international academics commencing research or engaging in teaching in UK universities,

allows for high quantity research output. Consequently, the UK improves its academic status globally through holding 60.4% of all global academic publications, the largest share of internationally co-authored publications in 2021.

International academics also form 32.1% of staff within UK higher education institutions. Additionally, without the input of specialist staff, the workloads placed on UK based staff could become unsustainable. A report on staff workloads from 2022 by UCU notes that 87% of university staff say their workload has increased over the past three years with one in ten saying it is 'entirely unmanageable' and almost a quarter saying it is unmanageable most of the time. Restrictions placed upon these groups and external factors, such as the inability to obtain visas for dependents, risk becoming a determining factor for internationals in their decision-making process on whether they should pursue further study or transition into work in the UK. Within UK academic institutions, international scholars and academics are present in roles at every level, from lecturers and teaching assistants to senior leadership. Many first come to the UK to either start their studies or to further develop their research, going on to become staff in high-impact UK sectors.

In the academic year 2020–21, 81.4% of international academic staff in the UK were based in England and 26.5% of all international academic staff were based in London. The highest proportional areas of international staff in UK academic institutions are found in:

- Engineering and technology (47.7%);
- Biological, mathematical and physical sciences (40.2%);
- Administrative and business studies (38.9%).

This international cohort brings valuable expertise and new perspectives from outside the UK to critical areas of UK academia, contributing to the development of innovative thought-leadership with the potential for wider contributions and effects on the wider UK economy. Increasing global engagement is imperative for UK institutions to create a co-developed, innovative curriculum designed to facilitate a global outlook and increase potential in research synergies and networks.

2.5. Case Study - Dr Doseline Kiguru

An article by the *Guardian*, published on the 11th November 2023, highlights the often unspoken story and difficulties faced by academics from the Global South in obtaining visas for their dependants. In this case, the issues faced to allow Dr Kiguru's daughter to join her mother in the UK.

Colleagues at the University of Bristol, where Dr Kiguru has accepted a permanent research position, have denounced the recent decision of the Home Office in response to its rejection of Dr Kiguru's six-year-old daughter being able to join her mother in the UK. Upon accepting a permanent appointment to Bristol, after coming to the UK in 2021 as a Research Associate, Dr Kiguru applied for her daughter to join her in the UK. She did not find out about the rejection until the University intervened in November, giving her just one week to appeal the decision. The Home Office decreed that it saw "no compassionate grounds" to allow the child to join her mother – in a letter addressed to the six-year-old. It stated: "It was your mother's personal decision to depart for the UK". Colleagues have condemned this verdict, stating it as cruel and sadly familiar due to the rise in similar cases for scholars in the Global South.

Dr Kiguru's case is not unique. Cases are often not made publicly available due to parents who are typically scared to go public for fear of rebuttal on their own visas or applications. The year 2019 saw the Home Office make a U-turn after a widespread condemnation from academics across the world when it rejected visas for the children of two female researchers at the University of Oxford. Publicity of the stories of academics and their struggles to bring dependants to the UK needs to be more prolific.

Without information and public consciousness, knowledge of the processes and success rates of bringing dependants to the UK is not documented or understood. In order to gain public traction, cases such as Dr Kiguru's story importantly document the humanitarian side to the visa process and its effects on family units.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

The current Conservative narrative on international students and their dependants is tied to misinformation with regard to the issue of immigration. Their depiction of a stereotypical “immigrant” nuclear family becoming a burden on the UK economy is inaccurate and neglects to encompass the skills and knowledge that international students and their dependants are able to provide the UK in academic institutions and in the labour market.

The image of the nuclear family having one member studying and dependant that are economically dependent on the state is often untrue. Evidently, committing to study in the UK requires a large financial commitment and proof of funds to stay in the UK and is evaluated at the visa application stage, and cannot be a burden under the condition that the student is able to support each dependant that enters the UK. Although dependants are financially supported, further analysis is required on the types of workers arriving in the UK alongside their academic partners, and likewise ignores the potential for the future development of the UK.

The children of these internationals, who will mostly be educated in British primary and secondary schools, will themselves learn and study in English. They will gain the ability to be a part of British institutions and society. The likelihood of these children, as they grow into young adults, to want to stay, study and work and therefore contribute their own skillsets to the UK’s economy is also increased. These considerations suggest a new pathway of thinking. If a diplomat, who is serving three or four years in their posting in the UK, can bring their family with them – why cannot another international professional, such as a budding academic, do the same for the same duration of time? The current mindset by the Conservative government is inaccurate and adversely affects the public consciousness and will further entrench the idea that dependants are a burden if dependants are forbidden to accompany their parents or partners.

Under the current law, and from the statistics discussed, there are urgent questions we must continue to ask. These include:

- How many high-profile members of academia or future scholars will the UK be preventing and restricting due to its obstructive rules on dependants, such as the case of Dr Doseline Kiguru?
- Is the UK limiting both its intellectual and economic potential under the new Act through its complicated visa application system?

International students must be seen as valuable members of the UK academic community. They are present in classrooms as students, teachers, and researchers. The contributions made by these students, and international academics, are vital to the development of new partnerships and the continuation of innovative knowledge production across a wide range of fields. Securing the UK’s legacy as a global hub for the production of high-quality research is only possible through cooperation. We have therefore advocated that there are clear and important benefits to be derived from welcoming a diverse and international student and academic cohort into UK institutions.

Dispelling myths and misconceptions around the impact of international students and academic staff in the UK is paramount. Internationals contribute in a positive manner to the UK, and it is imperative that these myths are disproved. The vital contributions made by international students, and international academics, develop new partnerships and facilitate the continuation of innovative knowledge production across a wide range of fields. Their presence secures the UK's legacy as a global hub for the production of high quality research through international collaborations based in the UK and bolsters the international profile of UK institutions. International students and academics, universities and employers require greater transparency and communication between one another and government to aid internationals in securing visas for further study, work and sponsorships.

Higher education students and academics should not be denied the right to keep their families together and the UK visa system should allow the entry of spouses or partners who work in high-skilled sectors and their children. However, further inquiry is needed into whether international students or academics are more likely to have spouses or family members who work in high-skilled sector themselves and how they can support the UK economy. Publicity of visa denial stories should be circulated into the public consciousness to provide general knowledge of how rejections can adversely affect the family unit when an academic is in the UK but their dependants cannot follow. International students and academics need to be reclassified into a higher tier in the UK Visa system due to the expertise and skills which they bring to the UK.

The contributions which international students bring to the UK domestic economy must be highlighted to show the instrumental role they play in aiding development. Internationals must prove that they can support not only themselves, but their dependants during the visa application process and therefore the myth that dependants are unable to support themselves while in the UK and a burden on the welfare state must be dispelled. In essence, the provisions that the UK makes for its own students should be extended to international students to ensure the sustainability and future of the higher education sector.

Recommendations

1. Recognise the vital contributions made by international students, and international academics, to the development of new partnerships and the continuation of innovative knowledge production across a wide range of fields.
2. Ensure the means to secure the UK's legacy as a global hub for the production of high-quality research through international collaborations based in the UK.
3. Introduce a clearer and easier visa process for incoming international students in order to bolster the international profile of UK institutions.
4. Acknowledge the need for clearer transparency and communication between incoming students and employers in order to secure sponsorships.
5. Highlight the importance of international students to the UK's domestic economy.
6. Secure the ability for students and academics to bring spouses or partners who work in high-skilled sectors.

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7. Develop further inquiries into whether international students or academics are more likely to have spouses or family members who work in high-skilled sector themselves.
 8. Give clear emphasis to the publicity around visa denial stories and how they adversely affect the family unit, especially when an academic is already in the UK but dependants are unable to follow.
 9. Dispel the misconception that dependants are unable to support themselves while in the UK and are a burden on the welfare state.
 10. Reclassify international students in the Tiered Visa system so as to better recognise the level of expertise and skills that they bring into the UK.

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About the Lifelong Education Institute

The **Lifelong Education Institute** (LEI) exists to promote learning and skills training for people at all ages and stages of their lives and careers. We believe that education should be available and accessible to everyone whenever and wherever they need it. Whether they are school leavers or university graduates, new recruits or long-serving employees, recent arrivals or long-term residents, working people or those who have entered retirement.

Our approach is based on four principles:

- Putting the lifelong learner first
- Building an integrated tertiary education system
- Bringing stakeholders together
- Looking to the four nations of the UK and beyond

Together, these principles underpin every part of our work, from research to advocacy, from convening to commentary. They are the bedrock on which we must build the 21st-century education system that the UK's learners urgently deserve.

The Lifelong Education Institute's Secretariat is hosted by the thinktank ResPublica. The Institute gets its strategic direction from its Advisory Board, which comprises prominent and forward-thinking figures in education and skills space. In addition, the Institute has asked political figures to form a Board of Patrons, who will advise on the current political environment, and help by progressing the Institute's positions in Whitehall.

International Students and Immigration: *Tackling myths and misconceptions*

Debates on the future of international students in the UK are becoming increasingly prominent and interwoven with discussions around immigration. This has especially been the case concerning the UK Government's objective to reduce immigration numbers and become all the more noticeable since July 2023, when the UK Government gained Royal Assent for the Illegal Migration Act to be written into law.

In this thinkpiece, the Lifelong Education Institute (LEI) explores the subject of international students and evaluates how current and new legislation is unfairly targeting them and in particular their families or dependants. It concludes with key reflections on how international students, and international academics, are far from being a problem. Instead, they are valuable economic and research contributors to British higher education institutions and society as a whole.



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