

International students and the UK economy

On Christmas 2014, Theresa May revealed potential requirements for non-EU students to have to reapply for a visa after their the completion of their degree. [Katy Sandalls](#) and [Samuel Russell](#) debate the merits of May's proposed policy

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Image: [ukhomeoffice](#)

Are international students negative competition for UK students?

Sam: "International students reduce the number of places"

It could be argued that we have highest population densities in the world. Allowing international students a free pass into this country is untenable. Government estimates suggest that by 2020, only five years away, there will be about 600,000 non-EU overseas students coming to the UK to study. At present almost 60% of overseas students remain in the UK after finishing their degrees. Based on these figures, in 2020 there will be approximately 350,000 international students remaining in the UK, or an extra 0.5 per cent of our total population each year. International students reduce the number of places available to home students; they make up almost 10 per cent of all undergraduate students and nearly 30 per cent of postgraduates. This makes it much harder for home students to attend university and, particularly for postgraduate degrees, allows universities to raise the cost of their courses. Removing the free-ticket that international students get by studying in the UK would eliminate the free-riders, leaving those who come here to learn from the best.

Katy: "We can't keep hold of these graduates. They don't owe us"

May's proposal raises some interesting questions. Do international students have more of a right to live in the UK than self-made entrepreneurs or graduates from overseas universities? Why should we give graduates a favourable visa application process when essentially they have paid for their education, in many ways a service, and have received it? We owe them nothing more and they should not expect anything more. Interestingly, some students have come out as saying that they expect to have to leave the UK and re-apply; they don't see why they should be treated differently to any other immigration applicant. When asked about their view on this topic, one third year international student told Nouse: "I did not even know we were allowed to stay after our degree. I see no reason why we should". Another interesting political point is this - is it fair to keep hold of these graduates? Do they really owe us anything? Some commentators have also acknowledged that it would be better for many of these students to go home and help their own nations. By making it more difficult for them to stay here we encourage them to go back and be innovative in their own countries, essential for global development.

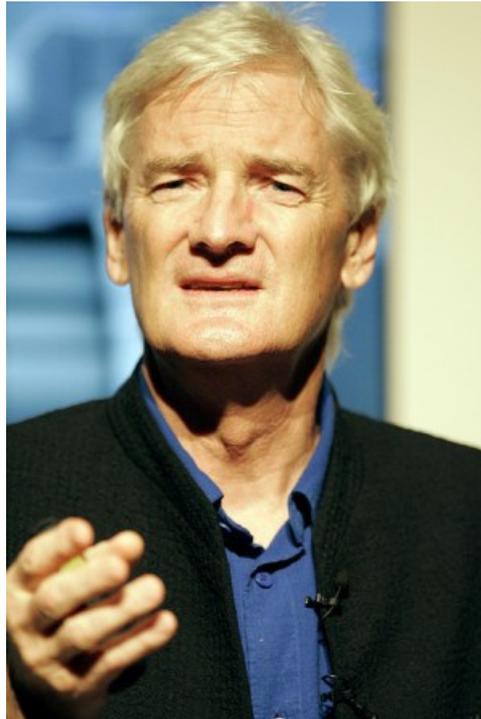


Image: Eva Rinaldi

International students are a big asset to the country

Sam: "It is clear that international students benefit the economy"

From a financial perspective it is clear that international students benefit the economy. Unlike home and EU-students, they pay the actual cost of their degree. They also bring money into the country, receiving transfers from abroad and spending it here. The country also benefits from having more university graduates, reducing the cost of skilled labour and allowing our businesses to be more competitive. Encouraging them to reapply for a visa when they finish their degree will reduce the numbers who stay in the UK. As Sir James Dyson said, this narrowminded policy will thus only serve to reduce the number of graduates in our population. It is a short-term means of attracting votes aimed to appease UKIP that will damage our economy in the future. If Theresa May wanted to reduce the level of immigration she would do better by reducing the number of unskilled non-EU workers, instead of targeting the potential future leaders of our economy.

Katy: "Britain's already seen as unfriendly to non-EU students"

It's important to look at Theresa May's proposals from a political point of view. Examined this way, some of her ideas don't make sense. Students already have to find a job within four months to stay; they aren't staying here without conditions and they have to prove they are contributing to the economy. Britain is

already seen as unfriendly toward non-EU students (and non EU nationals); the numbers of them joining British universities has dropped in the past few years. If we implement May's rules then we are simply making ourselves look less attractive. Additionally, we are constantly being told of the benefit of non-EU citizens by those intent on severing links with the EU. By not placing the extra hassle of having to leave the country, reapply and then return on their shoulders we bring them more into line with EU students. Isn't that exactly what the government wants immigration - wise? The debate out at a sensitive time for the Tories already wounded by UKIP. The Guardian commented that some of the statistics for the increase in non-EU postgrads would "fit neatly onto a UKIP pamphlet". Perhaps that is exactly May's thinking."

Though this proposal is unlikely to go much further, in its current form anyway, it represents a worrying trend. As the election approaches politicians will propose increasingly more controversial in an attempt to weaken the opposition and pander to some of the stronger voices in their party. Which ever way you think about this topic, the lack of thought and debate about its effect before being announced should trouble you.



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