



The Vanishing Students from Outside the EU

International Students: MW 387



Summary

1. Much attention has been paid to the apparent failure of the government to reduce non-EU migration. However, it would seem that this is very largely due to the significant number of students who have remained in the UK, legally or otherwise.
2. Non-EU net migration has averaged 172,000 in the last ten years, as recorded by the International Passenger Survey (IPS); an average of 271,000 non-EU migrants have arrived while just 99,000 have left the country.
3. In the recent past (2010-2013), an average of 156,000 non-EU migrants arrived each year for study but only 46,000 a year have been recorded as departing in the period 2012 to 2015, when most of this intake might have been expected to leave. This suggests that around 100,000 students have stayed on. Students appear therefore to be a very significant source of non-EU net migration.
4. A number of students switched into work or marriage visas but most extensions were for further study. There seems to be no record of most of the latter departing the UK.

International Passenger Survey Data

5. The IPS is a voluntary survey of those arriving and departing the country. It asks passengers about their nationality, intended length of stay and their reason for migration.
6. Over the last ten years, the IPS shows that net migration of non-EU migrants averaged 172,000 a year.
7. In the most recent year, 2015, the IPS records net migration of non-EU migrants as 152,000¹, of which by far the largest portion was students.

1 The net migration number most often quoted for 2015 is 188,000. This is the LTIM figure which is the IPS figures adjusted for asylum grants, visitor switchers and movements between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. This does not affect the thrust of this paper.

A net inflow of:

- 103,000 for study;
- 37,000 accompanying/joining family;
- 12,000 for work;
- 7,000 were recorded as Other/No reason stated;
- and a net outflow of 8,000 were going home to live;
- Giving total net migration of non-EU citizens as recorded by the IPS as 152,000

Net Migration of Students

8. In the four years between 2010 and 2013 the inflow of non-EU migrants for study averaged 156,000 a year. This time period has been selected because those who arrived in 2014 and 2015 are unlikely to have finished their studies and left the country.

9. In 2012 the ONS introduced a new question which captured a greater number of students departing. This gave an average of 46,000 students departing each year in the four years from 2012 to 2015.

10. It follows that either the IPS is seriously undercounting the departure of students from the UK, or around 110,000 students have been staying on by one means or another.

Student Extensions

11. While not directly comparable with IPS data, between 2011 and 2014 (the only years for which data is available) an average of 93,500 students obtained an extension of their visa. The majority of these – 67,500 – were for further study, while around 22,000 obtained an extension for work and 3,500 for family. The number of extensions for work has however fallen since the closure of the Tier 1 (Post Study Work) visa in 2012 and now stands at around 6,000 a year.

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