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Making the case for separating international students from net migration figures

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UN definition

"a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months)"

(UN definition of a long-term migrant)

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Reporting migration in the UK

- Quarterly net migration statistics (ONS)
- Based on International Passenger Survey
- UN definition used to classify individuals as long-term migrants
- This is irrespective of whether or not they have a route to permanent settlement

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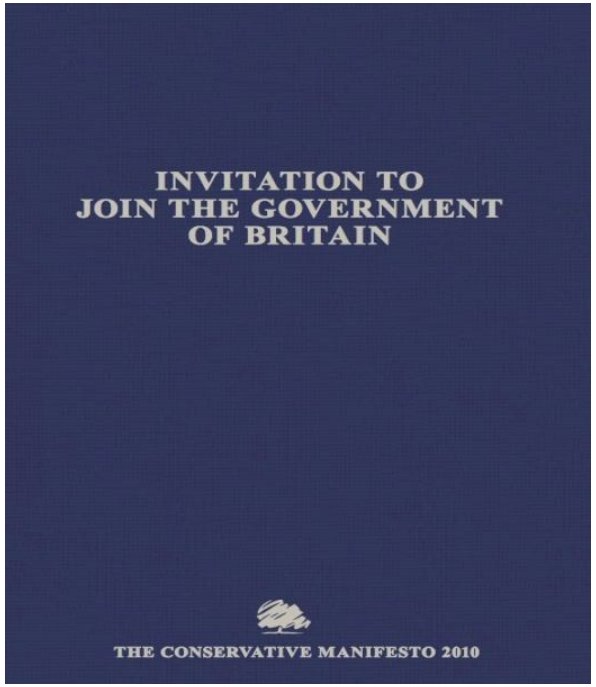
Net migration in the spotlight



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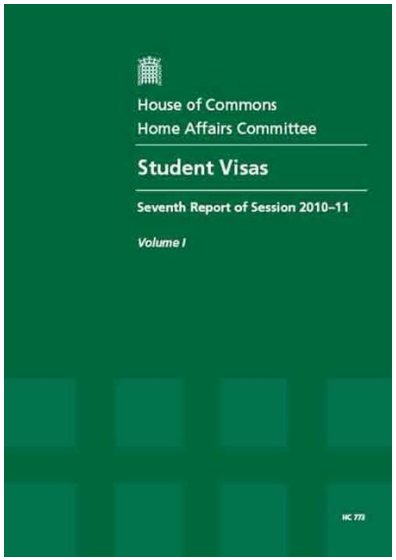
“….we are not persuaded that students are in fact migrants”

(Home Affairs Select Committee 2011)



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"We recommend one simple policy change straight away: remove students from migration figures while they are studying. Like tourists, they are temporary residents and should be treated as such. If they stay to work after graduating, incorporate them at that point…"

(Simon Walker, Director General, Institute of Directors)

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Does the UN definition of a migrant prevent an alternative approach to reporting migration statistics being adopted?

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The Government's view

"It is important that we stick to international UN definitions. As I said, there would be considerable criticism of me if I suggested that we should fix those figures purely for our own purposes."

(Lord Henley, House of Lords, 30 April 2012)

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But....

- The UN definition is a *recommendation*
- Introduced to harmonise national practices and achieve better comparability among migration data
- It is not used by all
- Many take a different approach

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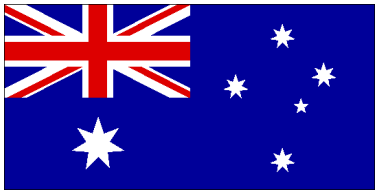
Australia



Net Permanent Arrivals	Arrivals under the Permanent Migration Program Arrivals under the Humanitarian Programs
Net Temporary Residents	International students Temporary skilled workers Working holidaymakers Tourists and visitors
Net Other Arrivals	Australian citizens and permanent residents settling or emigrating New Zealand citizens settling or emigrating

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Canada

- Net international migration calculated as follows:

  net international migration = immigrants – (emigrants + net temporary emigrants) + net non-permanent residents + returning emigrants

- Students clearly presented as being non-permanent residents

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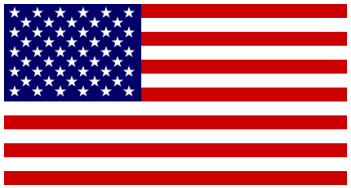
United States



- Department of Homeland Security classifies international students as *non-immigrant admissions* alongside tourists, business travellers and those involved with cultural exchange programmes.

- Those persons who have been granted lawful permanent residence (“green card” recipients) are categorised as ‘legal permanent residents’

- A clear presentation of students as temporary admissions

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OECD

- Definition of a permanent migrant excludes international students, even if they stay for more than a year in the host country
- Students only count as permanent-type migrants if they then switch into an immigration category placing them on a migration track leading to permanent residence

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The rationale for exclusion

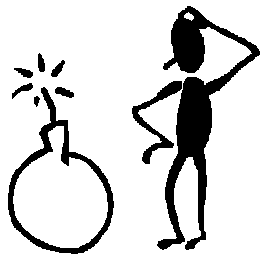
- Students are only in the UK temporarily
- No route to settlement
- Predominantly they come, they study, they leave
- The current presentation of students as permanent migrants is misleading
- Genuine international students benefit the UK

And what of the politics?

A political time-bomb

or

an issue where cross-party consensus is possible?



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Fiddling the figures?

The suggestion that students be taken out of immigration statistics would do nothing to address abuse but it would destroy the government's credibility since they comprise 60% of visa applicants.

(Migration Watch, 2012)

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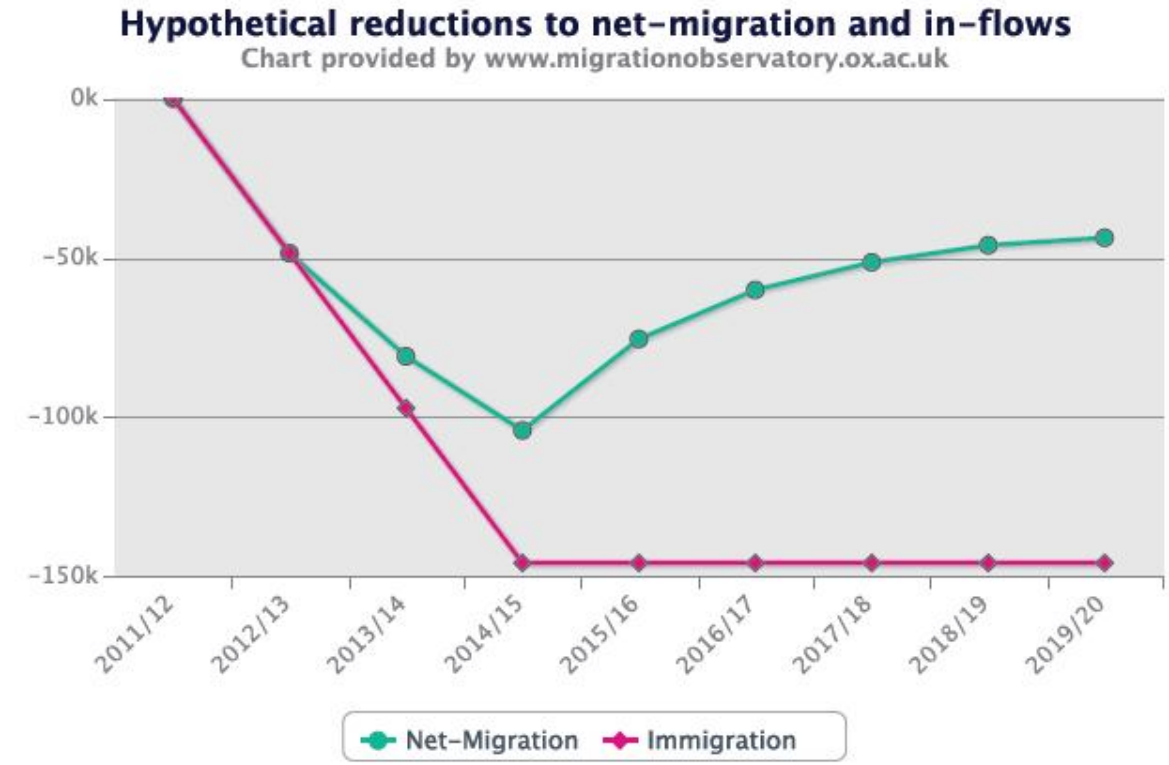
“Net migration bounce”



Migration Observatory modelling based on MAC Limits report 2012 and Home Office Migrant Journey report 2010

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Benefits of excluding students

- Respond to the growth in international students
- Enhance public understanding
- Improve the immigration debate
- Bring the UK in line with key competitors
- It will not impede the Government in tackling abuse in the immigration system

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To summarise

- Clear case for exclusion
- The UN definition does not represent a barrier to taking an alternative approach
- Adopting a different approach will bring us in line with some key competitors
- Facilitate more informed policy-making
- Safeguard our position as a world leader in education exports