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Student Immigration: Storing up trouble for the future?

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The parameters of student immigration policy

- General Election 2010 and the evidence of the unpopularity of immigration.
- Promise to bring net migration down to the 'tens of thousands' by 2015.
- The view that to achieve this, student migration had to make a contribution to the downward trend.

Generating anxiety around international students

- Problem – public opinion not particularly worried by international students – see Migration Observatory opinion poll May 2011 suggesting 70% support migration to provide skills.
- Strategy for ramping up anxiety around the issue.
- Elements – 'bogus college' issue and the evidence of 'The Migrant Journey' – 20% international students remain for longer than 5 years.

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Strategy of 'the brightest and the best'

- Visa policies to concentrate on the selection of degree and post-graduate level students.
- Reduce fringe benefits – such as free hours and post study work rights - to limit students to those who could afford to limit themselves to study.
- Stringent student monitoring obligations imposed on colleges to monitor progress

Dangers of this approach

- A business plan for elite colleges only?
- Ignores interconnections between the different parts of education – evidence that one-fifth of degree level students advance from FE-level preparatory courses.
- Conflicts with legitimate student interests – particularly from more modest socio-economic groups who finance their studies through loans.
- Conservative approach to student selection on the part of colleges and universities to avoid risks of drop-outs and slow progress through examinations

The bigger picture

- HE is closer associated with productivity driven-growth in the knowledge sectors of the economy. Success in this area likely to depend on universities having capacity for risk-taking which will be impeded by a strengthened immigration control function.
- Reputational damage at time when other countries expanding their capacity.
- Loss of opportunities to generate hubs and networks.

Thanks!

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