



ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES

Migration Advisory Committee Call for Evidence – August 2017 MAC Students' Commission

Association of Colleges Response

26 January 2018



The Association of Colleges

The Association of Colleges (AoC) represents nearly 95% of the 275 colleges in England incorporated under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. Colleges are transformational – they help people make the most of their talents and ambitions and drive social mobility; they help businesses improve productivity and drive economic growth; they are rooted in and committed to their communities and drive tolerance and well-being. They are an essential part of England’s education system.

Colleges provide academic, technical and professional education for young people, adults and employers. The 275 colleges in England provide education and training to:

- 712,000 young people aged 16 to 18
- 1.4 million adults including 150,000 taking higher education courses
- 313,000 apprentices¹

College international activity

Colleges engage in a wide range of work involving students, education partners and governments from other countries. In December 2017 AoC published the results of a survey tracking college international activity for the academic year 2016/17. The survey highlighted over 20 different types of international work that colleges are engaged in, ranging from participation in European projects to the operation of a campus overseas. The recruitment of international (non-EU) students to the UK was the most popular international activity at colleges, underpinned by a clear message that the college sector wishes to see international students removed from Government net migration targets.

Some colleges have longstanding history of working internationally, for example in providing training in specialist subject areas such as marine engineering. Colleges have also been at the forefront of operating English language classes for successive waves of migrants to the UK, whether those looking to settle or study here, or those seeking asylum and resettlement. The UK’s education system has a very strong reputation internationally, and overseas government education policy has an increased focus on skills and technical training. Colleges offer academic, technical and professional programmes that are attractive to international organisations and students alike. 90 colleges identified 66 different countries in their individual lists of their top 5 overseas markets.

Participation in projects, partnerships or exchanges with international education organisations brings a range of benefits to colleges, including:

¹ AoC Key Facts about colleges 2017: <https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/Key%20Facts%202017-18%20.pdf>

- Intercultural learning and work experience for Home students
- Continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for staff
- Curriculum development
- Generation of additional income streams outside Government funding

Sources of evidence

AoC's response to the MAC has been compiled using the following data sources:

- AoC Survey of College International Activity 2016/17²
- AoC network meetings with colleges
- College case studies
- AoC Survey of College ESOL provision³

Whilst the information provided here relates to colleges in AoC membership, AoC has discussed the MAC Call for Evidence with our counterpart organisations in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, to whom this response is copied.

² AoC Survey of College International Activity 2016/17:

https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/AoC%20international%20survey%20report%202017_0.pdf

³ Pending publication

Responses to the MAC enquiry questions

1. What impact does the payment of migrant student fees to the educational provider have?

AoC's 2016/17 survey of college international activity reported that:

- The combined international (non-EU) and EU college income 2016/17 was nearly £57m (£52m international (non-EU); £4.4m EU student fees)
- Colleges that are active internationally generate an average of £838,753 per year in international (non-EU) income. This figure includes income from a range of international work, for example international tuition fees
- Colleges that are active internationally generate an average of £105,948 per year in EU student tuition fee income
- Colleges that are active internationally enroll an average of 121 non-EU international students a year and 353 EU27 students per year

Migrant student fees can provide an additional revenue stream for colleges. Any surplus from this revenue can be invested back into central college operations and services, benefitting all students and staff at the organisation. However, it should be noted that college leaders are expected to report satisfactory financial management to Government without any dependency on migrant student fees.

2. What are the fiscal impacts of migrant students, including student loan arrangements?

AoC has not carried out any specific research on the fiscal benefits of international further education students because this issue was effectively covered in a report commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in 2013, the "Evaluation of the value of Tier 4 international students to FE colleges and the UK economy"⁴. The report concluded that:

- Additional income from Tier 4 learners is perceived as highly valuable in supporting the college's financial viability, and can also help fund further activities in the college such as building projects and further international projects
- Colleges estimate that Tier 4 students will spend approximately twice the value of their tuition fees on subsistence in the local area. This may include spending on college owned accommodation, rent for local host families, and spending at local shops. This additional income is perceived as very beneficial for local areas

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/value-of-tier-4-international-students-to-further-education-colleges-and-the-uk-economy-evaluation>

3. Do migrant students help support employment in educational institutions?

In the main, migrant students join timetabled college classes with UK students. Curriculum staffing will already be in place therefore as migrant students are joining a core college programme. However, migrant students do create additional employment opportunities for colleges. The addition of migrant students to the class can boost class numbers and help to ensure the viability of some courses that are difficult to recruit to. This in turn secures teaching staff jobs. An example of this is an AoC member college where migrant student numbers, particularly Tier 4 sponsored students, helped to maintain the college's economics, accounting and pure maths provision. Without the migrant students the provision was stripped back, leading to a reduced local offer.

Furthermore, some courses may be arranged specifically for migrant students and hence do not fall within the scope of ESFA-funded programmes. Examples include some English language courses, summer courses or short bespoke training programmes for an overseas partner. In this scenario the college will recruit additional staff to teach the courses or will offer additional teaching hours to part-time staff. For example, one AoC member college has been able to continue offering higher-level ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) courses to its local community given the demand from international students for the courses. Other colleges maximise their estate by running summer courses for international students, outside the traditional academic year.

Larger, sustainable numbers of migrant students studying in colleges also create a requirement for administrative, support and management jobs to oversee their study. AoC's 2016/17 international survey reported that 77% of colleges active internationally employ staff with dedicated responsibility for international work. Such roles include:

- Compliance officer for Tier 4 operations
- Erasmus+ programme coordinator
- International welfare officer
- International manager/director

The recruitment of international students through the Tier 4 visa route necessitates staff roles to manage the institution's sponsor licence. However, staff roles can be at risk should the college lose its sponsor licence, for example in the event of a change of Ofsted grading and the failure to meet educational oversight requirements.

4. How much money do migrant students spend in the national, regional and local economy and what is the impact of this?

AoC has no specific data on spend for migrant students at colleges. However, it can be reasonably assumed that if colleges generated £57m in international income in 2016/17, significant additional spend (often estimated to be double the tuition fee income for international non-EU students) would be brought to the local economy by migrant students on housing, transport and food during their studies.

International (non-EU) students applying for a Tier 4 visa must evidence that they have sufficient funds to support themselves during their course of study (currently £1,265 per month for living costs if studying in London and £1,015 per month for living costs if studying outside London). They must also pay a healthcare surcharge to access NHS services. It is clear therefore that whether they are studying in the UK for one week or for one year, international students contribute financially not only to the institution that they are studying at, but also to the local economy where their institution is based.

There are 321⁵ colleges in the UK, spread across major cities such as Birmingham and Manchester, through to market towns and rural areas of the southwest of England or the north of Scotland. Colleges serve the local communities in which they reside, and they may be the only post-16 education provider in the local area. There may be no university situated nearby, therefore migrant students studying at the college will be the main migrant students contributing to the local economy.

5. How do migrant students affect the educational opportunities available to UK students?

Migrant students enhance college life. As outlined in question 4 above, colleges are located in very different areas of the UK, including areas of low social mobility or ethnic and cultural diversity. Some college principals take a strategic decision to engage in international activity not to generate additional income but simply to bring diversity and opportunity to the college campus. Migrant students joining classes alongside UK students means that UK students have the chance to learn about other countries and cultures, broadening their global outlook and developing competencies attractive to employers. This is more important than ever for young people as the UK prepares to leave the European Union and foreign language learning declines.

The European Commission's Erasmus+ programme⁶ is an example of how migrant students enhance educational opportunities for UK students. Erasmus+ funds placement opportunities for UK students in Europe and vice-versa. The programme

⁵ <https://www.aoc.co.uk/about-colleges/research-and-stats/key-further-education-statistics>

⁶ <https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/>

allows young people from across Europe to meet each other and to develop their interpersonal and employability skills. Through Erasmus+, colleges also strengthen their links with local employers, who work with their local college to offer short placements to Erasmus+ students coming to the UK.

As outlined in question 3 above, migrant student numbers can help to sustain important areas of college provision. Moreover, a 2017 NUS survey of UK students⁷ showed that:

- 70% of UK students agreed that any reduction in international students would impact their cultural experience at university
- A quarter of students believed that their course could not run without international students
- 75% of students agreed that international students should be allowed to work in the UK after graduating

When asked about having international students in their classes, lecturers at one college fed back to AoC that international students often have complementary skills to their UK counterparts. For example, in an A-level Mathematics class, lecturers paired a Chinese student with a local English student. The Chinese student had stronger mathematical knowledge than the English student, but paired together, the Chinese student improved his English language level and the English student improved his mathematics.

Another AoC member college reported that the international nature of the college's student body was highlighted by the college's Ofsted inspector. The inspector observed that by being part of a truly international student body, the students expanded their understanding, tolerance and acceptance of difference. Colleges that have large ESOL provision cite it as a valuable tool for encouraging community cohesion and for respecting and valuing difference in the community.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2013 report highlighted numerous educational benefits reported by colleges which have Tier 4 learners, including enabling them to offer courses they may not be able to otherwise through increased demand and additional student numbers; helping staff develop new teaching styles and skills to accommodate learners from different cultural backgrounds; and enriching the overall learning environment. The report stated that many colleges emphasised the value that Tier 4 students have by adding diversity to more homogenous areas and increasing UK learners' awareness of other cultures which will be useful for future employment.

⁷ 'Student Perspectives on International Students', National Union of Students 2017

6. To what extent does the demand from migrant students for UK education dictate the supply of that education provision and the impact of this on UK students?

Demand from migrant students for UK education does not dictate the supply of education provision at colleges. As outlined in question 3 above, migrant students, especially those taking full-time courses, infill into college classes. This is particularly the case for EU27 nationals settled in the UK who come to college to improve their qualifications. In most instances, they will be classed as Home students.

However, colleges engaged in international projects have often been able to use short, bespoke courses developed for international partners to pilot innovative delivery models and new provision that can then be offered to Home students. Such opportunities prove highly valuable to the ongoing work of a college and provide staff with CPD.

AoC's international survey 2016/17 showed that study at RQF Level 3 is the most popular level of study for international (non-EU) students, reflecting the attraction of A-levels and foundation programmes overseas. College students often progress to degree programmes from Level 3, as the sector provides a pathway into university.

AoC's international survey 2016/17 also highlighted that almost half of colleges engaged in international education offer English language programmes. However, the number of international students taking higher level vocational qualifications such as Higher National Diplomas has progressively declined. Changes introduced to student visa regulations since 2010 have meant that students from the traditional non-EU countries interested in higher vocational qualifications found it more difficult to obtain student visas. AoC and the British Council's 2012 report 'Sector Skills International Activity' highlighted that 67.9% of respondents were offering HNC/Ds internationally. By contrast, AoC's international survey 2016/17 showed that only a third of international students were studying at Levels 4 and 5. Home Office immigration data⁸ charts the drop in sponsored study visa numbers to the further education section since 2011, although it should be noted that the data is not broken down by public/private college or qualification type.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-july-to-september-2017/summary-of-latest-statistics>

7. What is the impact of migrant students on the demand for housing provision, on transport (particularly local transport) and on health provision?

AoC's international survey 2016/17 reported that 65% of colleges engaged in international work offer 'homestay' accommodation, and 27% offer on-campus residential accommodation. Migrant students include both students temporarily in the UK to complete a qualification before returning home, but also those who have settled in the UK, for example EU27 students.

Migrant students require accommodation, which generates opportunities for local families to open up their homes to international students. 'Homestay' accommodation involves families offering room and board to students at their local college, a popular choice for households where their children have left home and there is a spare room. Hosting an international student brings not simply financial benefits to the homestay family, but also cultural benefits and company for older hosts.

Colleges work closely with their local network of homestay hosts to ensure safeguarding standards are met, working with at least 50 families in their local area, and up to 250 families in parts of England where there is high demand for short-term English language courses. Homestay is particularly popular with college students who are aged 16-19 or who are studying in the UK for short periods. Homestay provision is located near the college campus, allowing students to use local transport to get to college. Most migrant students will use public transport or college-arranged transport to reach college.

8. What impacts have migrant students had on changes to tourism and numbers of visitors to the UK?

AoC has no specific data in relation to this question, however it is clear that migrant students studying at colleges bring more visitors into the UK, benefitting the tourism economy. All colleges enrolling migrant students will showcase the local and national tourism attractions available. The range of budget flights within the EU make it possible for EU27 students to invite friends and family to visit. International (non-EU) students, especially those on Tier 4 visas who must be able to finance tuition and living costs into the thousands of pounds, will also be visited by friends and family whilst they are in the UK. The friends and families of migrant students will take the opportunity to engage in tourism activity whilst they are in the UK, and to spend in tourist attractions, accommodation and restaurants.

The UK's strength as a tourist destination is evidenced in a project that AoC is operating in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism, Brazil. In January 2018, 100 Brazilian young people sponsored by the Ministry joined tourism and hospitality courses running at 10 host colleges in AoC's network. The colleges are located across the country, each offering different tourism opportunities to the students.

9. What role do migrant students play in extending UK soft power and influence abroad?

Migrant students who study in the UK are ambassadors for our education system and for our country. If they have a positive experience in the UK, they will encourage others to come and study here. Colleges active in international work often establish 'buddy' or 'international ambassador' schemes to connect current and future international and Home students together. Indeed according to the Times Higher Education⁹, the UK is top of the table for educating world leaders.

10. If migrant students take paid employment while they are studying, what types of work do they do?

College international (non-EU) students are not permitted to work during their studies, following Home Office rule changes in July 2015. Work rights are however in place for international (non-EU) students taking specified courses and sponsored by a UK recognised body or a body in receipt of public funding as a higher education institution. EU27 students who are studying at colleges may be working part-time in industries where they fill key skills gaps, for example in the hospitality sector.

11. What do stakeholders think would happen in the event of there no longer being a demand from migrant students for a UK education?

It is a very unlikely scenario, given the strength of the UK's education sector and our place as the home of the English language, that migrant students would no longer choose the UK as a study destination. However, it is a real and current risk that EU27 students and students from outside the EU may be put off from coming here due to mixed messages arising from the Brexit process. Some media reporting of the outcome of the 2016 referendum has conveyed an impression that people from other countries are not welcome in the UK. Indeed since the referendum, non-UK students have reported hate crimes. Colleges play a vital and inclusive role in their communities, and it is important that colleges can continue to welcome migrant students into their student body.

⁹ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/uk-top-table-educating-world-leaders#survey-answer>