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Global demand for UK postgraduate research degrees

Trendş challenges and opportunities

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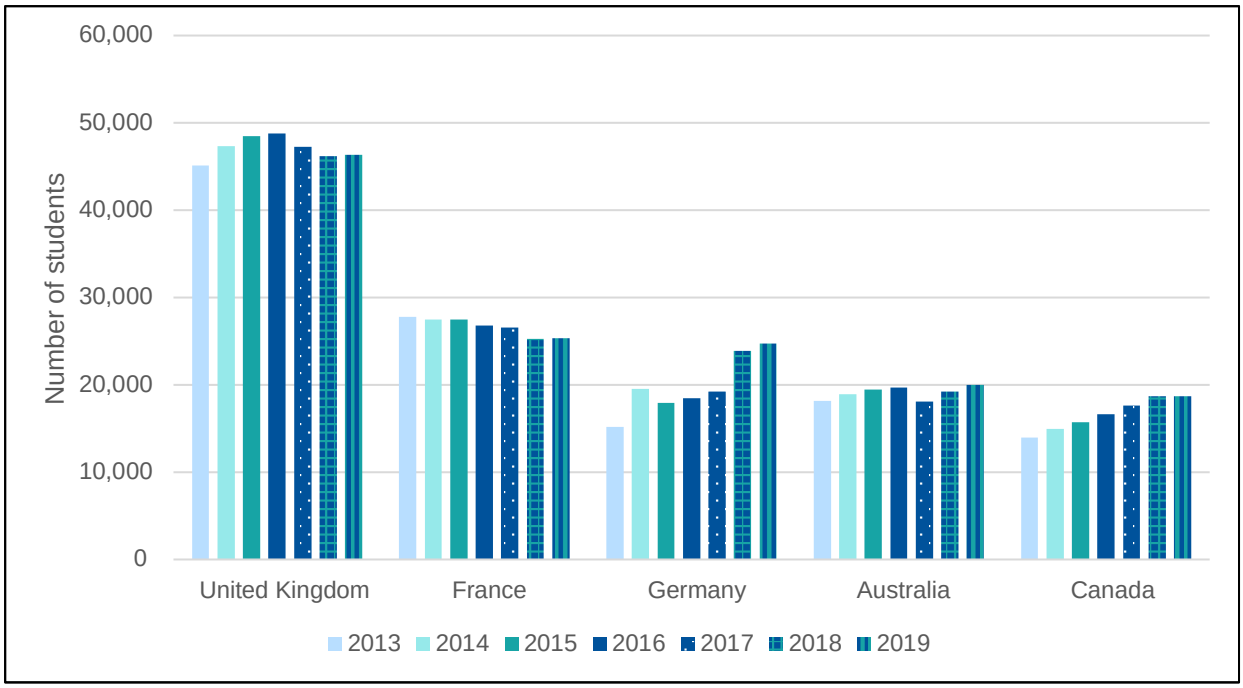
- The uncertainty of the UK's participation in Horizon Europe impacts both access to the prestigious Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action doctoral training networks and PhD students funded through Horizon Europe projects. The number of European Commission-funded doctoral entrants is small and there was a 16% decline in EC-funded doctoral entrants in 2020/21 compared to three years ago.

Trend 1: The UK is losing ground to Germany and Canada in attracting international doctoral students

Figure 1:

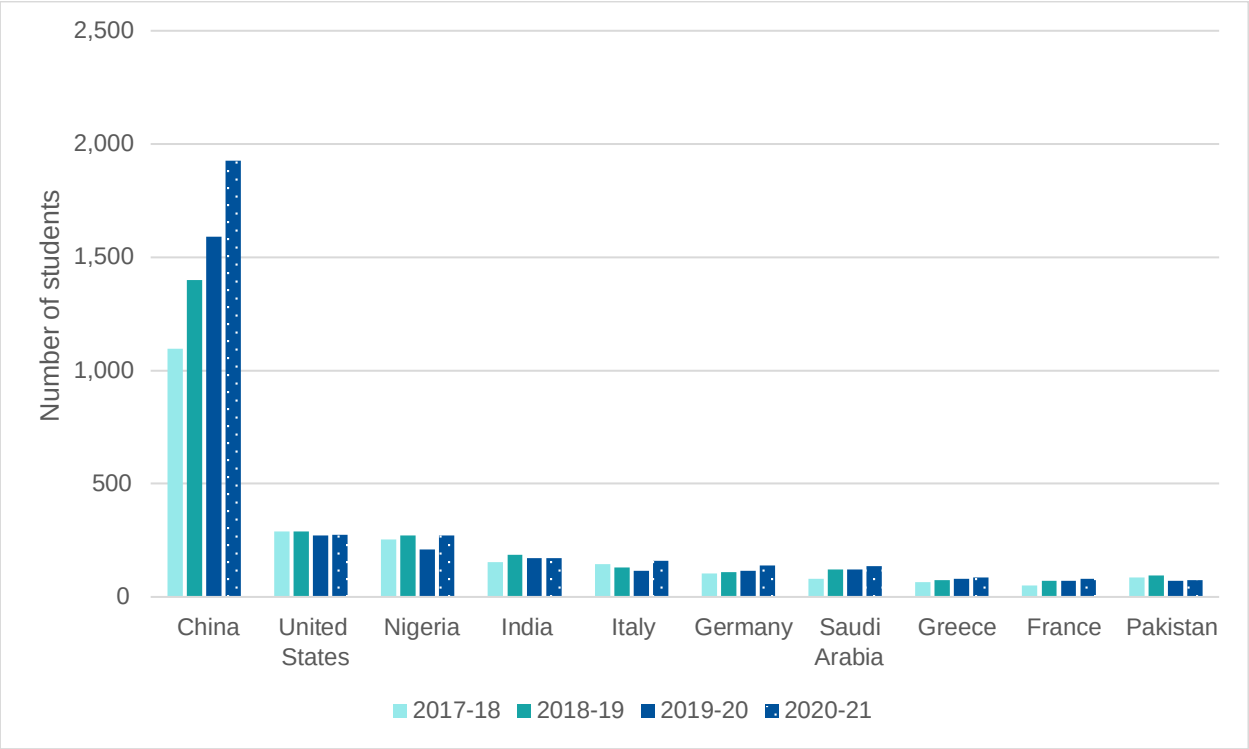

60,000
50,000
40,000
30,000
20,000
10,000
0
Number of students
United Kingdom
France
Germany
Australia
Canada
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019

Trend 4.1: There was a significant increase in the number of self-funded entrants in 2020-21, which is mainly attributed to the growth from China.

International doctoral entrants with no award or financial backing represent 39.3% of the overall doctoral population. There was a significant increase in the number of self-funded entrants in 2020-21, which is mainly attributed to the growth in the number of Chinese students. China accounted for 43% of the overall growth in 2020-21. The } µ v š Œ Ç [• } š } Œ o v š Œ v š • U •] • À] v š (Œ % u Figure 6, accounted for almost 40% of all international PhD entrants in 2020-21. Over the past four years, the growth in self-funded doctorates from China accounted for 68% of the overall UK-bound entrants to doctoral programmes.

The US and Nigeria have a similar number of doctoral entrants. There was a recovery in entrants from Nigeria, which made up for the declines in the previous year.

Figure 6: Top domiciles of self-funded international doctoral entrants, 2017-18 to 2020-21



Source: HESA Student record, multiple years

Trend 42: Providers' own funds are the second most common source of tuition fee funding for non-UK doctoral entrants, with Chinese students making up roughly one quarter.

Providers' own funds are the second most common source of tuition fee funding for non-UK doctoral entrants. Often, provider awards are required by overseas governments as a condition for their funding. This is illustrated by case studies from the University of Liverpool (case study 1) and the University of Sheffield (case study 2).

Figure 7 shows that

Case study 1: University of Liverpool provider awards for doctoral students

dZ D š Œ] o• /vv}À š]}v & š}Œ Ç ~D/&•]• }v }(šZ the research and development of advanced materials. It was founded by the University of Liverpool and Unilever in 2006 as part of the UK Research Partnerships Investment Fund.

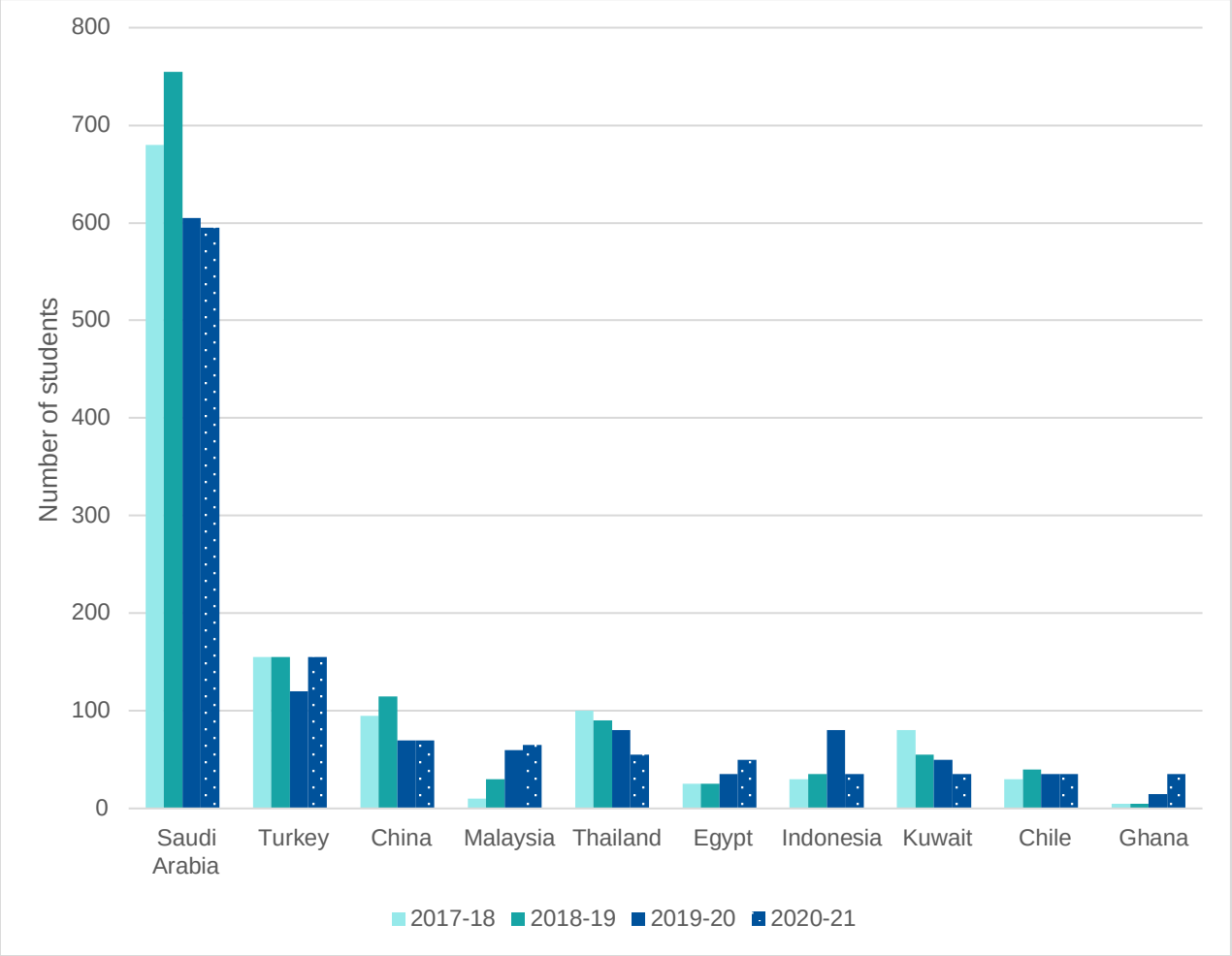
The MIF attracts high-quality applications from PhD students around the world, with funding from a wide range of sources.

In addition, partial-scholarships (university-funded fee bursaries) are utilised as matched funding with overseas scholarship providers. For example, a joint scholarship agreement with China Scholarship Council (CSC) enables a number of students to st at PhD level each year.

Trend 43: Overseas government funding as a major source of tuition fees peaked in 2018-19 and has been declining since across most countries, except for Ghana and Egypt.

Overseas government funding is the third-largest source of tuition fees for international doctoral students in the UK. Figure 8 shows that since 2018-19, government funding has declined across most countries. The declines were most pronounced in in the number of doctoral entrants from Saudi Arabia. Turkey marked some recovery in the number of government-funded students, whereas Egypt and Ghana grew the numbers of funded scholars, though the growth was from very low levels in the previous years.

Figure 8: Overseas government funding for doctoral entrants, 2017-18 to 2020-21



Source: HESA Student record, multiple years

4. There has been strong operational liaison between Sheffield, the sponsor, and specific agents. A recent example is the funding webinar delivered in a market in which the university has previously recruited the highest proportion of sponsored students. The webinar was given in both English and the local language alongsid š Z P v š š } v } (š Z u Œ l š [• o Œ P } Œ P v] • Œ • X Œ µ š o Œ • U Z ‰ Œ } • ‰ š] À W Z mature and well-informed t and this is largely true t but they still need transactional and emotional information from their prospective institution to Z o ‰ š Z u u l v } u u] š š } š Z] •] } v š } • š µ Ç

Acknowledgements

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