





# Foreword by Jamie Arrowsmith, Director, Universities UK International

International students deliver huge cultural, social, and economic benefits to the UK. A single cohort delivers a net economic contribution of over £37 billion to the UK economy, with every 11 non-EU students generating £1 million worth of net economic impact for the UK economy

We should be proud that our universities continue to attract students from all over the world, and that higher education is one of the UK's most important and successful exports.

Recent years have seen a marked increase in the number of international students choosing to study in the UK. This has come off the back of the success of the government's International Education Strategy (IES) and introduction of the Graduate route, which have both been important in helping the UK to regain our position as the second most popular study destination in the world.

Since 2014, the number of international students studying in the UK has increased by approximately 45%. In 2021-22, the UK hosted a record 679,000 international students and, in doing so, has become the most popular study destination in the world.

steps as a sector to manage and mitigate compliance and assurance risks. Doing so is in our individual and collective interest and helps ensure the UK's student immigration system maintains the confidence of the public and politicians.

For their part, the Home Office and UKVI have strongly supported the higher education sector's work to increase and diversify student intake – working with individual institutions on a proactive basis to both identify and address any issues or concerns while also producing regular 'study sector' briefs that highlight recent trends and analysis.

It is incumbent on our sector to demonstrate that we are ready to respond accordingly, ensuring measures are in place to protect and maintain the very high levels of compliance already seen across the student immigration system.

This report offers some suggestions on how this can be done, based on feedback from Universities UK (UUK) members. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, nor should it be seen as a set of generic recommendations. Instead, the report should be read as a guide that can support members when considering how they can manage and mitigate some of the challenges they may face when diversifying recruitment. In doing so, we hope this report helps enable the sector to sustain, grow and enhance its international recruitment.











# International recruitment trends

There has been an increase in the number of international students studying in the UK over the last few years.

In 2021-22, there were 679,970 international students studying in the UK. 120,140 of these were from the EU and 559,825 were from outside the EU

In the year ending September 2022, there were 463,315 sponsored study visas granted. This is the highest annual number of study visas granted on record and represents both a recovery from the lower number of visas granted during the Covid 19 pandemic and an increase on pre-pandemic levels.

Before 2020, a consistent rise in new enrolments from China drove the growth in non-UK student numbers. In 2020, new enrolments from China fell for the first time in data recorded by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA 07-08), but in 2021-22 new enrolment numbers returned to slight growth, up 0.8% from 2020-21.

New enrolments from India totalled 87,045 students in 2021

## FIGURE 1

Source: [Home Office](#)

According to HESA, total enrolment figures for the top 10 sending countries to the UK in 2021/22 were:

1. China (151,690)
2. India (126,535)
3. Nigeria (44,195)
4. Pakistan (23,075)
5. United States (22,990)
6. Hong Kong (17,630)
7. Bangladesh (12,700)
8. Malaysia (12,135)
9. France (11,870)
10. Italy (11,320)

For more information, please see [our publication on international student recruitment data](#) and th



## Key regions

We asked respondents what key regions and markets their diversification strategies were focused on. Respondents listed a very wide range of markets, including 40 different countries. The most commonly mentioned countries by respondents were the US, India a

- setting additional requirements for certain markets

As well as this, half (50%) of respondents to our survey told us that their university had introduced new scholarships to support diversified international recruitment. A further 22% told us that they were considering doing this.

## Examples of emerging practice

### Strengthening application processes

To ensure they maintain their very high levels of compliance with UKVI metrics such as visa refusal, enrolment, and completion rates, a university has strengthened their application process and their credibility and scrutiny protocols, including increased use of pre-CAS interviews.

### Setting up a strategic group

A university has established a strategic group to respond to the challenges of increasing international student numbers and diversification, including subgroups tasked with recommending a range of interventions.

The subgroups include staff working in admissions, agents, portfolio development, scholarships, and the agreed target countries.

### Expanding in-country presence

A university has expanded their in-country presence in India and Southeast Asia and are considering further expansion in Africa, the Middle East, and the US to support diversification.

The university introduced a January intake for Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students in 2019/2020.

The university is a leading provider of international student support services.

# Deposits

Universities may wish to consider reviewing their deposit requirements alongside their diversification plans to help ensure applicants are genuine students and intent on studying

This could include introducing or increasing deposits or introducing earlier deposit deadlines

The diversity of provision in the sector means that universities will take different approaches to requiring deposits, but they can be a helpful way of managing risk – for example, ensuring the seriousness of student intentions to study at the university. Increased or earlier deposits may therefore provide a more realistic enrolment benchmark, allowing university services to better consider how they meet demand.

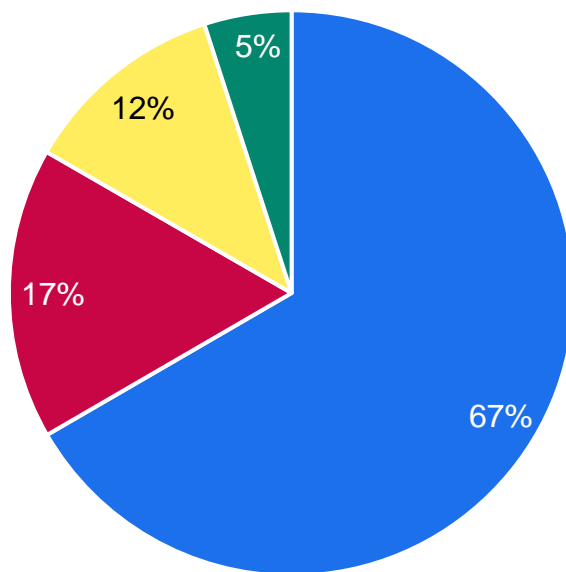
Increased or earlier deposits also reduce the amount of tuition fees still to pay post-arrival, which may ease pressure on funding living costs and ensure that students have access to the funds needed to undertake their studies. This also reduce the likelihood of students transferring out of the degree programme due to the higher upfront cost.

Almost all (96%) of respondents to our survey told us that their university required deposits from at least some international students. The majority

## Deposit amounts

FIGURE 3

If your university does require deposits, are these set at a



Two thirds (67%) of respondents to our survey told us that their university's deposits for international students were set at a specific monetary amount. We asked about what the specific amount was, and answers ranged from £500 to the full first year fee.

17% of respondents told us that their university's deposits for international students were set at a percentage of the tuition fee. We asked about what the percentage charged was, and although answers ranged from 10% to 70% of the tuition fee, the most common answer was 50%, given by almost three quarters of respondents to this question.

We also asked what the approximate amount of this percentage was. Responses varied from £3,500 to £14,000, with most respondents noting that this amount varied depending on programme or level of study.

Of the 12% of respondents who selected 'other', most of these told us that they used both specific amounts and percentages for deposit amounts.





Most respondents (83%) told us that their university did not require variable deposits by level of study, with 13% saying that their university did require this. Of those who reported that their university required variable deposits by level of study, a few respondents told us that their university required higher deposits for postgraduate taught courses.

## Examples of emerging practice

### Managing risk of refusals

To manage the risk of refusals, a university has started asking for proof of meeting the maintenance requirements in addition to increasing deposit amounts.

### Introducing different deadlines

A university has introduced different application and deposit deadlines for high demand postgraduate taught and undergraduate programmes. The university frequently reevaluates application data and adds programmes to the earlier deadlines if demand increases.









## Responding to the rise in dependants

Following this greater than anticipated rise, universities should consider making changes to their processes in response to this rise in number of dependants, including asking students about whether they have dependants that plan to travel to the UK at the point of offer so they can provide appropriate advice and better plan support for them. The importance of informing their university so that they can better support students on arrival should be emphasised in any communications, alongside a realistic assessment of, for example, the availability of suitable family accommodation and schooling for those with younger dependants.

Almost half (45%) of respondents to our survey told us that their university asked postgraduate students about whether any dependants are planning to travel to the UK. A further 17% said their university did not do this currently, but was considering it.

We asked respondents to tell us about any other practices in relation to dependants. Respondents most frequently mentioned surveying students on whether they are planning to bring dependants with them to UK. Several respondents noted that this enabled their university to provide information and advice to students, including on accommodation and university expectations, policies about children on campus th







## FIGURE 8

## Examples of emerging practice

### Working closely with a large group of agents

A university is working with more than 200 agents from 80 different countries and regions. The university provides their agent recruitment partners with resources including:

- a dedicated university agent website
- a portal
- a monthly global agent newsletter
- ad-hoc university updates on key developments
- regional bespoke newsletters

The university regularly meets and trains agents in key recruitment markets from different regions both virtually and in person. The university also hosts annual virtual



## Ways of using the framework

We asked respondents about how their universities use the UK Agent Quality Framework. Respondents most frequently told us that the framework is incorporated into agent agreements and considered in the design of agents' contracts, and that the framework is used in agent training.

As well as this, several respondents told us that their university has used the framework to review their own policies and processes. A handful of respondents also told us that the framework is used to inform performance reviews of current agents.





# Further resources

Universities UK [International student recruitment: geographical diversification of markets](#)

Universities UK [Supporting good practice in student accommodation: considerations for senior university leaders](#)

British Council, [UK Quality Agent Framework](#)

BUILA [Agent Quality Framework](#)

[Immigration Compliance Network \(ICN\)](#)

UKCISA [International student advice and guidance](#)

