

Union Stance on the Immigration Bill

A paper by Marissa Lewis, Deputy President (Welfare)

The Immigration Bill was announced on 10 October 2013 and is likely to become law from Summer 2014. Within it, we have identified two proposals which, in their current format, will affect International Students - these are outlined below.

1. The proposal to introduce an NHS fee for non-European Economic Area (EEA) migrants

Background

One proposal is to introduce a minimum fee of around £200 per year of study for International Students which would be paid up-front before entry into the UK.

Arguments for this charge centre around the fact that International Students do not pay National Insurance contributions unlike many UK nationals. However, they do pay taxes such as VAT which contribute towards the funding of the NHS and they contribute to the economy in other ways. The estimated value of this contribution is in the region of £7.9 billion (1).

There is a significant amount of confusion about how much is spent by the NHS on non-EEA individuals who aren't entitled to free treatment e.g. asylum seekers - estimates range from £3 million to £300 million (2).

From a survey of 78 international students, 92% opposed this proposal, with 51% claiming that paying this levy would be a financial struggle for them. The results of the entire survey are included in Appendix 1.

A government factsheet on this proposal states that they will 'Exempt certain groups from having to make this financial contribution where appropriate' but does not define which groups these are (3).

Beliefs

Imperial College Union should oppose any policy which would adversely affect its students. As tabled, this policy would cost a large percentage of Imperial students a significant amount of money.

International Students contribute to this university as well as the wider national community, we should not be placing barriers to their attendance at Imperial or support proposals which could undermine their well-being.

Discouraging International Students from applying to Imperial would subsequently detract from the diversity and wealth of talent at Imperial College which is an important part of the student experience here for everyone.

Imperial College Union should oppose any policy which discriminates against people without proper justification and creates any kind of unfairness within the student community.

Resolves

1. Imperial College Union should oppose and actively campaign against the Immigration Bill as long as International Students are not exempted from paying for medical treatment.

2. Imperial College Union should join with relevant parties, such as the NUS or other London Unions, to help campaign on this issue.
3. In parallel to direct action against the proposed Bill, the Union should work with College to ensure measures are in place to mitigate the effect of this Bill, such as publicising the Hardship Fund and working in partnership with the International Office, to ensure students struggling to pay these fees can access financial aid.

2. The proposal to require landlords to check the immigration status of their tenants

Background

Under the new proposal, landlords would face a fine of up to £3000 if they did not conduct thorough background checks on their tenants to ensure they have a legal right to live in the UK (2). There are concerns that the threat of financial penalty may lead landlords to be discouraged from renting to International Students. This is because proving British nationality can be achieved by presenting a British passport but, for International Students, these checks are likely to be more complicated. Concerns have also been raised that the proposed change could lead to racial profiling.

In the survey of International Students, 29% stated they already had problems renting privately, giving examples such as:

“Having to pay 6 months rent upfront is very expensive. We have already provided evidence that we have the money to sustain ourselves so I don't understand why do we still face such discrimination. And many landlords actually specify that they don't prefer to rent to international students because of fear or legal repercussions, so imposing this new policy will make it even harder for international students to find housing.”

“It's hard enough to find private accommodation from a different country, without being able to see the flat, meet the landlord, or provide an accurate credit check. Landlords would obviously rather rent to Home/EU students.”

“Many landlords we approached requested 6-months prepaid deposit, making it difficult 1) to rent the place in the first place due to the financial commitment, and 2) pretty much forces us to congregate with other internationals instead of mingle with home/EU students because the latter don't want to pay 6-months deposit alongside us.”

“We have to pay at least 6-12 months upfront and some landlords would refuse to rent out to us full stop. Not all of us are minted, for the love of Mike.”

76% stated they were opposed to this proposal.

Beliefs

The housing market in London is already extremely competitive. It can be very problematic for any student to get affordable accommodation. This problem is exacerbated for International Students who often have less access to London during the holidays and less experience with London itself than other students.

In addition, the lack of UK-based guarantors regularly means that international students are required to pay large portions of their rent in advance; routinely 6 months or a year. Not only can this make the process difficult and stressful but in some cases can mean that International Students are not treated equally to UK nationals.

It is our belief that this policy would amplify a problem that already exists and put additional stress on the already flawed system.

Resolves

1. Imperial College Union resolves to oppose and actively campaign against the Immigration Bill as long as landlords will be obliged to check the immigration status of International Students.
2. Imperial College Union should investigate ways that the College could support International Students facing these checks.

3. Conclusion

The supposed purpose of this levy is to reduce net immigration and illegal immigration whilst still welcoming 'the brightest and best migrants who want to contribute to our economy and society'. We believe that International Students clearly fall into this category.

60% of International Students surveyed said that these proposals would discourage them from applying to Imperial. As an institution which welcomes thousands of International Students every year and relies on International Students and staff members to maintain its status as one of the top universities in the world, we believe it is our duty to take a clear stance against proposals which could potentially deter such people from applying to Imperial.

72% of International Students surveyed believed we should take a stance against both proposals, with only one International Student saying we should take no stance at all. As the voice of all students at Imperial, this is something we should take into serious consideration given we were elected to represent every student, regardless of their fee status.

References

1. Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011 - 'Estimating the Value to the UK of Education Exports'. Accessed online [9/10/13] www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/e/11-980-estimating-value-of-education-exports.pdf+education+and+trainign+exports
2. Barrett, D. and Ross, T., 2013 - End of free NHS care for migrants under new bill. Accessed online [9/10/13] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/10358569/End-of-free-NHS-care-for-migrants-under-new-bill.html>
3. Home Office, 2013 - Immigration Bill Factsheet: National Health Service (clauses 33-34). Accessed online [9/10/13] [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/249315/Factsheet_08 - Health.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/249315/Factsheet_08_-_Health.pdf)

Appendix - Results of the International Student Survey.

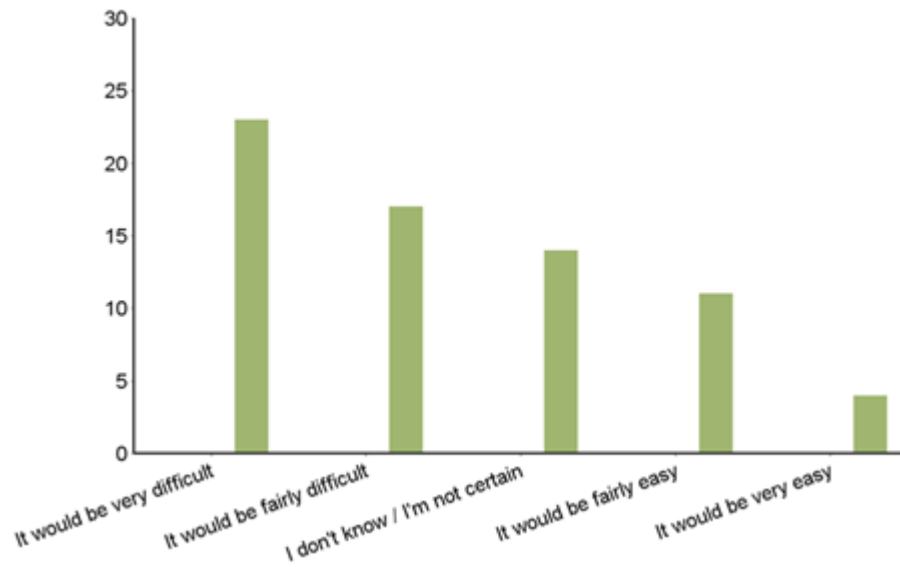
120 students filled out this survey, here is the breakdown:

Choice	What is your fee status?-Home	What is your fee status?-EU	What is your fee status?-International	Total
Undergraduate	14	16	58	88
Postgraduate (Taught)	1	2	10	13
Postgraduate (Research)	2	7	10	19

How International Students felt about the proposed NHS charge:

Choice	What is your fee status?-International
Very Dissatisfied	63
Dissatisfied	8
Somewhat Dissatisfied	1
Neutral	5
Somewhat Satisfied	-
Satisfied	1
Very Satisfied	-

How financially easy International Students would find paying the NHS fee :



Free text comments on the NHS fee:

"It already costs so much to study in the UK, this would be an extra burden to my parents"

"Stop treating us as money machines!"

"One of the reasons that makes international students more comfortable with studying in UK is good welfare, ease of access to information about the application/visa procedure etc. Nowadays, US has become a great competitor in terms of attracting international students (at least for us Asians. possibly more Europeans eventually) because of the academic reputation of the institutions, opportunities, and many other factors. The proposal of the new NHS policy will definitely make UK less attractive to international students."

"The change seems to be based on the assumption that international students = cash cows, which is not true. It's absurd that we have to pay an extra 200 quid (equivalent to \$2,500 in home currency) just to get healthcare - we already have pressure to stop ourselves from getting ill so far away from home, why make the experience even more stressful?"

"Already we pay triple the fee home students pay, is it really necessary to pile on an extra 200 pounds?"

"We shouldn't pay 200pounds upfront. Instead, we should pay everytime when we use the services provided by NHS since I believe most of us barely use the services."

"I have lived in the UK for 3 years already, and have not had to use the NHS once. To me, that would've been 600 pounds wasted. I would much rather spending those 600 pounds on private healthcare."

"If any country wants to develop its economy and pursue growth of social wealth, it perhaps should open up its mind to the world, be welcoming to the talented citizens of other countries rather than pushing them away with selfish policies. As international students, we pay 3 times of home tuition fees and provide a huge amount of money to help to sustain the British universities. Besides, we also pay taxes when we shopping, traveling...We are making contributions to the British society in form of taxes, even bigger contribution than some British citizens made for this country. Our money helps sustaining the social services including NHS here. It's not fair, nor wise, to charge international students for this reasons."

"I might not be paying any income tax, but I'm still paying VAT and boosting London's economy. Why should I have to pay extra? If I had chosen to live in my home country, I'd still be covered under my parents' health insurance (which is better than NHS!), so it's ridiculous to say that I'm taking advantage of the system."

"It isn't really fair and just seems like a way to try to get as much money out of international students as possible. Its not so much about how much money we have. Its just going to discourage good students. It is steps like this that make one feel very unwelcome in this country and thats a pity when one considers giving up the opportunity to get great education because of government policies"

If International Students felt their fee status had affected their search for private accommodation:

Choice	What is your fee status?-International
Yes - it has affected me positively	2
Yes - it has affected me negatively	19
No	45

Free text comments:

"Im in my first year and I live in halls, so I have not yet had to search for accommodation."

"Not yet. Because I am still living in university halls. But I have heard stories of how international students were affected negatively."

"I never disclosed my status as an overseas student until the last moment before signing the contract, so as to let the landlord(s) judge me as a person and not as an international student."

"Mostly attitude."

“Yes, they discriminate.”

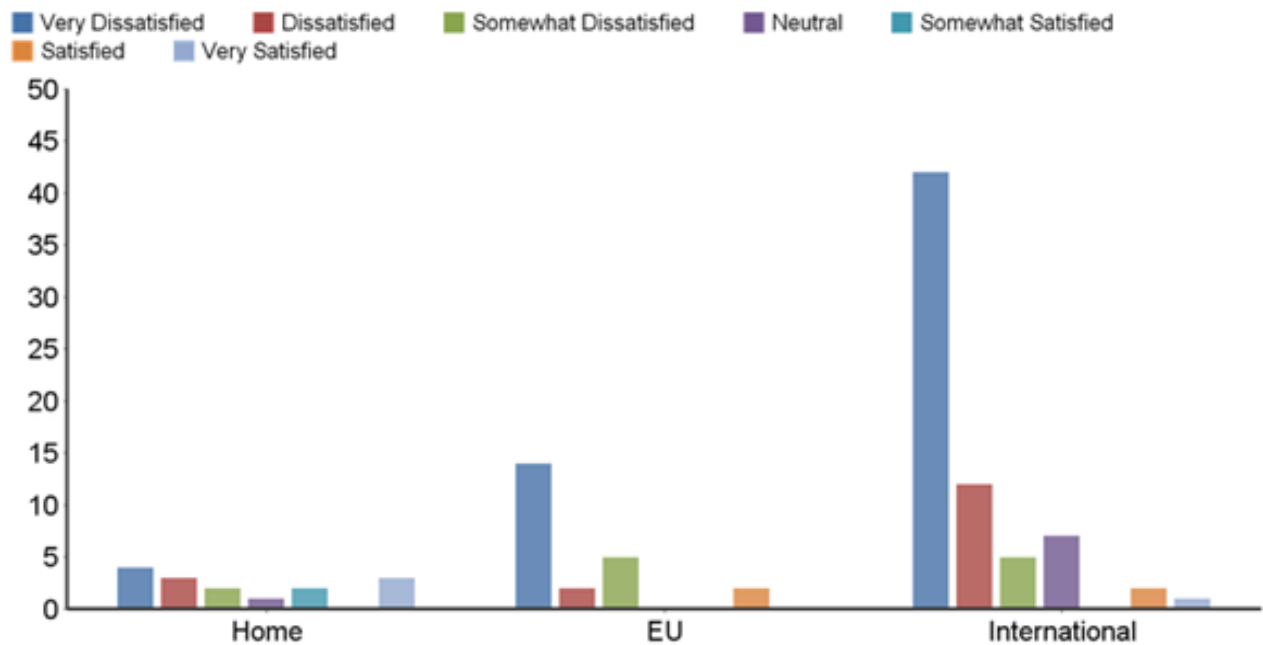
“We have to pay at least 6-12 months upfront and some landlords would refuse to rent out to us full stop. Not all of us are minted, for the love of Mike.”

“Many landlords we approached requested 6-months prepaid deposit, making it difficult 1) to rent the place in the first place due to the financial commitment, and 2) pretty much forces us to congregate with other internationals instead of mingle with home/EU students because the latter don't want to pay 6-months deposit alongside us”

“It's hard enough to find private accommodation from a different country, without being able to see the flat, meet the landlord, or provide an accurate credit check. Landlords would obviously rather rent to Home/EU students”

“Having to pay 6 months rent upfront is very expensive. We have already provided evidence that we have the money to sustain ourselves so I don't understand why do we still face such discrimination. And many landlords actually specify that they don't prefer to rent to international students because of fear or legal repercussions, so imposing this new policy will make it even harder for international students to find housing.”

How do students feel about the proposed landlord checks:



Free text comments:

"It's hard enough finding rent in London, as student. Many landlords don't accept students from the start. Other want you to pay the whole rent in advance, which is a huge amount of money. It's pretty hard to find one who doesn't want such an arrangement. If the bill passes, non-UK students will have an even lower chance to get a roof over their heads."

"This is unfair and simply the government unloading their own responsibilities onto landlords who aren't qualified to deal with these situations."

"I believe that not just international students should have to undergo checks that they really are who they claim to be. I could very well be a British-born Asian and therefore look international but have British papers. As a British landlord, would you refuse your fellow countryman board because they looked international? Racist much. On a less rant-like note - I do believe that landlords should not be lazy about checks like this. As I said, everyone (regardless of whether local or international) should be required to undergo some sort of check. Guarantors already have to, and they're the people paying the money!"

"As already mentioned, international students have already undergone stringent checks by UKBA, so I don't understand why are we still facing discrimination."

"It's already hard enough to find accommodation if you are EU or international.. why make it harder?"

"I would agree with this if there would be a way for the student to easily and efficiently get this check for free and provide the confirmation to the landlord, in such a way that the landlord will not have any reason to turn away the students. We are already facing supplementary requirements and restrictions, like having to pay 6 months in advance upfront. Most international students make an effort to study at the world class universities in the UK and these measures seem to limit the chances of brilliant people applying here, which will therefore limit the achievements of these universities hence lower ratings in league tables. In my case particularly it was just luck that I was working the summer before, otherwise I wouldn't have been able to pay 6 months of rent at once."

Would the proposed changes affect International Students applying to Imperial:

Choice	What is your fee status?-International
Yes - it would have encouraged me	-
Yes - it would have discouraged me	41
No - it would have had no effect on my applications	27

What students think our stance should be:

Choice	What is your fee status? - International
We should only oppose the NHS fee for International Students	15
We should only oppose the landlord checks for International Students	3
We should oppose both the NHS fee and landlord checks for International Students	50
We should not take a stance on either of these issues	1

General free text comments:

"The only reason why it would have not affected my decision is because I'm lucky enough to have parents who value my education and are willing to spend the money for it. I know a lot more cases where this extra hassle would just be too much."

"May I remind imperial that almost 50% of your undergraduate student population are international students, so we are effectively your cash cow, funding many research/ projects. This new policies will definitely discourage international students from applying to study in the UK, and could potentially affect your source of income adversely. So I earnestly hope that you would consider your stance carefully on this issue. I look forward to hearing your wise decision."

"They stress should be given to the NHS fee as its consequences are more direct (students will have to pay). 'Landlord checks' is a more complex subject. We should oppose to both aspects of the bill but stress should be given to the former."

"I disagree strongly with these changes in general for what they mean to international students. And, as a Commonwealth citizen and student, these changes are actually insulting in the government's blatant disregard for anyone outside of the UK/EU."

"As it is Imperial charges way too much - are we trying to price people out, international or otherwise (instead of trying to attract the brightest and the best as we claim that we are/should be aiming for?) There's hardly any support financial-wise for internationals as it is, and the majority of us who study here have to be minted to a certain extent."

"With ICL having a 40% international student population, I sincerely hope that the university will do something about this to protect us. It is the best time for the school administration and the union to show that they care for our welfare. Thank you."