Office for National Statistics

Article

Reason for international migration, international students update: February 2026

International student migration to the UK, 2019 to 2025. These are official statistics in development.

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1 . Overview of latest international student migration

This article focuses on international students, building on the estimates provided in our [Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending June 2025 bulletin](#), by looking at their immigration status in the UK over time. It also explores further insights on student characteristics and the type and subject of study they come to the UK to undertake. It provides an update on the analysis presented in our previous article [Reason for international migration, international students update: May 2025](#).

The number of people arriving on study-related visas has steadily declined since the peak of 484,000 in year ending (YE) June 2023, falling to 301,000 in YE June 2025. This is largely because of the decrease in study-dependants arriving following government policy changes in January 2024. Looking at the latest available 12-month period of study immigration, in YE June 2024, there were 310,000 students who arrived and 88,000 dependants. A year later, while study levels remained broadly similar at 288,000, the number of dependants had dropped to 13,000.

Those on a study-related visa (study visas and study-dependant visas) made up 43% of total non-EU+ and 40% of total EU+ visa holders who immigrated in YE June 2025. Study-related was the most common reason for immigration for non-EU+ visa holders and the second-most common for EU+ (49% of whom arrived on work-related visas).

Non-EU+ visa holders make up the majority of international students; in YE June 2025 288,000 non-EU+ visa holders arrived on a study-related visa compared with 13,000 EU+ visa holders.

We also know student behaviours have changed in recent years, with students staying for longer and many transitioning onto different visas.

- Of those who arrived in YE June 2023, 61% (294,000) of students and their dependants transitioned to a different visa type after two years; a higher number and proportion than the 44% (59,000) of those who arrived in YE June 2021.

- Non-EU+ students and their dependants who arrived in YE June 2023 were over four times more likely than EU+ students and dependants to transition to another visa type after two years (62% and 14%, respectively), for example moving from a study visa to a work or family visa.

- EU+ visa holders who arrived in YE June 2023 on a study-related visa were slightly more likely to have emigrated after two years, 4,000 (32%) compared with non-EU+ visa holders, 100,000 (21%).

The characteristics of newly migrated higher education students are set out in [Section 5: Characteristics of international higher education students studying in the UK](#) and in our new [Characteristics of international higher education students studying in the UK dataset](#). These are based on Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for the 2023 to 2024 academic year; they provide insights not available from the Home Office Borders and Immigration (HOBI) data.

These are [official statistics in development](#), which means estimates may be revised and updated as improvements are introduced and as further and more recent data become available. We therefore advise caution when using the data. Read more in [Section 8: Data sources and quality](#).

2 . Important informationabout student migration data

Home Office Borders and Immigration (HOBI) data provide migration patterns of long-term international migrants who come to the UK on a study-related visa (a study visa or a study-dependant visa). As the HOBI data only include those who require a visa, we are not able to include those who are able to study in the UK but do not require a visa, for example those on the EU settlement scheme see Section 8: Data sources and quality.

Data for EU+ visa holders are only available from 2021 onwards following the introduction of visa requirements after the end of freedom of movement between the EU and the UK. Estimates for this group have been included in this analysis for the first time following the development of new methods for long-term international migration (LTIM), described in our provisional long-term international migration estimates methodology.

Of the 85,000 EU+ nationals immigrating for all reasons in YE June 2025, EU+ visa holders made up 38%.

Migration behaviours are affected by visa duration, which is closely related to course length for study-related visas. Most courses are either undergraduate (three years) or master's level (one year), with a small proportion studying for a doctorate. Our analysis shows that, for the academic year 2023 to 2024, non-EU+ nationals were more likely to choose a master's level course (73%), than an undergraduate course (23%), whereas EU+ nationals had a more even split between undergraduate (49%) and master's level (43%) courses.

3 . Overall long-term migration for those on a study-related visa

Figure 1: Net migration for those arriving on study-related visas has continued to fall because of lower immigration

Total number of all, non-EU+ and EU+ visa holders who initially immigrated long-term into the UK on a study-related visa, by flow type, for year ending (YE) June 2020 to YE June 2025

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest hundred. The sum of individual numbers may not equal totals seen elsewhere.

2. Emigration includes those who initially immigrated on a study-related visa but may have subsequently transitioned to a different visa type before they emigrated.

3. These estimates are for long-term international migrants only.

4. Includes study-dependant visas.

5. EU+ visa holder estimates only available from YE June 2021.

6. The EU+ chart has been presented on a different scale to the non-EU+ and combined charts to enable clear visibility of the patterns in the data.

Figure 1 shows that total net migration for those initially arriving on a study-related visa continued to decrease to 152,000 in year ending (YE) June 2025. This is the primarily the result of reduced immigration for non-EU+ visa holders for the second year running. Emigration for non-EU+ visa-holders who initially arrived on a study-related visa has stabilised in the YE June 2025 (144,000), having increased between YE June 2022 (50,000) to YE June 2024 (142,000).

Net migration for EU+ nationals who initially arrived on study-related visas in YE June 2025 was at 8,000. Net migration for EU+ visa holders has remained broadly stable over the last two years but shows a decrease of 3,000 (27%) compared with YE June 2022 arrivals.

Home Office quarterly immigration system statistics (published 21 August 2025) show that in YE June 2025, 4% fewer study visas were granted than in the YE June 2024 and there was an 81% reduction in study-dependant visas compared with the previous year. Home Office data also showed that a similar number of study visas were granted in YE September 2025 and there was a continued decline in study-dependant visas granted.

4 . Study-related visas and length of stay in the UK

Home Office Borders and Immigration (HOBI) data allow analysis that follows the migration patterns over time of long-term international migrants who arrived on a study-related visa in the years ending (YE) June 2020 to June 2025. The methodology for this work is described in more detail in our Reason for international migration, international students update: November 2023 article.

Figure 2: A greater proportion of more recent non-EU+ study-related visa arrivals are transitioning to a different visa type compared with those who arrived in YE June 2020

The migration status to the UK for the years ending (YE) June 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 cohorts, between YE June 2021 and YE June 2025 for non-EU+ visa holders

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole percentage. The sum of individual numbers may not equal totals seen elsewhere.

2. Study-related visa arrivals include those who arrive on study and study-dependant visas.

3. Non-EU+ visa holders only.

4. These estimates are for long-term international migrants only.

5. "Emigrated in previous years" refers to those who have emigrated in a different year.

6. A small number of records for YE June 2020 arrivals could not be categorised because of the use of updated Home Office Borders and Immigration data to maintain consistency with published long-term international migration estimates.

7. We advise caution when comparing data on visa transitions after one year. Migration behaviours are affected by visa duration, which is linked to course length for study-related visas and is not visible in these data.

8. It is likely that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic influenced international student immigration in earlier years, as well as the post-study behaviours of students and their dependants.

Figure 2 shows that the percentage of non-EU+ visa holders on a study-related visa transitioning to a different visa type after two years has steadily increased from 17% (22,000) for YE June 2020 arrivals to 62% (292,000) of YE June 2023 arrivals. A similar increase is also seen for those on a study-related visa transitioning to a different visa type after three and four years, with 26% (32,000) of YE June 2020 arrivals transitioning after three years compared with 48% (151,000) of YE June 2022 arrivals transitioning after three years.

At the same time, a smaller proportion of students and dependants are emigrating after two years with 36% (44,000) of YE June 2020 arrivals emigrating after two years compared with 21% (100,000) of YE June 2023 arrivals. For the 2020 cohort, 31% (39,000) are remaining in the UK after five years either on a study-related visa or another visa type.

Migration estimates of EU+ nationals who initially arrived on study-related visas are only available for the period year ending (YE) June 2021 onwards, following the introduction of new visa requirements and the development of new methods, described in our [provisional long-term international migration estimates methodology](#).

Figure 3: The migration statuses for EU+ nationals who arrived on study-related visas have stayed broadly consistent over the past four years.

The migration status to the UK of the years ending (YE) June 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 cohorts, between YE June 2022 and YE June 2025 for EU+ visa holders

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole percentage. The sum of individual numbers may not equal totals seen elsewhere.

2. Study-related visa arrivals include those who arrive on study and study-dependant visas.

3. EU+ visa holders only. These estimates are based on small numbers for the earlier years.

4. These estimates are for long-term international migrants only.

5. "Emigrated in previous years" refers to those who have emigrated in a different year.

6. We advise caution when comparing data on visa transitions after one year. Migration behaviours are affected by visa duration, which is linked to course length for study-related visas and is not visible in these data.

7. EU+ visa holder estimates only available from YE June 2021.

Figure 3 shows that the proportion of EU+ study-related visa holders for each migration status has remained relatively consistent over the last few years.

For EU+ visa holders arriving YE June 2023, 68% (8,000) remained in the UK after two years, which is a slightly smaller proportion than seen for non-EU+ (79%, 371,000).

EU+ visa holders who arrived in YE June 2023 were over three times more likely to remain on a study-related visa after two years (54%, 6,000) compared with transitioning to a different visa type (14%, 2,000). This is a different pattern to non-EU+ visa holders, who were more likely to transition to a different visa type than remain on a student visa.

Study-related visas and transitions to other types of visas

The visa type most commonly transitioned to, for both EU+ and non-EU+ nationals who initially arrived on a study-related visa, was work-related visas (including the Graduate visa). For non-EU+ visa holders who arrived in YE June 2023, 42% (197,000) had transitioned to a work-related visa after two years compared with only 14% (2,000) of EU+ visa holders.

Nationalities of those arriving in the UK on a study-related visa

Most non-EU+ students and their dependants arriving in YE June 2024 were Indian with 32% (125,000), Nigerian, 17% (64,000) and Chinese, 14% (54,000). These continue to be the most common nationalities for students and their dependants.

Further information on types of visas transitioned to, and migration patterns by nationality, plus more detailed nationality and characteristics information for non-EU+ visa holders, can be found in our Long-term international student migration, provisional estimates dataset.

5 . Characteristics of international higher education students studying in the UK

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data provide information on the characteristics of international students who started their course in the 2023 to 2024 academic year. We have expanded on our previous analysis and explored subjects related to health.

Our international higher education (HE) student population is designed to be similar to the definition of a long-term international migrant (LTIM) on a study visa. However, these data are not directly comparable with LTIM estimates. They relate to different time periods and do not include student dependants. Further details of our method are given in Section 8 Data sources and quality.

Our international HE student population who were entrants in 2023 to 2024 decreased by 2% compared with the previous academic year. The split between non-EU+ nationals (93%) and EU+ nationals (7%) remained the same and the majority of students continued to be studying for a master's degree (71%). Further comparisons can be found in Series 1 of our Characteristics of international higher education students studying in the UK dataset.

Figure 4 highlights the disparity in the sizes of the main nationalities making up the international HE student population, which is important to be aware of when comparing characteristics of different nationalities in the subsequent analysis. Further data on characteristics by nationality and other details can be found in Series 2 of our Characteristics of international higher education students studying in the UK dataset.

Figure 4: Indian, Chinese, or Nigerian nationals accounted for 60% of international higher education students

International higher education student population, most common nationalities, UK, academic year 2023 to 2024

Notes:

1. This population of international higher education (HE) students was designed to closely match our definition of a long-term international migrant (LTIM) on a study visa.

2. Percentages are proportions of this population and have been rounded to the nearest percentage. The 10 most common nationalities are shown as well as the percentage for the EU+ group of nationalities.

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Subjects and level of study

In the 2023 to 2024 academic year, 71% of our international HE student population studied one of five groups of subjects, with almost half studying business and management or computing (Table 1). A more diverse range of subjects was studied at a doctorate level, with engineering and technology being the most popular. The interactive chart (Figure 5) illustrates which subjects were more or less popular for our most common nationalities.

Table 1: Business and management and computing were the most common subjects taken at undergraduate and master's levels of study

International higher education student population, percentage studying each subject group by level of study, UK, academic year 2023 to 2024

Subject groups	All levels of study	Undergraduate	Master's	Doctorate
All subject groups	100%	100%	100%	100%
Business and management	38%	33%	41%	8%
Computing	11%	10%	11%	8%
Engineering and technology	8%	7%	8%	18%
Social sciences	7%	8%	7%	8%
Health-related subjects (medicine, dentistry and subjects allied to medicine)	7%	7%	6%	12%
Other subjects	29%	35%	26%	47%

Source: HESA Student data, academic year 2023 to 2024, supplied by Jisc

Notes

1. This population of international higher education (HE) students was designed to closely match our definition of a long-term international migrant (LTIM) on a study visa.

2. Percentages are proportions of each level of study within this population and sum down the columns. Percentages are rounded to the nearest percentage and therefore may not sum exactly to 100%.

3. Where students are studying more than one subject, they are assigned to the first subject given.

4. "Health-related subjects" combines two of the Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA) subject groups: medicine and dentistry, and subjects allied to medicine.

5. Individual subjects by subject group can be found as a download from the Common Aggregation Hierarchy page on the HESA website.

6. Copyright Jisc 2025. Jisc cannot accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived by third parties from its data.

Figure 5: The majority of international students studying business and management subjects were Indian, Nepalese, and Bangladeshi nationals

International higher education student population, percentage of each nationality studying the most common subject groups, UK, academic year 2023 to 2024

Notes:

1. This population of international higher education (HE) students was designed to closely match our definition of a long-term international migrant (LTIM) on a study visa.

2. Percentages are proportions of each nationality within this population and have been rounded to the nearest percentage. The 10 most common nationalities are shown, as well as the percentages for the EU+ group of nationalities.

3. Where students are studying more than one subject, they are assigned to the first subject given.

4. "Health-related subjects" combines two of the Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA) subject groups; medicine and dentistry, and subjects allied to medicine.

5. Individual subjects by subject group can be found as a download from the [Common Aggregation Hierarchy page on the HESA website](#).

6. Copyright Jisc 2025. Jisc cannot accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived by third parties from its data.

In our international HE student population 7% of students studied a health-related subject (Table 1). Within this sub-group, environmental and public health was the most popular subject for Nigerian (42%) and Indian (17%) students with Chinese students favouring medicine and dentistry (33%). Of all students studying health-related subjects, around a quarter of Nigerian students (26%) and one fifth of Indian students (19%) studied nursing and midwifery compared with 3% of Chinese students. Further data can be found in Series 3 of our [Characteristics of international higher education students studying in the UK dataset](#).

6 . UK international students' data

[Long-term international student migration, provisional estimates](#)
Dataset | Released 27 February 2026
Long-term international student migration to the UK, including status of migration and visa, age, sex and nationality. These are official statistics in development.

[Characteristics of international higher education students in the UK](#)
Dataset | Released 27 February 2026
Additional insights on international higher education students in the academic year 2023 to 2024. Based on analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data, supplied by Jisc.

7 . Glossary

Cohort

A group of student and study-dependant long-term migrants who arrived in the UK in the same year ending (YE) period.

Dependant visas

International migrants who have entered the UK on a visa may be eligible to bring their dependant partner or child with them through a dependant visa, depending on the type of visa the main applicant holds. A dependant partner or child is any of the following of an international migrant:

- a husband, wife, civil partner or unmarried partner

- a child under 18 years, including if they were born in the UK during the international migrant's stay

- a child over 18 years if they are currently in the UK as the international migrant's dependant

EU, EU+ and non-EU+

EU is the European Union. It is the sum of EU14, EU8, and EU2, plus Malta, Cyprus and Croatia (from 1 July 2013). British nationals are not included in these numbers at any time point. The European Union groups are:

- Romania and Bulgaria (EU2)

- Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (EU8)

- Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden (EU14)

- "Other EU" is Malta, Cyprus and Croatia (joined from 2013)

"EU+" is all current EU countries plus Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

"Non-EU+" is the sum of the rest of the world, including the rest of Europe, not included in the EU+ category. British nationals are excluded from these numbers.

Humanitarian reason for migration

For EU+ and non-EU+ nationals who travel on a visa, the reason for migration is based on their visa type. The "humanitarian" category includes people who immigrated into the UK and were classified under of the categories:

- protection

- British national (overseas) (BN(O))

- Ukrainian support schemes

- asylum applicants

International student

An international student is currently defined as someone who arrives in the UK to study and remains for a period of 12 months or more. In line with the current UN definition of a long-term migrant, international students are included in our estimates of long-term immigration.

Level of study

Level of study indicates the level of the higher education course on which a student is engaged.

Undergraduate level of study includes honours degrees, ordinary degrees and higher diplomas, as well as those studying for a foundation degree.

Postgraduate courses include doctoral and master's degrees and postgraduate certificates.

More information on determining level of study is available in HESA's student definitions.

In our previous article in this series, we defined the other terms we have used in this article.

8 . Data sources and quality

Official statistics in development

These statistics are labelled as "official statistics in development". Until September 2023, these were called "experimental statistics". Read more about the change in the Office for Statistics Regulation's Guide to official statistics in development.

Estimates for the most recent time period in our data series (year ending (YE) June 2025) are provisional and provide users with an early indication of migration during this period. Our Population and International Migration Statistics Revisions Policy methodology shows they are released with the expectation that they may be revised and updated as further, and more recent, data become available. We are also continuing to develop and refine our methods for measuring long-term international migration, including international students.

More information on revisions is available in our Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending June 2025 bulletin.

Home Office Borders and Immigration data

We use Home Office Borders and Immigration (HOBI) data that combine visa and travel information to link an individual's travel movements into and out of the country. More information is provided within the User Guide to: Immigration system statistics on GOV.UK.

Our method uses an individual's first arrival and last departure dates to approximate their length of stay in the UK within the period for which they have a valid visa. Individuals whose stays last 12 months or more are classified as long-term immigrants.

For emigration, we identify previous long-term immigrants with a last departure from the UK during the reference period and record them as long-term emigrants if they do not return to the UK within 12 months, or if they only return for a short-term stay.

Information on the type of visa held in HOBI data is used to identify those people who initially arrived on a study-related visa. More detailed information can be found in our provisional long-term international migration estimates methodology.

EU+ visa holders

Since January 2021, following the end of freedom of movement between the EU+ and UK, EU+ nationals moving to the UK have either needed a visa, status on the EU Settlement Scheme, or indefinite leave to remain.

The development of our new methods, using Home Office Borders and Immigration (HOBI) data, explained in our provisional long-term international migration estimates methodology, has allowed us to now include EU+ visa holders as well as non-EU+ visa holders. As the method combines visa and travel information, we are not able to include those who do not require a visa, for example those on the EU settlement scheme.

Of the 85,000 EU+ nationals immigrating in YE June 2025, EU+ visa holders made up 38% (32,000), those with status on the EU settlement scheme (EUSS) accounted for 53% (45,000), and Irish nationals made up the final 9% (8,000). More information is available in our Long-term international migration bulletin.

Higher Education Statistics Agency data

The analysis in Section 5: Characteristics of international higher education students studying in the UK uses Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record data supplied by Jisc. We filtered the data to match, as closely as possible, our definition of a long-term international migrant (LTIM) (someone who has recently migrated into the UK on a study-related visa and started a new higher education course that they expect to last for 12 months or more). We filtered out records where the student:

- had any form of British nationality

- previously studied at another institution within the UK or were permanently living in the UK prior to starting their current course

- expected their course to last for less than 12 months

- did not require a study visa for the course (applying eligibility rules for study visas from the GOV.UK Student visa web page)

- was not in the first year of their course

- was recorded as not actively engaged in the course

- was engaging in the course as a distance learner outside the UK

- was missing information on their nationality

We allocated students to countries of the UK and regions in England by the postcode and/or the local authority district of their term-time address or, if this was unavailable, by their higher education provider.

Each record is an instance of a student engaging on a course. The proportion of students in our filtered population with more than one engagement is less than 0.01%. The number of records is therefore considered to be an excellent proxy for the number of students in our population.

The bespoke definition of our international student population prevents direct coherence between our findings and those statistics on the HESA website.

9 . Future developments

We will continue to update estimates of international student migration as we receive more data, improve methods, and provide more insights.

In this release, we have introduced EU+ visa holder data following the development of new methods using Home Office Borders and Immigration (HOBI) data, shown in our provisional long-term international migration estimates methodology. This is in line with the updates in our Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending June 2025 bulletin.

We will continue to analyse Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data to provide further insights in future releases, including analysis of data for the 2024 to 2025 academic year.

We want your feedback

We are currently considering the priorities and plans for future migration analysis and development work. This work includes the frequency and timing of our articles on international student migration, as well as requirements for similar analysis on migrant workers.

Your feedback is important. We are seeking feedback to help us understand your needs and inform future releases. We would be grateful if you would complete our Reason for migration: student and work visa analysis survey.

The form will be available until 31 March 2025. However, we welcome general feedback at any time by email to pop.info@ons.gov.uk.

10 . Related links

[Long-term international migration, provisional: year-ending June 2025](#)
Bulletin | Released 27 November 2025
UK international migration for the year ending (YE) June 2012 to YE June 2025. These are official statistics in development.

[Reason for international migration, international students update: May 2025](#)
Article | Released 22 May 2025
International student migration to the UK, 2019 to 2024. Analysis relates to non-EU+ nationals. These are official statistics in development.

[Quality report for the Student Record (23056)](#)
Quality Report
An overview of the data quality and methodology for the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) 2023 /24 student record data collection.

[International migration research, progress update: February 2025](#)
Article | Released 26 February 2025
An update on international migration methods and research.

[Migrant journey](#)
Article | Released 22 May 2025
A series of publications that explore migrants' journeys through the UK's immigration system.

[Immigration system statistics quarterly release](#)
Article | Released 27 November 2025
Home Office statistics, including information on individuals coming to the UK for study reasons.

11 . Cite this article

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