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Encouraging the movement of international students across Europe

Addendum to the report¹

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

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1. Introduction

1. The report on movement of international students across Europe was adopted by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons in January 2018. As rapporteur for this report and Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee on Refugee and Migrant Children and Young People, I organised a hearing on the subject in the framework of a sub-committee meeting held in London on 26 March 2018. The hearing brought together prominent academics and practitioners involved in international student mobility, particularly in the United Kingdom, as well as government and parliament representatives.

2. The meeting was held jointly with the Sub-Committee on Culture, Diversity and Heritage of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media. The outcome of this part of the proceedings will be included in my ongoing report on the value of cultural heritage in a democratic society.²

3. The relevance of the hearing for my report on student movement prompted the submission of the present addendum to the report. It reflects the presentations and exchanges and proposes two amendments to the draft resolution to be debated and adopted by the Assembly.

2. Participation in the hearing

4. The hearing began with a presentation of the report and an exchange of views with Ms Lucie Cerna, who was an expert consultant during its drafting. Research Associate at the Oxford Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), she highlighted main issues, among them the adverse effect of the failure to distinguish between student “movement or migration” and all other types of migration (economic, political or otherwise) on both the status of student movement and European countries’ attitude towards it.

5. Other speakers at the hearing were Ms Nicky Rogers, Head of Migration Analysis and Development of Sources, and Ms Amelia Ash, Senior Research Officer from the Migration Statistics Division of the United Kingdom’s Office for National Statistics, and Ms Julie Allen, Director of Policy and Services with the UK Council for International Student Affairs, and Ms Eleanor Jubb, Policy Analyst at Universities UK International. Conclusions were drawn by Lord Karan Bilimoria, Chancellor of Birmingham University. More than 30 parliamentarians attended the event and participated in debate after the presentations.

1. Addendum approved by the committee on 25 June 2018.
2. See the motion for a resolution, [Doc. 14026](#).



3. Main issues arising

6. Speakers agreed that the trend for study abroad has seen a considerable increase in the last forty years. From under a million United Kingdom students studying in a foreign country in 1975, numbers had grown to 4.6 million in 2015. Students drew multiple benefits from mobility, as did the higher education institutions, employers and host countries involved. Student movement allows the acquisition of new skills, including languages, and ensures the formation of a well-trained and integrated labour force. A significant source of income for host countries, experience and competencies gained through student movement help to establish a creative, innovative and diverse working population.

7. In attracting international students, different factors are taken into account for the host country, such as the language of instruction, compatibility across national education systems, immigration policies, economic, political and social factors and, finally, tuition fees, which vary greatly from country to country. Some countries have a “no tuition fee” policy that applies to both international and domestic students, such as Finland and Germany. In others, tuitions fees are fixed at the same rate for both domestic and international students (France, Italy, Luxembourg). Lastly, there are countries imposing tuitions fees at a different rate for domestic and international students (Austria, Belgium and the United Kingdom).

8. The legislative framework set up by the European Union to encourage student mobility, the “High Energy Ignition” and subsequently the Erasmus project with 33 participating States had served to promote “inward mobility” within the European Union (the most popular destinations being Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy).

9. Student mobility was shown by speakers at the hearing to be closely linked to labour migration, since sometimes students chose to prolong their stay in the host country in order to work, thereby benefiting local economies. The length of the job search period varied from 6 to 18 months, but some countries offered special facilities for students staying on. A recent estimate in 2017 indicates that 16.4% to 29.1% of international students from non-EU countries choose to remain in the European Union, the highest proportion being from north-west Africa and the Commonwealth of Independent States. It should be noted however, that this is normally for a short-term period of 6 to 12 months after graduation.

4. The case of international students in the United Kingdom

10. The United Kingdom is currently in second place worldwide, after the United States, in numbers of international students studying there, followed by China, Germany, France, Japan and Canada. According to Universities UK, more than half a million international students are currently enrolled at a British university, of which approximately one fifth are in London.

11. Between April 2015 and April 2016, 193 100 non-EU students came to study in the United Kingdom, of which 122 000 departed after graduation, whereas 57 900 were granted authorisation to remain, to study, work or other. The Survey of Graduating International Students, set up to further the understanding of what students do before, during and after their studies, has found that the average stay of students from European Union countries was two years and five months, while for non-EU students it was just one year and 11 months. However, a gradual but extremely significant decrease of students extending their visas after graduating had been observed; from over 150 000 students extending their visas in 2011, the number had decreased to 35 572 by 2016.

12. To a question regarding the post-study plans of international students, more EU students said they were likely to plan to stay in the United Kingdom to look for work or for further study than non-EU students. Of the EU nationals responding to the survey, the Germans (15%) and the French (13%) made up the largest proportion. In analysing the topic further, the Office for National Statistics had begun using Exit Checks to investigate what non-EU migrants travelling on a work or family visa did when their visa was due to expire.

13. The impact of international students on the British economy is significant. In 2014-2015, international students (including EU and non-EU students) accounted for 19% of all the students registered at British universities and subsequently generated £10.8 billion of United Kingdom export earnings. Furthermore, as well as what they spent on university fees and accommodation, in 2014-2015, international students spent £5.4 billion off-campus on goods and services, supporting 206 600 jobs nationally.

14. It is therefore obvious that academic movement benefits students, higher education institutions, employers and countries alike. Even though student mobility has greatly improved in the last few years through European legislative frameworks and national initiatives, there are still steps to be taken, especially in

the domain of tuition fees, which can sometimes discourage students from choosing a particular country. Taking into account the fact that international students contribute towards economic sustainability, greater diversity and a broader range of skills, all stakeholders should seek to attract and retain them.

5. Proposed amendments to the draft resolution

Amendment A

At the end of paragraph 5.7, add the following words:

“and establishing tuition fees which are not prohibitive for some international students, while maintaining grant and loan programmes for students where incentive is required for areas of study considered important”

Amendment B

Before paragraph 6.1, insert the following paragraph:

“take into account to a greater extent in policies and programmes the evidence of surveys and studies to show the economic, social and cultural benefit for host countries and countries of origin of encouragement given to student movement;”