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# Examining the Influence of Global Polarisation on International Student Mobility:

Implications for the University of St Andrews

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Executive Summary .....</b>  | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>1.0 Introduction .....</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>2.0 International Student Diaspora Trends Across UK Universities and St Andrews.....</b> | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>3.0 Polarisation Between the UK and Source Countries of St Andrews Students.....</b>     | <b>10</b> |
| <b>4.0 The Role of Global Polarisation on the St Andrews Experience.....</b>                | <b>13</b> |
| <b>5.0 Implications for the University of St Andrews .....</b>                              | <b>16</b> |
| <b>6.0 Recommendations.....</b>   | <b>18</b> |
| <b>7.0 Conclusion .....</b>   | <b>20</b> |
| <b>8.0 Bibliography.....</b>  | <b>22</b> |

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In our ever more interconnected global landscape, student migration emerges as a pivotal force propelling progress, allowing individuals to pursue educational opportunities beyond their native borders. International students are highly valued for their ability to bring fresh skills and knowledge to the labour market, often at more affordable wage levels. This positive impact has driven a notable increase in the number of student migrants in recent years, underscoring the growing acknowledgment of their contributions across various sectors.

However, the resurgence of right-wing populism in recent times has introduced instability in higher education mobility and internationalisation. For example, EU student enrolment in UK universities has declined by more than half since the Brexit referendum in 2016. This political shift poses a particularly acute challenge for St Andrews, Scotland's most international university, compared to its counterparts in the UK.

In this paper, we present the following recommendations to address these challenges and better equip the university to navigate the uncertainties within the international student market:

1. Enhance communication and collaboration.
2. Tailor career support services.
3. Intensify post-graduation support.
4. Create equitable financial aid between domestic and international students.
5. Assist cost-effective travel planning.
6. Comprehensive wellbeing support for all international students.
7. Engaging in advocacy efforts at the national level.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, the seamless movement of knowledge and talent across borders stands as a fundamental pillar of advancement. Central to this dynamic is the phenomenon of student migration, where individuals embark on educational journeys beyond their home countries. Through the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, international student migration experienced a remarkable surge, increasing by 70% compared to previous years, establishing itself as the primary driver of migration across numerous Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations (Raghuram 2013). Although the COVID-19 pandemic hindered international students' ability to navigate the administrative procedures required for enrolling in higher education abroad and travelling for studies, the numbers of international students in OECD countries nearly rebounded to pre-pandemic levels by 2023. For instance, in the United States, the count stood at 1.08 million international students holding active study visas as of January 2023, closely approaching the 1.14 million recorded in January 2020, just before the pandemic occurred (ICEF 2023).

Several factors have driven the notable increase in students studying abroad. In numerous developing nations, a shortage of university slots prevails, primarily due to the struggle of emerging economies to meet the demand for tertiary education. Consequently, many students find themselves compelled to seek educational opportunities overseas (Gribble 2008). Moreover, families and students in these developing countries often perceive foreign study as a pathway to acquiring professional and business advantages (Gribble 2008). As a result, tertiary education has evolved into a significant global export commodity, with developed countries seizing the opportunity presented by the educational deficits in many developing nations to actively recruit foreign students. According to OECD estimates, the higher education market within its member states alone is valued at approximately \$40 billion annually (UNESCO 2005) with the USA, the UK, and Australia leading the way in the provision of international education (Hatakenaka 2004). For many developed countries, the international student market has become not only an important source of revenue for local economies but also a way of addressing skill shortages in key areas as students are valued as nascent skilled migrants who offer the benefits of new knowledge to the labour market at relatively low wages.

However, beneath the surface of the promising statistics lie certain realities that warrant consideration, potentially exerting a notable influence on the future influx of international students.

In the last decade, there has been a notable resurgence of populism in political discourse, emphasising the concept of 'the people' and often pitting them against 'the elites'. A Pew Research Center analysis, drawing primarily from Palgrove, which is a repository for cross-national political data, indicates that populist candidates on the ideological right have been gaining increasing portions of the vote in recent European elections (Silver 2022). Such resurgence of populist attitudes can largely be attributed to the bolstering of nationalistic ideologies, spurred by the contentious issue of migration. Political leaders on the right of the spectrum frequently intertwine nationalism into their discourse, where concepts like 'the nation' and 'the people' become interchangeable (Mudde 2004). Immigrants, often excluded from these groupings, are portrayed by right-wing populists as antagonistic forces threatening the status quo. Consequently, universities find themselves navigating a delicate landscape, as the values of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, which are central to internationalisation efforts, come under scrutiny and face challenges from the ideology of right-wing nationalism. For instance, Brexit, which represented a rejection of London, globalisation, and multiculturalism (Calhoun 2017), has resulted in a significant decline in the number of EU students enrolling in British universities. The figures show that enrolment from Italy, Germany, and France has more than halved since the referendum (O'Carroll and Adams 2023).

The resurgence of populism and its resulting instability in higher education mobility and internationalisation have a significant impact on the University of St Andrews' international student community. As Scotland's most international university, this diverse student body is not only integral to the university's financial health but also contributes significantly to its unique character. Therefore, the recent decline in international student numbers across the UK poses a particularly acute challenge for St Andrews compared to other universities in the UK. This research paper will investigate how the university has been impacted by global polarisation and its effects on the international student experience.

This report will be structured as follows. Firstly, we conducted a questionnaire to explore the key factors influencing international students' decision to study at St Andrews.

Understanding these factors is crucial for the university to address potential reasons for the decline in international student enrollment and to devise strategies to enhance its competitiveness. Subsequently, we analyse geopolitical influences on the source countries of St Andrews students, emphasising the importance of comprehending the geopolitical landscape in these key source countries to anticipate potential impacts on student migration to the UK. Then, we highlight the significance of qualitatively exploring the international student experience at St Andrews as a means of understanding the effects of global polarisation within higher education and its implications for the university. Finally, the paper concludes by offering recommendations for additional initiatives that can provide the university with a proactive competitive advantage moving forward.

## 2.0 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT DIASPORA TRENDS ACROSS UK UNIVERSITIES AND ST ANDREWS

International students' education admission has been one of the most important sources of income for the United Kingdom over the past two decades. In 2006, the second phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education was launched, attracting over 100,000 students to study in British higher education institutions in a year (Huang 2008). Since this initiative, the UK has actively pushed forward the strategy of 'internationalisation' and maximising the number of overseas students studying in the UK. These efforts have solidified its position as the top destination for students all over the world in pursuit of quality education. Various 'push' and 'pull' factors have shaped the UK into a 'student paradise'. These factors include the perceived reputation of the education system, the rising middle class in other nations, and the ease of visa regulations for example (Huang 2008). Additionally, the congested nature of the graduate labour market and the increasingly protracted transitions from university to work contributed significantly to international student's education decision-making (Brooks, Waters, and Pimlott-Wilson 2012). Studying abroad allows students to 'distinguish themselves' from other graduates within the mass higher education system, equipping them with a competitive edge and enhancing their employability. However, recent research indicates that there is a substantial reduction of international students across the UK tertiary education. This downturn represents a 'major blow' to UK universities, with approximately one-third experiencing a significant drop in non-EU international applications in 2023, evidenced by UCAS data (Foster, Borett, and Gross 2024). This decline has alarmed universities regarding their financial stability. The situation is expected to deteriorate further with the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's active policies aimed at reducing net migration and tightening the graduate visa route (Laker 2024).

University of St Andrews is not only the most international of Scotland's universities but also one of the most international in the UK, with students from over 150 different countries. This diversity has crowned its unique characterisation as 'International Scottish' (University of St Andrews n.d.). According to UCAS official statistics, the current student population at the University of St Andrews is 55% UK students, 9% EU students, and 36% international students, this distribution reflected a highly diverse and rigorous academic environment at the university (UCAS n.d.). Yet, with the gradual decline in the overall number of international students seeking education in the UK, St Andrews will find

itself in an even more challenging situation compared to other UK universities. To understand comprehensively the underlying reasons for this trend, the key factors that influence international students' decision to study at St Andrews must first be examined. Analysing these factors is crucial for the university to pre-empt possible reasons for the decline in international student enrolment and for devising appropriate strategies to enhance the university's competitiveness.

From the questionnaire we distributed to current international students at St Andrews, valuable insights from student's perspectives were collected. Through a series of targeted questions, our research was able to capture the respondent's motives, experiences and perceptions related to studying at the university. The feedback suggested several common factors that explain international students' decisions to study in St Andrews.

The result of the questionnaire suggested that 65.2% of our respondents selected St Andrews as their top university choice, while 34.8% answered otherwise. Approximately 70% of the respondents agreed that the UK was their top university destination. This reflected that the UK as a whole stands out as a competitive option of choice for international students, and particularly, University of St Andrews holds a strong appeal in this area.

To gain a more holistic understanding, we included an open-ended question in our survey regarding their motivations. This approach allowed the respondents to provide flexible answers that best represented their individual reasons from their perspectives. The list of answers we collected include: location, course ranking, campus environment, internationalism, university's reputation, diversity, student experience, research areas, Scottish education system and staff testimonials. The university's reputation was the most influential factor, with more than 95% of the respondents included it as a motivation for them to pick St Andrews, followed by internationalism and the campus environment. This reflects the crucial role of a university's reputation in attracting students to select it as their academic destination.

However, we acknowledge there might be a potential discrepancy between the pre-admission expectations and the actual post-admission experience of international students. To investigate deeper into this aspect, the questionnaire followed up with questions specifically asking about their experiences after enrolling at the University of St

Andrews. When asked to rate the support services available for them provided by the school, the responses varied. 39.1% of respondents rated the support service as 3 out of 5, 30.4% rated 4, 17.4% rated as 2 and 13% rated as 5. The fewest number of respondents chose the highest ranking of 5, reflecting a level of dissatisfaction with inadequate support received from the university. The lack of support is rooted in areas including:

- Visa application
- CV and cover letter guidance
- Housing support
- Career navigation
- Post-admission process
- Funding navigation

Specifically, one respondent expressed frustration by stating that the university had 'a false image of the reputation', and another respondent echoed this by stating 'I've felt Student Services is poorly equipped to handle my situation'. Hence, inadequate support from the university appears to exert influence into student's overall experience with their education. 56.5% of respondents rated 4 out of 5 for their overall university experience, 21.7% rated 3, 13% rated 5 and 4.3% opted for ratings of 1 and 2. 95.65% of the respondents expressed that they will not continue their education at the St Andrews after their current program. This overwhelmingly one-sided response suggests a possible correlation between student's overall satisfaction with the university and university's support towards international students, which will likely play a key role in affecting their future decision of whether to continue their study in the same university.

The questionnaire reveals that support services play a central role in directly impacting international student's experience at St Andrews. An overwhelming percentage of respondents reflected dissatisfaction in the university support and indicated they would not consider continuing their education further in St Andrews. The discrepancy between the university reputation and student's realistic experience hinted at an underlying reason for the observed decline in international students' admission rates in UK universities and specifically St Andrews.

### 3.0 POLARISATION BETWEEN THE UK AND SOURCE COUNTRIES OF ST ANDREWS STUDENTS

In the academic year 2021/22, the University of St Andrews saw significant student enrolment from the US (2,105 students), China (705 students), India (230 students) and Germany (200 students) (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2023). Understanding the geopolitical landscape in key source countries is crucial to analysing potential impacts on these student diasporas' migration to the UK.

The US and UK share a longstanding alliance characterised by stability and mutual support ("Policy & History" n.d.). This relationship, bolstered by common language, shared ideals, and compatible political systems (Oliver and Williams 2016, 549), provides a smooth transition for US students studying in the UK. Immersing in a new culture while still feeling a sense of familiarity enhances these students' experiences. While the US-UK special relationship explains the 2,105 US students attending the University of St Andrews in 2021/22 (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2023), this does not extend to all other key source countries.

India-UK relations remain amicable, marked by a shared Commonwealth history ("India-UK Relations Political Relations" 2013) and ongoing cooperation outlined in the '2030 roadmap' (British High Commission New Delhi 2021). Hence geopolitical relations are not a factor deterring Indian students. However, during COVID-19 the diaspora of Indian students faced difficulty obtaining visas and planning travel, leading to a decline in outflows of students (Singh, Manchanda, and Mishra 2022). Hence, while unaffected by geopolitics, COVID-19 did impact the Indian student diaspora.

Conversely, Chinese students face significant challenges in the UK. COVID-19 triggered a sharp drop in Chinese students studying internationally, nearly halving intake from 2019 to 2020 (Statista 2018). In the UK, practicalities like irregular and increasingly expensive flights constrained attendance (Nuwer 2023). This was compounded by the British Council being severely restrained in delivering IELTS language tests to China, necessary for international student enrolment in UK universities (Xi and Yuqiao 2020). Deteriorating Sino-UK geopolitical relations have also sparked anti-Chinese sentiment in the UK (Nuwer 2023). The narrative of Chinese students as Communist Party mouthpieces reflects the trend of social alienation (Chu 2022). A xenophobic landscape is not conducive to student

migration. Instead, Chinese students have reoriented towards domestic institutions and institutions within Asia (Nuwer 2023).

However, the US, once a top destination for Chinese students, has cultivated an even more xenophobic environment. Former President Trump's 2020 ban on several Chinese graduate students, on grounds of alleged ties to the Chinese military, reflects this (Nuwer 2023). Additionally, the Trump administration changed policy to shorten Chinese graduate student's visa duration (Chen 2023). The policies have continued under Biden (Chen 2023). The anti-Chinese political climate in the US has grown (Xi and Yuqiao 2020), with these geopolitical tensions evidently reflected in visa policy. Contrastingly, the UK reformed its visa policy, allowing for a two years post-graduation stay (Xi and Yuqiao 2020). Declining rates of Chinese students in the US (Chen 2023) coincides with increasing rates in the UK (Xi and Yuqiao 2020), potentially due to worsening Sino-US relations.

As the strained German-British relations resulting from Brexit extend to the entire EU/EEA, it is this collective group that warrants consideration. Transitioning EU students from 'home student' to 'international student' status in 2021 resulted in increased tuition fees for these students from just over £9,000 to as high as £38,000 (O'Carroll and Adams 2023). Compounding this, another result of Brexit was that EU/EEA students no longer qualified for student loans from the UK Student Loans Company (Bhardwa 2022). Costs were further enhanced due to visas and healthcare. No longer qualifying for the EU Settlement Scheme, EU/EEA students now pay £358 to apply for a student visa (Bhardwa 2022). Similarly, the UK announced an 'immigration health surcharge' for all EU/EEA nationals (Bhardwa 2022) amounting to £470 per year, with a total of £1,500 for a full undergraduate tenure (Hunter 2023). Prior to Brexit, EU/EEA students had access to the NHS free of charge and could use their European health insurance cards without being registered with the NHS system (Hunter 2023). These post-Brexit fees have driven a steady decline in EU/EEA applicants ("Brexit's Impact on Students and UK Universities: A Comprehensive Analysis | Amber News" 2023). In 2021/22, the number of EU students beginning an undergraduate degree in the UK halved (Brexit's Impact on Students and UK Universities: A Comprehensive Analysis | Amber News" 2023). Brexit has been assessed as the primary deterrent (O'Carroll and Adams 2023). Instead of seeking tertiary education in the UK, EU/EEA students have turned to alternatives like the Netherlands, which experienced a record number of applications in 2021/22 from the EU/EEA (Hunter 2023).

In summary, a combination of geopolitical tensions and pandemic-related restrictions has impacted student mobility from key source countries to the University of St Andrews, with students from China and the EU bearing the brunt of these challenges.

#### 4.0 THE ROLE OF GLOBAL POLARISATION ON THE ST ANDREWS EXPERIENCE

The connections between global polarisation as effected through foreign policy and international student populations is well documented in International Relations scholarship. However, existing scholarship tends to focus on quantitative figures to understand this interaction, with changing numbers of overseas students used as a variable to track shifts in foreign policy (Holsti 1982; Volgy and Schwarz 1991).

This section will argue that a qualitative exploration of the international student experience is a vital tool to understand the manifestations of global polarisation within higher education through a case study of the international student experience at St Andrews.

The most explicit effect of global polarisation on the student experience is visible in the financial burdens associated with one's status as an international student. Financial resources have historically been, and remain, both a central barrier and enabler for international students (Choudaha and Van Mol 2022, 380). 30% of survey respondents explicitly mentioned facing financial challenges. One example of this is the compulsory NHS surcharge, cited by multiple respondents as an additional financial burden when compounded with the healthcare fees they already pay in their home countries. The aggravation of these financial challenges as corresponding to increasing polarisation is visible in the periodic increase in the NHS surcharge across several years. Introduced in 2015 at £200 per year, the surcharge increased to £624 per year across the span of 8 years. The approaching academic year (2024-2025) is set to witness the most significant jump with a 66% increase to £1035 per year (Gower and McKinney 2024). While the surcharge is not specific to the St Andrews experience, the financial support offered by the university to international students is notably limited with far fewer funding options offered to international students than offered to Scottish and British students. The distribution of scholarships for undergraduates for example, includes 4 scholarships open to all undergraduates, 40 scholarships open to Scottish students, 30 open to British (excl. Scotland) students, and only 14 open to exclusively international students. This drastic difference in the number of scholarships accessible to international students places a significant financial barrier to international students seeking to pursue higher education at St Andrews. Another financial burden, which is explicitly linked to university policy,

that was cited by respondents is travel planning. The university generally releases exam timetables halfway into the semester. This results in international students having to bear the increased costs of flights booked closer to dates of travel. Thus, while the financial challenges of the international student experience are largely universal across higher education in the UK, student experience reflects a lack of financial support to address these challenges from the University of St Andrews.

In addition to the financial front, recent policy measures announced by the British government are set to heighten the severity of various challenges expressed by respondents. Paired with financial considerations, another factor central to the decision to study abroad is perceived future prospects, specifically ‘anticipated labour market opportunities and preparation to live and work in a globalised world’ (Choudaha and Van Mol 2022, 380). 60% of respondents expressed desires to seek employment in the UK post-graduation. A policy measure announced earlier this year outlines plans to give international students six months after graduation to find a professional job after which they will be asked to return to their home country if unsuccessful (Tanriseven, et al. 2023). This is a significant reduction from the existing two-year period. Furthermore, international students will also be prevented from switching out of student routes into work routes before their studies have been completed (Khandelwal 2023). Given that a lack of career guidance catered to international students was the most recurring response to the survey’s question on challenges faced, difficulties entering the workforce are central to the worsening effects of polarisation on the St Andrews experience. As cited by multiple respondents, the university has a reputation for internationalism, and thus many students pick St Andrews expecting an environment conducive to enabling the professional aspirations of international students. This expectation is being increasingly hindered by national policy and the university is yet to provide mechanisms to help address these hindrances.

The survey further highlights the university’s lack of effective support for international students in times of crisis. A significant indicator of this is the COVID-19 crisis. Scholarship predicted that the pandemic would raise logistical barriers such as travel and visa requirements as well as concerns around value for money due to changes to learning models (Choudaha and Van Mol 2022, 392). In 2022, many international students at St Andrews missed the start of their academic year due to delays in receiving their student visa. Other students faced challenges re-entering their home countries. One respondent

expressed difficulties in keeping up with classes and coursework from a different time zone with the university failing to provide suitable options for students to access classes and assessments from various time zones. This absence of accommodations for international students is made apparent in the lack of flexibility offered to students affected by visa and travel restrictions as well as students forced to attend class remotely during the pandemic.

The university's response to global conflict serves as another challenge faced by international students that the university fails to address effectively. Studies have observed a trend across higher education institutions of neglect towards student engagement in the process of internationalisation (Green and Baxter 2022, 306). In recent months, this has become explicitly visible at the University of St Andrews. The university has faced significant backlash from the student population for its response to the ongoing war in Gaza. Out of a list of demands outlined by students campaigning against the war, the university has only agreed to one – increasing the number of scholarships offered to students from Palestine (Jackson 2024). While emphasising its role in maintaining a space for open dialogue and discussion, the university has failed to address the concerns and suggestions explicitly vocalised by students and fallen short in taking active measures to provide students directly affected by the conflict with support.

All in all, global polarisation has situated the international student population at the receiving end of an interaction of compounding challenges. British policy towards international students in higher education presents rising financial challenges and decreasing employment prospects. The effects of this shift in policy will likely manifest quantitatively in decreasing international student numbers over the next few years. However, the qualitative experiences of international students today are useful in anticipating the repercussions of this shift at the micro level. As reflected in survey responses, the University of St Andrews largely failed to provide adequate support for existing challenges and its mechanisms of support will prove increasingly inadequate as trends in global polarisation continue.

## 5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

An increasingly polarized political climate has had very real impacts on international students globally and within the UK. St Andrews is not alone in dealing with changing times and negative perception of international students coming from media and governments alike. The English government has in recent years expressed many statements that come across as anti-migrant in nature. This rise in protectionism is not unique to the UK, nor will it likely end soon. As recently as May 2023, it was announced that in 2024 international students would no longer be able to bring dependants with them to the UK except in specific circumstances should the proposal be passed (Syal 2023). This is not an insignificant step as the burden of a mass influx of students without the infrastructure to handle them has been faced by many university communities. It is worrisome to consider if limitations are being placed on international student's families now, when will these restrictions begin to limit the number of international students arriving in the UK?

The high number of international students globally and within the UK are already being decreased due to financial means and language capabilities. There are over 5.6 million students pursuing higher education outside of their countries of origin world-wide (Roshid and Seraj 2023, 1). International students benefit universities by providing higher tuitions, an increase in labour market flow, a source of talent, an indication of institutional prestige, and a means of extending global reach (Roshid and Seraj 2023, 2). It is illogical for universities to turn away willing applicants who bring higher revenue due to international student fees. Not accepting international students would reduce the number of highly educated and skilled workers available for the future labour force.

However, as attractive as international students are for universities, it is the UK government that sets the number of student visas available each year. In the UK, there were record numbers of non-EU international applicants to UK universities in 2022, while the number of EU applicants dropped compared to recent years (Higher Education Student Numbers 2024). This strongly suggests that pushback against international students is not pushback against international students, but pushback against non-European students. This calls into question whether xenophobia and racism may be a factor contributing to concerns raised, or whether this anger is due to a lack of resources in an already stretched educational system. At present, most international students apply for universities in

Anglophonic or European states (Roshid and Seraj 2023, 2). The UK's recently proposed restrictions on international students bringing family members as dependents disproportionately impacts students from predominantly non-white and non-European states (Syal 2023). Once again, this brings poses questions as to the motivations behind the many recent government proposals against international students. It is not only the UK making proposals like this. In Canada, a maximum cap of 360,000 has been placed on the number of international students being accepted into post-secondary programs for 2024, with the Canadian citing the stress high numbers of international students place on health care, housing, and service sectors (Government of Canada 2024). As the UK faces similar concerns, there is a chance that the government may follow suit. This would have a devastating impact on universities and students alike, as fewer international students may result in an increase in tuition for domestic students.

St Andrews has many support systems in place for international students to navigate the application process and adjust to life in Scotland. The university has an International Advice team that provides guidance with immigration questions and visa applications (Student Immigration Services 2024). The university also provides information on visas, moving to the UK, bringing family members, and many more topics pertinent to international students (Student Immigration Services 2024). However, should new government regulations be put in place, the university would be hard pressed to operate around them. At St Andrews, mental health support is available to all students, along with many societies for minority groups (Student Support 2024). Despite the importance of these resources in supporting international students, this can only assist students within the university setting. What students experience outside of the university cannot be managed by the university, with counselling or the involvement of campus security being the only interventions the university can usually offer. Experiences of discrimination and racism that international students may face from the broader Scottish community cannot be avoided, regardless of what the university or government does. Although the university has a mental health strategy, it can only do so much for students (Student Support 2024). St Andrews cannot control how many visas are granted to students from specific countries each year, and no matter how much marketing to attract international students is done, it will not change the number of spaces available. Global polarization has a very real impact on students with aspirations of studying internationally, particularly within the UK. Given the current political climate, this opportunity may be put in jeopardy for many students, with little universities like St Andrews can do to change this.

## 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the prevailing global polarisation and xenophobia within the UK, the University of St Andrews must proactively adapt to these challenges while reaffirming its commitment to an inclusive and supportive environment on campus. Drawing upon insights gained from the student feedback survey and an analysis of UK-wide trends, the following set of actionable policy recommendations is proposed:

- 1. Enhanced communication and collaboration:** Establish regular and inclusive communication channels between university administration and international students to facilitate collaborative policy creation. By involving international students in decision-making, the university can better address their evolving needs and concerns, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging within the community.
- 2. Tailored career support services:** Gear career support to the needs and aspirations of international students, including job markets beyond the UK, US, and EU. As over 40% of international students surveyed were uninterested in seeking employment in the UK after graduation, it is important to cater career's advice to global job markets.
- 3. Intensified post-graduation support:** Continue careers support for 6 months post-graduation and intensify support in months before graduation. The UK government plans to reduce the period for graduates to secure employment from 2 years to 6 months. The university should help alleviate this greater pressure on international students. This may involve mentorship programs, networking events, and continued job search and application strategies.
- 4. Equitable financial aid:** Revise the university's financial aid policies to ensure that international students have access to equitable funding opportunities, including scholarships, grants, and emergency assistance programs. Establish scholarship programs targeted towards international students from underrepresented regions or socio-economic backgrounds.
- 5. Assist cost-effective travel planning:** Releasing exam timetables at the start of semester allows students to make affordable travel plans. As the status quo disproportionately affects international students, this would be a step towards equal treatment and considering of international students in policy-making.
- 6. Comprehensive wellbeing support:** Ensuring parity in wellbeing support services for all international students, regardless of nationality or backgrounds. The

treatment of Palestinian students has not matched the support offered to other national groups, for instance Ukrainians. Alongside promoting open dialogue, the university should support all international students equally.

- 7. Engaging in advocacy efforts:** Promote policy changes at the national level, collaborating with government officials and policy-makers to challenge xenophobic policies and advocate for streamlined visa processes, affordable tuition fees, and post-graduate work opportunities.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

The transborder exchange of knowledge and talent that occurs when students study internationally maximises global development and ensures that progress made is representative of global stakeholders. Driven by professional opportunities, millions of international students migrate to the UK. This diaspora not only offers British universities substantial funding, but also supplies skilled workers to UK labour markets. However, the resurgence of populism and anti-migrant policies pose significant threats to this symbiotic relationship.

As Scotland's leading international university, polarisation disproportionately impacts St Andrews. While its reputation, internationalism and campus environment attract international students, dissatisfaction arises due to inadequate support in areas like visa applications, career guidance, housing, and funding.

Geopolitical tensions, exacerbated by global crises like COVID-19, have influenced student migration patterns. While relations with the US and India remain promising, anti-Chinese sentiments and Brexit have deterred Chinese and EU students. St Andrews has attempted to address polarisation and xenophobia, but challenges persist, including rising tuition fees and limited financial aid.

The University of St Andrews has struggled to fully address the challenges posed by polarization and subsequently xenophobic UK policy. Instead, further constraints are imposed on international students. The ever-increasing tuition fees for international students at St Andrews, coupled with increasing UK visa and healthcare charges, are met with minimal financial support. Further, while the UK plans to reduce the time span for international students to find employment, which heightens the importance of careers services, St Andrews students remain dissatisfied with careers support. During COVID-19, international students, in particular, struggled. Issues ranged from logistical barriers on travel planning and visa applications to examination schedules not accommodating for students in all time zones. Crisis management was geared towards local students, and international students received minimal additional support. This extends to the handling of geopolitical crises, for instance the war and humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The university has not shown due attention to students campaigning for a ceasefire, and only agreed to

one demand – increasing scholarships for Palestinian students. Overall, university policy has repeatedly failed to account for the 45% of its student body that is international.

Insufficient support and xenophobia have led to reductions of international students across the UK. The UK government is actively pursuing policy that diminishes international student numbers. While the University of St Andrews has made steps to improved support, for instance through its International Advice team, the UK government itself is cultivating an environment inhospitable to internationalism. This raises the importance of compensating in St Andrews and continuing to improve international student support.

Overall, the University of St Andrews needs to confront UK-wide polarisation and xenophobia by creating an international-friendly environment.

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