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## Exploring the Factors Contributing to the Decline in the International Student Supply Chain to UK Universities in 2024

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**ABSTRACT:** *International student numbers continue to rise, and the UK was historically among the top five English-speaking destinations. However, in 2024, it experienced a significant decline in international student enrollment, with Australia overtaking it in global rankings. This decline, contemporaneous with a spike in the UK's anti-immigration political consensus, particularly owing to changes in student visa policies and restrictions on dependents, poses serious economic risks to UK universities, which rely heavily on international tuition fees, the local economies of university towns, and the UK's long-term global reputation. This systematic mapping review explores causal factors in 32 published news articles, categorized using the political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental (PESTLE) framework. The findings show that political, economic, social, and legal/regulatory issues—such as visa restrictions, increased costs, and stricter immigration rules—are key drivers. The results offer actionable insights and recommendations for UK policymakers and higher education institutions.*

**Keywords:** Immigration and education policy, international student enrollment, international student supply chain, Student visa policy, UK higher education

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## INTRODUCTION

The number of international students (int-students) pursuing studies abroad has steadily increased each year for decades, and 2022 saw a significant surge in int-student mobility, which had previously been suppressed by COVID-19 lockdowns. In the long term, UNESCO data indicate that the number of international students worldwide increased by 170.6% from 2002 to 2022, rising from 2.5 to 6.9 million per year (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2024). This marked a historic shift in the international education supply chain, reflecting growing demand for cross-border education and greater access to global academic opportunities.

The top host destination for international students in 2022 was the U.S., with more than one million international students, followed by the UK (700,000), Canada (600,000), France (392,000), Australia (361,000), and Germany (349,000) (Statista, 2023). Other countries also played significant roles in hosting international students. For decades, the UK has been a high-performing institution in attracting students, especially in terms of size (Tight, 2011); indeed, it has fewer than 150 universities, whereas the USA has nearly 4,000 (Moody, 2021). Consequently, the UK has long been noted for its disproportionate success in attracting a high number of international students in comparison to the USA (Bartram & Terano, 2011), although Canada does even better in this regard (i.e., relatively).

The decline in international student enrollment in UK higher education institutions (HEIs) extends beyond short-term economic impacts and job losses; it poses long-term consequences for the UK's international education industry. One significant "push" factor for prospective students is the presence of UK university graduates, who raise awareness and encourage others from their home countries to study in the UK; a decline in international students disrupts this cycle, directly affecting future enrollment. Furthermore, graduates of UK HEIs contribute to the economy by driving innovation, filling labor shortages, and fostering trade and business links between the UK and its home countries (Migration Advisory Committee, 2018). A reduced int-student population hinders such benefits (Dolen, 2024). Additionally, the factors deterring students from choosing the UK as their study destination could contribute to the perception of the UK as an unwelcoming country, further undermining its global reputation and

soft power in the aftermath of Brexit. Therefore, it is evident that the consequences of this decline extend far beyond a simple reduction in numbers, and research exploring why this is occurring is urgently needed. Hence, investigating the underlying causes of the decline in international student numbers provides important insights for a range of stakeholders.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study's conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1, encompasses a systematic mapping review in combination with "political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental" (PESTLE) analysis (Afshar & Shah, 2025) to provide a structured approach for identifying and organizing the factors contributing to the decline in international student enrollment in UK HEIs in approximately 2024.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Strategy**

Diverse strategies can be used in secondary research (Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Johnstone & Andrus, 2024; Lame, 2019; Ventresca & Mohr, 2017). For this study, a systematic mapping review was selected, as described by Barn et al. (2017), whereby the analysis unpacked in the following chapter presents news articles from 2024 to 2025 to identify the factors behind the decrease in int-student numbers among UK HEIs in 2024. This approach focuses on recent news articles, as the data are still emerging and are not "archived" yet or are reported in many secondary academic analyses.

The "Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses" (PRISMA) framework (Page et al., 2021) and content analysis (Kohlbacher, 2006) strategies are the most suitable for use in this study to ensure a comprehensive and structured approach. Consequently, the research question is clearly defined, along with the development of inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies and the creation of a suitable search plan for databases and sources. To enable the extraction of reduced information forms, articles related to the decline in the number of students in UK HEIs were thoroughly reviewed, and the extracted data were synthesized to present themes under PESTLE themes for further qualitative analysis to establish a matrix for quantitative analysis to test the developed hypotheses (as presented previously).

### **Research Methods**

The extracted data were categorized under predefined PESTLE analysis elements (Afshar & Shah, 2025) to identify the general factors contributing to the decline in international student enrollment in UK HEIs. Thematic analysis (qualitatively identifying patterns and themes within data, allowing for a deeper understanding of underlying issues) was then performed to extract specific factors within each PESTLE category (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Quantifying theme

frequency enables statistical analysis to explain findings and test hypotheses (Gautschi, 2011). Nevertheless, since the data collection is rooted in qualitative analysis of news articles in this research, it is broadly considered to be a mono-method approach, as described by Maxwell (2010). Rather than establishing direct causal relationships, this study examines how media reports, policy discussions, and public discourse characterized factors associated with recent changes in international student enrollment in the United Kingdom.

### ***Data Identification for Inclusion***

Since this research study is based on a systematic mapping review, as per the methods described by Barn et al. (2017), it follows the PRISMA framework to guide article identification, eligibility screening, and the final selection of articles for inclusion in the study. In this framework, the first step in article identification involves selecting search phrases, an appropriate database or search engine, and defining the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The search phrase used for article identification was “international student decline in the UK,” and the search was conducted on Google’s search engine. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Related to decline of int-students at UK HEIs. Published in English. Published from January 2024 to the end of March, 2025.	Might indicate commercial bias or published in unknow platform.

Following this search, as illustrated in the PRISMA diagram in Figure 1, a total of 48 articles were identified.

- Two articles were removed because of duplication.
- In the first screening phase, 12 articles were excluded to avoid commercial bias.
- In the second screening phase, one article was removed because it could not be retrieved.
- In the third screening phase for eligibility, one article was removed because it was out of the scope of the study.
- The remaining 32 articles met the study’s inclusion criteria and were included.

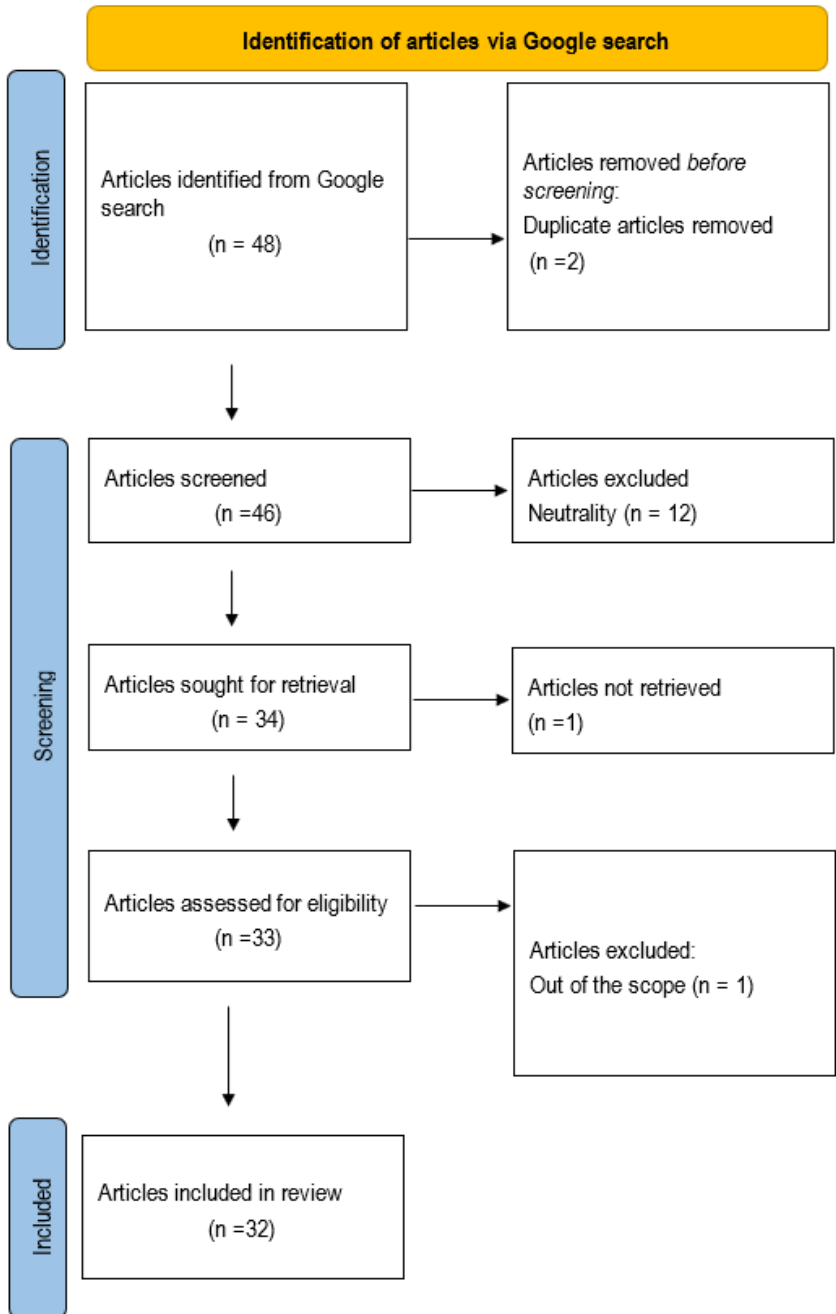


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Chart of the Study Search and Selection Process

**Data Synthesis and Data Analysis**

As summarized in Table 2, the data synthesis and analysis for this research study were conducted in two phases, each of which included qualitative synthesis and quantitative analysis using numerical methods, as briefly described below.

**Table 2: Data Synthesis and Analysis Summary for Each Phase**

Type	Purpose	Methods & Techniques	Outcomes
<b>Phase 1</b>			
Data synthesis	Generate included article summary	Content analysis	Structured table of summary data
Data analysis	Plot graph of articles' publishing timeframe	Numerical (in Excel)	Graph showing articles in each month per year
<b>Phase 2</b>			
Data synthesis	Generate general and specific decline factors	Content, PESTLE, thematic analyses	Table for general decline factors
Data analysis	Plot graphs for general and specific decline factors Enable hypothesis testing	Numerical (in Excel)	Graph for general decline factors 6 graphs to present specific decline factors

**Phase 1: Data Synthesis and Analysis.** The data synthesis in this phase involved generating a summary table from the included articles using content analysis. This process aimed to systematically extract key information from each article and categorize it under relevant themes. The quantitative analysis in this phase involved processing numerical data to create a graph in Excel that illustrated the articles' publication month and year. This visualization provided a clearer understanding of the time frame of the included studies and helped assess trends in the reporting of int-student decline in UK HEIs.

**Phase 2: Data Synthesis and Analysis.** In the second phase, data synthesis focused on categorizing and analyzing the identified factors contributing to the decline. A table was created to list the general decline factors, followed by a detailed breakdown of specific factors within each category. To achieve this goal, content analysis and PESTLE analysis (Afshar & Shah, 2025) were applied to extract themes related to the broader decline factors, whereas thematic analysis

was used to further refine and classify specific contributing factors. The extracted data were then organized in a list for clarity.

The quantitative analysis in this phase involved graphical representation of the findings. A graph was constructed to show the weights of each general factor contributing to the decline. Additionally, six separate graphs were created to illustrate the relative weight of each specific factor within its corresponding general factor. Numerical analysis in Excel was conducted to calculate the average number of studies confirming each general factor, which was used to test the previously formulated hypotheses. Finally, the overall results from this analysis were utilized to answer the main research question of the study.

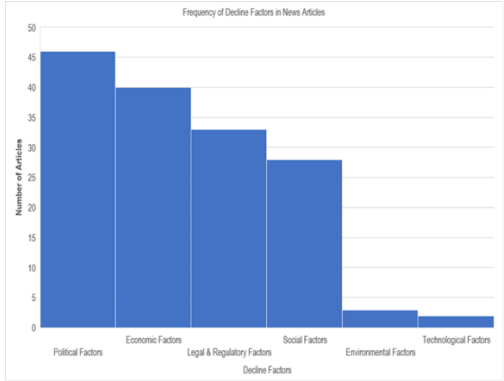
## **RESULTS**

### **Summary of Included News Articles**

A total of 32 articles published from January 2024 to the end of March, 2025, were selected for inclusion and were analyzed. A structured table was developed to present key details for each article, including the publisher's name, year and month of publication, article title, reference, and scope, which provides a brief summary of the article's content to facilitate comparisons and comparisons of the emerging data, as shown in Appendix 1. As discussed in detail below, news framing of the topic clearly revealed that UK HEIs face serious financial challenges because of new visa rules, especially the ban on student dependents, entailing job cuts, with some calling for changes to immigration policies. The distribution of the included news articles over the study period is presented in Figure 3, which shows heightened concern and interest in the topic among various stakeholders in September, the beginning of the 2024–2025 academic year.

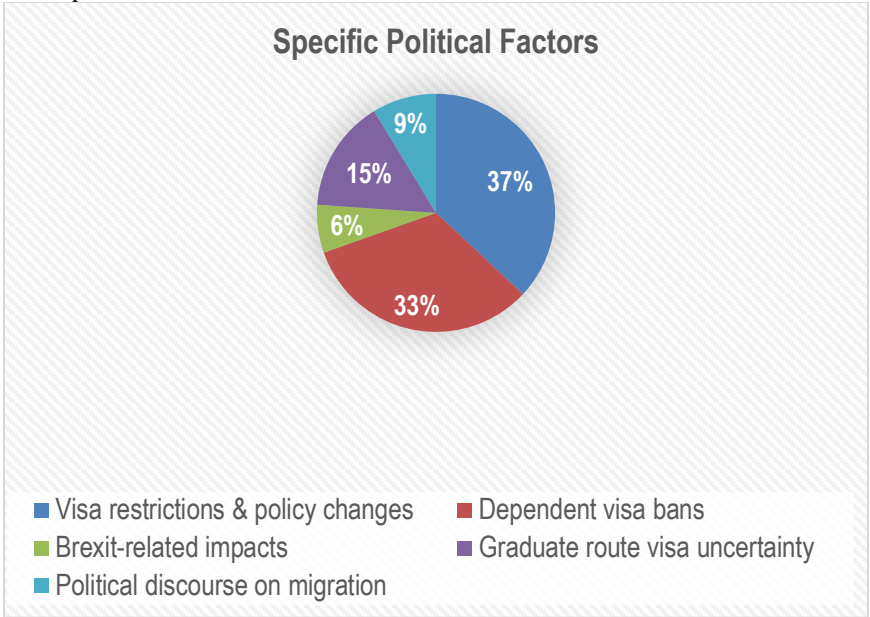
### **Identification of Decline Factors**

The identification of the decline factors was achieved by analyzing the content of each news article and extracting any factors that could be categorized under PESTLE domains. A breakdown of the studied dimensions for each article is shown in Appendix 2. To gain more insight into the derived findings, a numerical analysis was conducted to clarify the results. The frequency of items listed under each of the six decline factor categories is illustrated in Figure 2. It shows that the four main contributing factors, in order, are political, economic, legal/regulatory, and social. For a more detailed analysis, the items under each of the six general decline factors are sorted into subthemes to identify specific decline factors within each category, as presented in the figures below.



**Figure 2: Frequency of Decline Factors in News Articles**

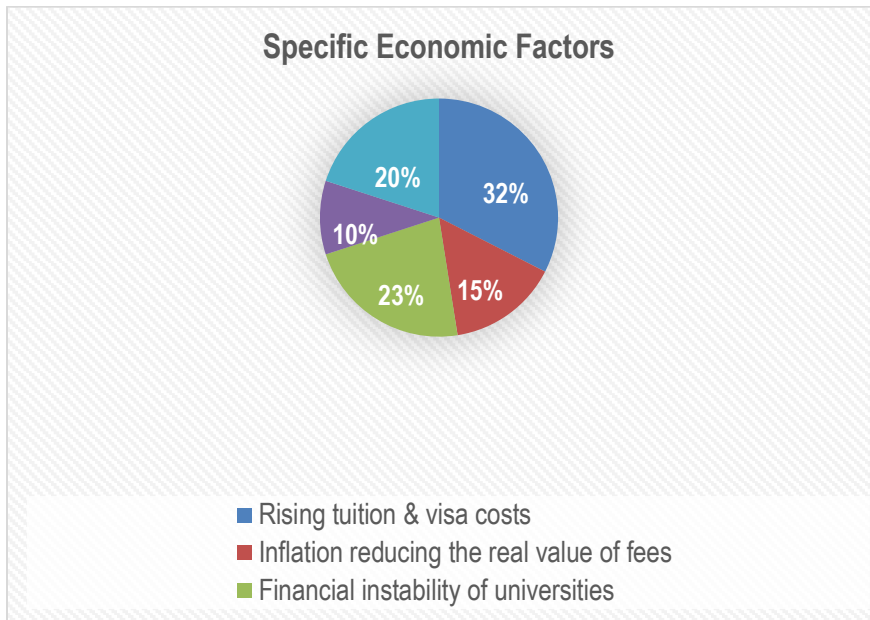
As shown in Figure 3, the specific political factors indicate that the leading issue concerns visa restrictions and policy changes affecting international students. This is followed by the cancellation of dependent visas. The uncertainty surrounding the Graduate Route visa ranks third in terms of impact. Two other factors also had some influence—namely, the politicization of migration and the consequences of Brexit.



**Figure 3: Specific Political Factors**

The specific economic factors include increased tuition and visa costs as the most prominent issue. This is followed by financial instability within HEIs, a

rising cost of living, inflation that reduces the real value of fees, and a decline in government support.



**Figure 4: Specific Economic Factors**

The specific social factors reveal that the leading issue, accounting for 43%, concerns negative perceptions of UK policies. This is followed by limited post-study work opportunities and a lack of confidence in UK education. Other noted factors include declining diversity and concerns about safety.

Technological factors contributing to the decline in international student enrollment were relatively limited, with concerns centering on reduced investment in digital learning and research infrastructure and the lack of comprehensive data on graduate employability and the contributions of dependents. Legal and regulatory factors, however, emerged as more significant influences, particularly stricter visa policies, uncertainty surrounding Graduate Route visa regulations, increased financial requirements for visas and health insurance, enhanced compliance measures, regulations affecting recruitment agencies, and post-Brexit policy changes. Environmental factors were the least frequently reported, with a shortage of student accommodation identified as the primary concern. Overall, the findings of this systematic mapping review align closely with the existing literature, highlighting political, economic, legal/regulatory, and social factors as the principal drivers of the recent decline in international student enrollment in the United Kingdom.

One of the most prominent political factors identified was the restriction of student visas and the cancellation of dependent visas. This finding supports

existing research (Trevena, 2019; Wilkins et al., 2012), which highlights the significance of immigration policies and poststudy work opportunities as pull factors. The uncertainty surrounding the Graduate Route visa further reinforces the literature's view that clear, supportive visa frameworks are essential for attracting students.

Economic concerns—such as increased tuition fees, high visa costs, and rising living expenses—were central to the findings. These challenges echo those of previous studies (Ke et al., 2022; Lopes et al., 2024), which stress that affordability is a key determinant of destination choice. Furthermore, the financial instability of UK HEIs, owing to overreliance on international tuition fees, confirms warnings by Wilkins et al. (2012) about the risks of such dependency.

From a social perspective, the findings highlight negative perceptions of UK policies and a decline in diversity. These issues align with the literature, which emphasizes the importance of country reputation, cultural appeal, and student confidence in educational quality (Chen, 2008; Maringe & Carter, 2007). Additionally, limited poststudy opportunities and safety concerns emerged as influential social factors affecting student decisions.

Legal and regulatory barriers—especially stricter visa policies and increased financial thresholds—further support concerns raised in the literature (Cavanagh & Glennie, 2012; Weimer & Barlete, 2020), which argue that the inclusion of international students in net migration figures can deter potential applicants.

While technological and environmental factors were less prominent, they remain noteworthy. A lack of investment in digital infrastructure and limited data on graduate employability echo the concerns discussed by Watermeyer et al. (2021). Similarly, the shortage of student accommodations, although minimal in occurrence, reflects persistent challenges in infrastructure readiness.

To test the redefined hypotheses in the introduction section, the average frequency score shown in Figure 4 was calculated to be 25. Any factor with a score above this threshold is considered significant, while those scoring at or below the threshold are deemed insignificant or “null.” Table 3 presents the outcomes of the hypothesis testing, indicating that four of the hypotheses were supported by the emergent results, while two were not.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings suggest that the reported decline in international student enrollment cannot be attributed to a single factor. Rather, media narratives consistently portrayed enrollment decisions as the result of interactions among immigration policies, economic conditions, institutional factors, and global competition. These findings align with international student mobility literature, which emphasizes the importance of both push and pull factors in shaping destination choice.

The prominence of visa policies and affordability concerns supports previous research demonstrating that government policies and financial considerations strongly influence student mobility decisions. Similarly, the

growing visibility of competing destination countries highlights the increasingly competitive nature of the global higher education market.

This paper explores the multiple reasons for the precipitous slump in int-student recruitment to British higher educational institutions since 2024, finding that it can mainly be ascribed to a combination of PESTLE barriers. While the UK has a longstanding academic and cultural brand, political and economic policies have made it a forbidding prospect for international students. In particular, hostile immigration policies, including cancelling and curtailing employment rights and dependent visas, increasing costs for tuition, and macroeconomic cost inflation (i.e., increased costs of general living), have profoundly undercut the competitiveness of Britain relative to global competitors for international students. Relatedly, UK educational institutions are overdependent on key recruitment markets (particularly China, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan) and are becoming increasingly financially insecure.

It must be emphasized that political decisions are the most instrumental factors, suggesting that the roots (and solution) of the problem lie with the government. Successive UK governments have included international students in their net migration reduction goals, with commensurate xenophobic populism and uncertainty about the safety of studying in the UK (e.g., erratic changes in policy can have severe negative impacts on students' lives, particularly for those with dependent family members). Other barriers to int-student recruitment to the UK include macroeconomic factors (i.e., high costs of tuition and living), a perceived lack of cultural diversity and celebration, technological issues concerning infrastructure, and a lack of clarity and certainty about the prospects for graduates (particularly in association with the restriction of the right to work in the UK after graduation from a UK university), and the poor-quality, expensive, and overcrowded accommodation options available to international students.

### **Limitation and Implications**

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis relies on publicly available news articles and media reports rather than primary data collected directly from students, universities, or policymakers. As a result, the findings reflect reported perceptions and narratives surrounding international student enrollment rather than direct evidence of causal relationships. Second, the study focuses on articles identified through Google searches and selected media sources, which may not fully represent all viewpoints or developments within the UK higher education sector. Third, media coverage may contain editorial biases that influence how issues are framed and presented. Future research should incorporate interviews with international students, university administrators, policymakers, and recruitment agencies, as well as official enrollment and visa datasets, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of international student mobility trends.

Future studies should extend this work by examining official enrollment, visa issuance, and retention data to determine the relative influence of policy, economic, and social factors on international student mobility. Comparative

studies involving major destination countries such as Canada, Australia, the United States, and Germany would further illuminate how policy environments shape student decision-making. Researchers may also explore the perspectives of current and prospective international students through interviews, surveys, and longitudinal studies to better understand how policy changes influence educational aspirations, destination choices, and post-graduation plans.

The first and most fundamental step to overcoming these issues would be not to include international students in statistical propaganda on net migration and a recalibration of political discourse toward a more factually based, rational, and long-term perspective about immigration. Flexible visas designed to support students through their academic journeys and a less restrictive dependent visa regime could encourage international students and help reduce the perception of the UK as a hostile educational destination.

Second, markets for student recruitment should be less dependent on a small pool of key sending countries to make HEIs less vulnerable to supply-side shocks. The expansion of scholarships would also be beneficial for recruiting top talent, but this seems infeasible in the current financial impasse.

Third, HEIs should invest more resources in services for international students, spanning the journey from recruitment to pre-arrival support and later guidance on career options. Such steps can increase customer satisfaction and institutional reputation.

Fourth, closer consultation must be arranged between the government and HEIs to meet the important needs of the academic sector in policy formulation. The ruinous impact of government policy on the HEI sector endangers not only HEIs themselves (and thus hundreds of thousands of jobs within the sector) but also the vast ancillary wealth generation and local socioeconomic and cultural life that international students bring to local communities, particularly in university towns.

Finally, Britain must take steps to manage its branding crisis by signaling that it does not despise foreigners (which would require a fundamental recalibration of the pungently xenophobic political discourse and policy) and seek to commit to ethnic diversity, high-quality experiences for students and other international visitors, and high-quality academic services.

Based on this analysis, major steps are needed to prevent looming catastrophes for UK HEIs. Student immigration policies must be depoliticized, and HEIs must offer more support and better-quality services if national international competitiveness is to be rehabilitated. Failing to take the required steps will result in the liquidation of many HEIs, resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs and a severe collapse in the reputation, influence, and knowledge and innovation capital of the UK and its educational sector. Evidence-based policies must be developed by HEI and government stakeholders to develop a cohesive and effective policy for the challenging years ahead.

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- None
- Some sections, with minimal or no editing
- Some sections, with extensive editing
- Entire work, with minimal or no editing
- Entire work, with extensive editing

This article does not incorporate content generated by artificial intelligence (AI) tools.

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**APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF INCLUDED NEWS ARTICLES**

No.	Publisher	Month & Year	Title & Reference	Scope
1	Guardian	Aug 2024	“Sharp fall in international applicants wanting to study at UK universities” (Adams, 2024)	Reports a 15% drop in student visa applications, linking it to visa restrictions on dependents and financial challenges for universities.
2	Business Standard	Nov 2024	“UK student visa applications drop by 16%: What’s behind the decline?” (Singh, 2024b)	Highlights a 16% fall in visa applications and an 89% drop in dependent visas, raising concerns over financial sustainability.
3	Higher Education Policy Institute	Sep 2024	“Reduced international student numbers are a much bigger problem than you think” (Blake, 2024)	Examines the economic risks of declining international enrollments, warning of financial instability, job losses, and potential university closures.
4	The PIE	Jan 2025	“International applications to the UK dip in 2024” (Nash, 2025)	Reports a 14% fall in student visas in 2024, with postgraduate enrollments from Nigeria (-65%), India (-34%), and Pakistan (-31%) significantly impacted.
5	Research Professional News	Nov 2024	“UK slump in international student visa applications continues” (Parr, 2024)	Reports a 16% fall in student visas and an 85% drop in dependent visas, emphasizing financial strain and reliance on international fees.
6	Universities UK	Feb 2025	“What’s next for international student recruitment?” (Modhvadiya, 2025)	Discusses visa restrictions, rising immigration costs, and the impact on enrollments across study levels, with potential for recovery under the Labor government.
7	House of Commons Library	Sep 2024	“International students in UK higher education” (Bolton et al., 2024)	Reviews enrollment trends, Brexit’s impact, and financial risks due to reliance on international student fees.
8	ICEF Monitor	Oct 2024	“International enrollment declines pressuring UK universities this year, with one in three facing significant financial challenges” (ICEF Monitor, 2024b)	Highlights that one-third of universities facing financial distress due to falling international enrollments and Brexit-related funding challenges.
9	National Union of Students UK	Sep 2024	“Dismantle the hostile environment” (National Union of Students UK, 2024)	Argues that restrictive immigration policies, including the dependents ban, have made the UK less attractive, damaging the sector’s reputation.

No.	Publisher	Month & Year	Title & Reference	Scope
10	Higher Education Policy Institute	Sep 2024	“As UK study visas continue to drop, institutions should focus on recruiting from these emerging student populations” (Basiri, 2024)	Reports a 13% decline in visas, with major losses from Nigeria (-70%) and Bangladesh (-56%), but growth in demand from Pakistan and Nepal.
11	The Standard	Jul 2024	“UK universities struggle to recruit international students” (Quadri, 2024)	Reports a 40% drop in visa applications, particularly in postgraduate (-55%) and undergraduate (-23%) enrollments.
12	British Council	Feb 2024	“Refocus for UK higher education as international student numbers expected to fall” (British Council, 2024)	Examines reasons for declining inbound mobility, including policy shifts, rising costs, and growing global competition.
13	VNEXPRESS	Jan 2025	“UK sees 14% decline in international student visa applications” (Anh, 2025)	Highlights a 14% visa decline in 2024, particularly affecting postgraduate enrollments and key markets like Nigeria (-65%) and India (-34%).
14	The i Paper	Aug 2024	“Universities scramble to fill places after losing £1.2bn in international fees” (Dimsdale & Phillips, 2024)	Discusses financial losses due to falling international student numbers, with 40% of universities running budget deficits.
15	Study Travel Network	Aug 2024	“UK business schools see decline in international student applications for 2024/25” (Kealy Roberts, 2024)	Reports sharp declines in postgraduate applications (-75%) for MBA programmes, mainly from non-EU students.
16	ICEF Monitor	May 2024	“UK: Home Office data finds a significant drop in student visa applications for Q1 2024” (ICEF Monitor, 2024a)	Reports a 44% visa decline in early 2024, with an 80% drop in dependent applications and significant falls in Nigerian (-63.5%) and Indian (-34%) enrollments.
17	Money Week	Jun 2024	“UK universities at risk as international student numbers fall” (Wilson, 2024)	Discusses how visa restrictions, rising salary thresholds, and policy uncertainty have increased financial instability in universities.
18	Forbes	Jun 2024	“Major blow to U.K. universities: The decline of international students” (Laker, 2024)	Examines the impact of enrollment declines on financial sustainability, citing York’s £24 m deficit and sector-wide concerns over recruitment strategies.

No.	Publisher	Month & Year	Title & Reference	Scope
19	Migration Observatory	Jan 2025	“Student migration to the UK” (Cuibus & Walsh, 2024)	Reviews student migration trends, noting the Graduate Route visa’s impact, and warning of future declines due to new policies on visas for dependents.
20	Fortune	Nov 2024	“UK universities brace for financial ‘crunch’” (Taix & AFP, 2024)	Highlights falling visa numbers (5% in 2023, 16% in 2024) and universities’ increasing reliance on international tuition fees.
21	WONKHE	May 2024	“International student numbers could fall a lot further yet” (Dickinson, 2024)	Criticizes government visa policies and warns of further declines in international enrollments due to immigration policy shifts.
22	The Critic	Nov 2024	“British universities should stop using foreign students as a crutch” (Jones, 2024)	Argues that UK universities’ overreliance on international fees is unsustainable, and calls for domestic tuition reform.
23	Business Standard	Oct 2024	“Be very careful”: UK colleges warn amid 16% drop in foreign student visas” (Singh, 2024a)	Reports a 16% visa decline and an 89% drop in dependent applications, raising concerns over university financial stability.
24	Reuters	May 2024	“UK universities at risk as international student numbers plunge” (Macaskill, 2024)	Highlights a 63% drop in postgraduate deposits, and potential university closures if Graduate Route visa restrictions continue.
25	IFS	Nov 2024	“A decline in foreign students and higher costs challenge Scottish universities” (Ogden, 2024)	Examines the financial strain on Scottish universities due to falling international enrollments and reduced domestic student funding.
26	The National News	Sep 2024	“UK universities face financial nightmare from foreign student shortfall” (Harley, 2024)	Reports a 17% visa drop and financial instability at mid-tier universities, with potential institutional closures.
27	Financial Times	Aug 2024	“International students to return in smaller numbers to UK universities” (Borrett & Foster, 2024)	Reports a 35% drop in student deposits, with key declines from Nigeria (-65%) and India (-44%), while Kenya and Nepal show growth.
28	BBC News	October 2024	“Drop in foreign student visas worrying for UK universities” (Standley, 2024)	Reports a 44% visa decline in early 2024, highlighting the Graduate Route visa’s uncertain future.
29	The PIE	Jun 2024	“UK reports warn against dismissing concerns on international student numbers” (Hogan, 2024)	Warns of financial instability due to reliance on international fees, and urges diversification in recruitment.

No.	Publisher	Month & Year	Title & Reference	Scope
30	UK in Changing Europe	Feb 2024	“The unexplored impacts of international students” (Costas-Fernandez et al., 2024)	Finds no negative impact of international students on domestic student outcomes, and emphasizes their economic contributions.
31	Dazzling Dawn	May 2025	“Will a drop in international students affect London?” (DD Staff, 2025)	Discusses London’s financial reliance on international students (£9.6bn contribution), and concerns over a 14% visa drop.
32	ICEF Monitor	Mar 2025	“UK: Reduced demand from India, Nigeria, and Bangladesh drive a 14% decline in visas” (ICEF Monitor, 2025)	Reports a 14% decline in visas, with sharp drops from India (-26%), Nigeria (-55%), and Bangladesh (-31%), but growth in Pakistan (+13%) and Nepal (+44%).

**APPENDIX 2: FINDINGS FROM THE IDENTIFICATION OF “DECLINE FACTORS”**

No.	Decline Factors					
	Political	Economic	Social	Technological	Legal	Environmental
1	The UK government’s tightening of student visa policies. Restrictions on dependents. UK a less attractive destination.	Rising inflation. UK education less affordable.	Negative perception of UK policies among international students. Concerns over inclusivity and accessibility to family support during studies.	NA	Stricter immigration regulations. Ban on most student dependents for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students.	NA
2	Visa policy changes banning most international students from bringing dependents.	Financial instability.	The UK’s reduced attractiveness as a study destination due to restrictive policies. Negative perceptions about treatment of international students.	NA	Visa policies.	NA
3	Uncertainty caused by government policies on university funding and visa restrictions.	Rising tuition fees. Increased cost of living.	Negative perceptions about the UK’s attitude toward international students. Post-Brexit challenges. Concerns about safety.	Reduced investment in digital learning infrastructure and research opportunities.	Stricter visa regulations. Ban on student dependent visa.	NA

No.	Decline Factors					
	Political	Economic	Social	Technological	Legal	Environmental
4	Uncertainty caused by government policy shifts, and the dependents ban.	Financial pressures.	Negative perceptions of the UK.	NA	Changes to visa regulations. Uncertainty over the Graduate Route.	NA
5	Government restrictions on dependents. Increased visa and immigration costs. Uncertainty over the Graduate Route visa.	Higher tuition fees. Increase in visa costs. Cost of living.	Declining attractiveness of the UK as a study destination. Concerns over poststudy work opportunities. Perceptions of hostile migration policies.	NA	Stricter visa policies.	NA
6	Government restrictions on dependents. Increased visa and immigration costs. Uncertainty over the Graduate Route visa.	Higher tuition fees. Increase visa costs. High cost of living.	Declining attractiveness of the UK as a study destination. Concerns over poststudy work opportunities. Perceptions of hostile migration policies.	NA	Stricter visa policies.	NA
7	Government restrictions on international students bringing dependents. Changes in student visa policies. Review of the Graduate Route visa.	Increased tuition fees. Higher visa and immigration costs. Rising living expenses.	Declining attractiveness of the UK due to Brexit. Removal of home fee status for EU students. Concerns about English language requirements for some international students.	NA	Post-Brexit visa requirements for EU students. Restrictions on switching from student to work visas. Stricter compliance regulations for universities and student recruitment agents.	Lack of available accommodation for international students.

No.	Decline Factors					
	Political	Economic	Social	Technological	Legal	Environmental
8	Government policies restricting student dependents. Uncertainty over the Graduate Route visa. Reduced poststudy work rights.	Rising costs of tuition. Inflation. Reduced government funding.	The dependents ban has made the UK less attractive to international students from key markets such as Nigeria, leading to a 49% drop in Nigerian student applications.	NA	Stricter visa policies. Limitations on student dependents. Limitations on work visa transitions	NA
9	Hostile environment policies. Ban on international student dependents.	Financial losses.	Anti-immigration rhetoric and policies.	NA	Stricter visa regulations. Harsher dependent bans.	NA
10	Dependents ban.	Currency fluctuations . Declining GDP.	Changing visa policies and messaging on migration. Uncertainty and a less welcoming perception.	NA	Increased visa refusals. Higher withdrawal rates. Regulatory uncertainty.	NA
11	Visa restrictions. Ban on student dependents.	Financial instability.	Changing perceptions of the UK as a study destination.	NA	Stricter visa policies.	NA
12	Changes in UK migration policy.	Rising tuition. Rising in living costs.	Increased competition from the US. Increase in student visa health charges.	NA	Regulatory uncertainties.	NA
13	Visa restrictions. Ban on student dependents.	Rising costs of study. Rise in living expenses.	Uncertainty created by recent policy changes has damaged the UK's reputation.	NA	Stricter visa policies. Ban on dependents. Increased financial requirements.	NA
14	Visa restrictions. Ban on student dependents. Higher salary requirements	Rising tuition fees. Inflation. High living costs. Currency devaluation in key markets.	International students feeling unwelcome.	NA	Stricter visa policies. Tough financial requirements . Rise in student visa issuances.	NA

No.	Decline Factors					
	Political	Economic	Social	Technological	Legal	Environmental
	for work visas.					
15	Changes in UK immigration policies.	Rising tuition fees. Rising in living costs. Currency fluctuations.	Reduced confidence in the UK as a study destination. Perceived unwelcoming policies.	NA	Stricter visa policies. Harsher work visa requirements.	NA
16	Visa restrictions. Dependents ban.	Rising tuition fees. Rising in visa costs. The 65% increase in the immigration health surcharge.	NA	NA	Uncertainty over the graduate route visa.	NA
17	Stricter immigration policies. Dependents ban. Higher salary thresholds for work visas. Potential restrictions on non-Russell Group institutions recruiting overseas students.	International tuition fees.	Higher living costs. Limited poststudy work options. Perceived hostile environment.	NA	Potential reforms to recruitment agents. Stricter English language requirements. Visa restrictions.	NA
18	UK government immigration policies. Restrictions on student dependents. Potential changes to the Graduate Route visa.	Financial instability in universities, budget deficits, and cuts in spending.	International students' confidence in UK education is declining.	NA	Scrutiny of recruitment agents. Potential tightening of visa regulations.	NA

No.	Decline Factors					
	Political	Economic	Social	Technological	Legal	Environmental
19	UK immigration restrictions. January 2024 dependent visa ban.	Rising tuition fees. Rising in cost of living. Limited financial aid.	Negative perceptions of UK immigration policies. The removal of financial incentives like scholarships	NA	Changes in student visa regulations. Uncertainty over the Graduate Route visa.	NA
20	Brexit-related impacts. Tightened visa restrictions. Ban on student dependents. Restrictions on switching to work visas.	Tuition fees.	Negative perception of the UK as an international study destination. Students preferring Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands, where courses are taught in English.	NA	Visa policy changes. Work opportunities for international students.	NA
21	Government crackdowns on visas. Political pressure to reduce net migration. Ban of dependent visas.	The government aims to cut migration.	The UK's reputation as a study destination is declining. Students choosing alternative destinations such as Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands, which offer better poststudy work options.	NA	Stricter visa regulations. Increased refusals and application withdrawals.	NA
22	Government visa restrictions. Ban on dependent visas.	Vulnerability to policy shifts.	A widening attainment gap. Quality of recruitment is declining in favor of quantity.	NA	The Graduate Route visa.	NA
23	Restrictive immigration policies. Ban on student dependent visas. Government to curb net migration.	The cost of studying in the UK remains high. Alternative destinations (e.g., Canada and Australia) more appealing.	The perception that the UK is becoming less welcoming to international students. Concerns about poststudy work opportunities.	NA	New visa regulations limiting dependents to research students and scholarship holders.	NA

No.	Decline Factors					
	Political	Economic	Social	Technological	Legal	Environmental
24	The UK government's push to reduce net migration. Restricting student visas. Ban on dependent visa.	UK universities are in a financially precarious situation. Concerns have been raised about graduate employment rates and low salaries poststudy.	Negative perception of UK immigration policies. Competition destinations other like Canada, Australia, and the US.	NA	Potential further restrictions on the Graduate Route.	NA
25	The Scottish Government's budget cuts. Visa policy changes. Discouraging international enrollment.	Declining real-terms per-student funding for domestic undergraduates. Higher employer National Insurance contributions increasing staff costs. Financial dependency on international students, whose numbers are decreasing.	Reduced accessibility to higher education for Scottish students. Increasing costs.	NA	Tighter UK immigration rules.	NA
26	UK government visa restrictions.	Universities' reliance on international fees. Rising inflation is also reducing the value of domestic tuition fees.	The perception of the UK as a less welcoming destination.	NA	Visa policy changes. Restrictions on dependent visas.	NA

No.	Decline Factors					
	Political	Economic	Social	Technological	Legal	Environmental
27	Restrictive visa policies. Ban on most postgraduate students bringing dependents.	Higher tuition fees.	Growing competition from alternative destinations.	NA	UK immigration policies remain a barrier, with mixed signaling by the new government toward a more welcoming stance toward international students.	NA
28	Visa restrictions. Discouraging applications from key markets like Nigeria and India.	Rising costs for students.	Negative perception of UK policies.	NA	The Graduate Route review has created uncertainty.	NA
29	Government restrictions on international students have led to financial strain on universities.	Overreliant on international fees. Growing funding shortfalls.	Public concerns over rapid growth of international students.	Lack of data on graduate employment outcomes and dependents' contributions makes policy decisions less evidence-based.	Visa restrictions	Accommodation shortages are straining resources.
30	Government visa restrictions.	Universities rely on international tuition fees to offset frozen domestic fees.	Public concerns about overreliance on international students could shape future policies.	NA	Lack of data on graduate outcomes and dependents' contributions creates policy uncertainty.	NA
31	Government policies restricting	International students contribute £9.6bn	Deter diversity and limit soft skills development.	NA	Stricter visa policies.	Accommodation shortage.

No.	Decline Factors					
	Political	Economic	Social	Technological	Legal	Environmental
	student dependents. Tightening poststudy work opportunities discourage international enrollment.	annually, supporting university finances and local businesses.				
32	The UK government's dependents ban.	Alternative study destinations . Offering competitive tuition fees and better visa policies.	Students are reconsidering the UK due to high living costs. Visa restrictions. Lack of poststudy work opportunities.	NA	The UK's restrictive immigration policies.	NA