

Institution: University of Southampton		
Unit of Assessment: 16 Economics and Econometrics		
Title of case study: 16-01 Improving the measurement of international student migration in the UK		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: January 2010 – December 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Corrado Giuliatti	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Research Fellow; Senior Research Assistant; Lecturer; Professor of Economics	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: August 2006 – August 2007; February 2008 – August 2009; September 2009 – February 2010; February 2016 – present
Jackline Wahba	Professor of Economics	January 1995 – present
Chuhong Wang	Research Fellow	September 2016 – March 2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: July 2017 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research at the University of Southampton has been instrumental in changing the way the Office for National Statistics (ONS) measures international student migration and conducts research on student migration. The accuracy of such statistics is crucial, both because of the large number of international students in Higher Education (HE) and because of the pivotal role that these statistics have in influencing immigration policy. The impact of this research on improving the measurements of international student migration statistics has been recognised by being awarded the ESRC Impact prize for Public Policy Impact in 2020.</p> <p>In addition, the evidence from our research is seen as vindication of the HE sector's longstanding concerns over the accuracy of the ONS's estimates of overstayers, which have been used to justify implementing a more restrictive student immigration regime. Our findings have also been used as evidence against international students overstaying by the ONS, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), Universities UK (UUK) and the Greater London Authority (GLA).</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>This work is underpinned by Professors Corrado Giuliatti and Jackline Wahba's rich body of research on international migration. Giuliatti has developed methodologies to combine aspects of various data sources to provide time series estimates of detailed migration flows [3.1], and, together with Wahba, used a novel survey design to analyse migration propensities [3.2]. Wahba has also led an extensive body of research on return migration focusing on the determinants of out-migration and re-migration intentions [3.3]. This project also builds on their expertise in devising online student surveys to capture students' migration patterns and behaviour. For example, Giuliatti and Wahba have also developed a unique online student survey to investigate the impact of student migration on their norms and economic behaviour in China, within an ESRC-funded project [G3].</p> <p>Since 2016, Giuliatti and Wahba together with Professor Jane Falkingham (Professor of Demography at the Department of Demography and Social Statistics), of the University of Southampton's ESRC Centre for Population Change (CPC), led the development of a methodology that captures potential gaps in existing statistics, in particular the International Passenger Survey (IPS), to produce representative data on the migration intentions and behaviour of international graduating students in the UK. This was in collaboration with the ONS and UUK and comprised two waves of the Survey of Graduation International Studies (SoGIS, also referred to as the CPC-ONS-UUK Survey [G1, G2]).</p>		

The accuracy of the estimates of international student migration is vital, as they not only directly feed into aggregate national migration statistics, but crucially are also used to inform immigration policy that eventually affects prospective international students and the whole Higher Education sector. In the academic year 2016/17, around 450,000 international students (312,000 from non-EU countries and 138,000 from EU countries) were studying in the UK. Traditionally, student migration statistics have been based on estimates by the ONS from the IPS.

SoGIS Wave 1 captured a) international (non-UK) student mobility patterns whilst studying in the UK; b) students' future intentions on staying or leaving the UK after graduation; and c) the certainty of these intentions in 2017 [3.4]. SoGIS Wave 2 tracked a subset of respondents six months after Wave 1, in order to capture actual migration behaviour after graduation and the reasons that led to the choice to leave or stay in the UK [3.5].

This work discovered new aspects about the volume and patterns of temporary departures by international students whilst studying, posing a challenge to the statistics from the IPS. Furthermore, empirical findings based on the survey provided novel evidence on migration intentions after graduation, both by comparing EU and non-EU graduating students, and by matching those intentions with actual migration choices after graduation a few months later. About 9 out of 10 international students who – at the time of SoGIS Wave 1 – expressed the intention to immediately leave the UK after graduation had actually left the country at the time of SoGIS Wave 2 [3.6]. The results are strikingly consistent with the statistics from the Home Office's Exit Checks that have been developed in parallel to the study, and which show that only 4,600 international students overstayed their visas in 2016, in stark contrast to previous suggestions from the government that the number was about 100,000 [5.8]. Taken together, the results highlighted that concerns about the non-compliance of international students in terms of over-staying their student visas were not supported by the data.

3. References to the research

3.1 Smith P, Raymer J & Giuliatti C (2010). Combining available migration data in England to study economic activity flows over time. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A*, 173(4): 733-753. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-985X.2009.00630.x>

3.2 Giuliatti C, Wahba J, & Zenou Y (2018). Strong versus weak ties in migration, *European Economic Review*, 04: 111-137. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euroecorev.2018.02.006>

3.3 Chabé-Ferret B, Machado J, & Wahba J (2018). Remigration Intentions and Migrants' Behaviour, *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 68: 56-72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2017.10.018>

3.4 Falkingham J, Giuliatti C, Wahba J, & Wang C, (2017). CPC-ONS-UUK Survey of Graduating International Students 2017, Technical Report, University of Southampton, ESRC Centre for Population Change. http://www.cpc.ac.uk/docs/2017_SoGIS_Technical_Report.pdf

3.5 Falkingham J, Giuliatti C, Wahba J, & Wang C, (2018). CPC-ONS-UUK Survey of Graduating International Students - Wave 2, Technical Report, University of Southampton, ESRC Centre for Population Change. http://www.cpc.ac.uk/docs/2018_SoGIS_Technical_Report_Wave2.pdf

3.6 Falkingham J, Giuliatti C, Wahba J, Wang C (2018) The impact of Brexit on International Students' Return Intentions, IZA Discussion Paper no 12032. <http://ftp.iza.org/dp12032.pdf> (Since published in *The Manchester School*).

Grants:

G1 CPC-ONS-UUK Survey of Graduating International Students - Wave 1, Office for National Statistics, £14,292, November 2016 - April 2017. Falkingham (PI) and Wahba (Col).

G2 CPC-ONS-UUK Survey of Graduating International Students - Wave 2, ESRC (ES/K007394/1), £70,396, September 2017- March 2018. Falkingham (PI), Giuliatti (Col) and Wahba (Col).

G3 Migration and the Reshaping of Consumption Patterns, ESRC (ES/L015684/1), £390,356, February 2015-July 2018. Wahba (PI).

4. Details of the impact

Our research has been **instrumental to the process of revising figures on international student out-migration**. Our findings were used – in conjunction with the Exit Check data – to highlight that the majority of international students plan to leave the UK once they graduate and that the vast majority actually adhere to their plans. Moreover, as highlighted by ONS in their testimonial letter, “research based on the CPC-ONS-UUK Survey of Graduating International Students, has been of significant value to the Office for National Statistics. In particular, the new evidence provided [...] has been important in informing changes to the way the ONS measures international student migration using the International Passenger Survey (IPS). The research has also informed ONS’s on-going internal research agenda on student migration, with the results around international students’ intentions stimulating further work on Exit Check data.” [5.1], ([5.2] p. 19) and [5.3].

Our research has impacted – both in terms of methodology and findings – the ONS’ commitment to improve student migration statistics, which is important for student migration policies. More precisely, the Office for Statistics Regulations states in their review of the ONS Code of Practice for Official Statistics on student migration statistics, ([5.2] pp 8 - 9), that: “[...] Requirement 4b: Similarly ONS should (a) use the data from the new CPC/ONS/UUK survey to improve its understanding of how the IPS might be identifying former-student emigration.[...]” Our research has contributed to the evidence base, leading ONS in 2018 “[...] to conclude that the IPS was likely to be underestimating former student emigration and we therefore concluded that any implied non-EU student net migration figure is likely to be an overestimate [...]”. Our survey also contributed to confirm “[...] the view of the Office for Statistics Regulation, UK Statistics Authority that these experimental estimates should not be used to produce implied student net migration figures [...]” [5.4]. As a result, the UK Statistics Authority asked ONS to review the quality of their long-term student migration statistics in July 2017 [5.5].

Also, our findings and evidence from the Exit Check data that the number of international student over-stayers is overestimated have contributed to the decision by the former Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, to **commission the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to review the impacts of international students in the UK** in 2017. This is the first time a review was commissioned in order to inform the debate at a time of controversy over the role of foreign students in the UK, and over the stricter visa conditions on international students due to concerns about over-stayers – which resulted in a fall in the numbers of non-EU students coming to study in the UK. This declining trend has been reversed since 2018 and was welcomed by the Higher Education sector. In the commissioning letter to the MAC, the Home Secretary highlights that “The Government welcomes the work which the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has been doing to improve the quality of statistics relating to international students” and that “The analysis of Exit Checks data published today shows that the overwhelming majority of students whose visa expired in 2016/17 were recorded as having left in time” [5.6]. Following the MAC’s review in September 2019, the Government announced a new two-year post-study work visa allowing international students to study and then stay to gain work experience in the UK – a move that was considered a major boost for the growing number of students from India (almost 22,000 in 2018/19) [5.7].

Moreover, our findings and data **have been used by several policy stakeholders and Government departments**. Indeed, ONS has extensively used our survey and its findings when providing evidence, for example, to the MAC’s call for evidence on the economic and social impacts of international students in October 2017 [5.8]. Also, ONS has relied on our research, as mentioned in their testimonial letter [5.1], when providing evidence about international students’ post-study plans, travel patterns, frequency of travel, and migration intentions versus actual behaviour, in a number of presentations, including to the Cross-Whitehall Group, at the Hearing of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) on student movement, and at the Migration Statistics User Forum (MSUF) in 2017.

Furthermore, evidence from our research was used by **UUK and the University sector** to highlight that previous ONS statistics overestimated the emigration gap, that is, the annual gap between the number of foreign students entering the country and those leaving [5.9]. For example, the PVC of Bournemouth University cited our research on their webpage to incoming students highlighting the value of international students and how they comply with visa requirements: “The report strengthens the argument to remove international students from the UK’s migration statistics. International students make an enormous contribution to the UK and an immigration system is needed that provides universities with the autonomy to recruit the brightest and best students to study here” [5.10]. Greater London Authority (GLA) and UUK relied on our findings when providing evidence on the impact of international students submitted to the MAC. GLA used our research to document low labour market participation and very low uptake of health services among international students in the UK ([5.11] pp. 292-294). Similarly, UUK relied on our work to document the positive fiscal impact of international students, ([5.11] pp. 561-562; p. 602). Also, the MAC [5.12] used evidence from SoGIS in the report’s section “Impact on the wider community” to describe the patterns of public services use by international students.

Our work on international student migration statistics and its impacts have been prominently recognised by the ESRC. The Centre for Population Change (CPC) has been awarded **the ESRC Impact Prize in the Outstanding Public Policy Impact category** in 2020 [5.13]. Our project “Improving the measurement of international student migration in the UK” was included in the filming activities which was shown at the Awards ceremony in November 2020. The ESRC Shortlisting Panel’s feedback to us highlighted that their decision was due to “how the impact engendered by our research and engagement with the Office of National Statistics has resulted in broad changes. They noted how more accurate data has changed predictions and strategies nationwide and has ultimately shaped how the country operates and plan for the future. The Panel agreed that CPC has developed a strong co-producing relationship with their policy delivery partner, which may function as a model for effective practice for others in academia.”

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Testimonial Letter from the Office of National Statistics, August 2019.

5.2 Office for National Statistics (2017) The quality of the long-term student migration statistics : A review of the continuing compliance with aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, July 2017.

<https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The-quality-of-long-term-student-migration-statistics.pdf>

5.3 Office for National Statistics (2017) International student migration research update: August 2017.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/internationalstudentmigrationresearchupdate/august2017>

5.4 Office for National Statistics (2018) Report on international migration data sources: July 2018.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/reportonthecomplexityandqualityofinternationalmigrationstatistics/july2018>

5.5 Letter from Director General for Regulation, UK Statistics Authority to the National Statistician, ONS: <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Student-migration-statistics-Ed-Humpherson-to-John-Pullinger.pdf>

5.6 Home Secretary’s commissioning letter on international students to the MAC, August 2017. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/639814/HS_to_MAC_-_students.pdf

5.7 UK announces 2-year post-study work visa for international students, 11 September 2019 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-2-year-post-study-work-visa-for-international-students>

5.8 Office for National Statistics (2017) Response to the Migration Advisory Committee's consultation on international students [Sections 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8]
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/responsetothemigrationadvisorycommitteesconsultationoninternationalstudents/2018-02-02>

5.9 New data show UK vastly overestimated students overstaying, Financial Times, 24 August 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/cd0da692-8820-11e7-bf50-e1c239b45787>

5.10 The Value of International Students – the Debate Continues, Global Buzz, 5 October 2017.
<https://microsites.bournemouth.ac.uk/globalbuzz/2017/10/05/starting-the-year-in-style>

5.11 Impact of international students in the UK: Call for evidence responses (1 of 3) Migration Advisory Committee September 2018.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/739092/Impact_intl_students_CfE_1of3.pdf

5.12 MAC (2018), Impact of international students in the UK, Migration Advisory Committee September 2018.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/739089/Impact_intl_students_report_published_v1.1.pdf

5.13 ESRC announces winners of its 2020 Celebrating Impact Prize
<https://www.ukri.org/news/esrc-announces-winners-of-its-2020-celebrating-impact-prize/>