

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the Augar Report is a very mixed bag. It is thoughtful but limited. It contains much careful and perceptive analysis, but ignores its own evidence. Far bolder changes are needed to address the issues it seeks to remedy. The disparities between the 50 percent who attend HE and the rest are likely to continue. Fiscal constraints on Augar alongside a lack of vision have prevented it from being sufficiently holistic—from seeing post-18 education provision as part of a whole system serving all 100 percent rather than HE serving 50 percent and FE the other 50 percent. There is no conversation in the Augar Report about the relationship between FE and HE or between academic and vocational education. The benefits of its reform package are confined, it leaves major problems untouched, and it triggers new anomalies.

It is unclear if any of the Augar Report's recommendations will be implemented. The report's future is marred by the fact that the review was commissioned by the now ousted Prime Minister May. It is possible that the report's recommendations will be cherry-picked by the Conservatives or others in the years ahead. However, the newly appointed minister responsible for universities, Jo Johnson (the new prime minister's brother) was sacked by May because he did not support such a review. He criticized the Augar Report when published, saying that reducing fees to £7,500 will leave a funding hole the Treasury would not fill. Such changes, Johnson predicted, would destabilize university finances, reverse progress on widening participation, and mainly benefit higher earning graduates. "Bad policy, bad politics," tweeted Johnson. ■

International Graduate Outcomes in the United Kingdom

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UUKi's recently published report International Graduate Outcomes 2019 is available at <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/intl-graduate-outcomes-2019.aspx>.

The UK's freshly minted International Education Strategy sets a target for the United Kingdom to attract

600,000 international students by 2030, an increase of 30 percent. The UK government decision to launch this strategy is not unconnected with our decision to leave the European Union. While there have always been those in government who understand the enormous opportunities created by our popularity with international students, Brexit has focused minds on repositioning the United Kingdom globally. Suddenly, we have found that a much broader range of politicians were interested in the connections that we forge through hosting international students. Now, right across government, there is a sharper awareness of the benefits that international students and graduates confer, not only in economic terms, but in long-term positive influence on perceptions of the United Kingdom itself.

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If we are to reach the new target, and return to significant growth in international student numbers, the United Kingdom needs to do two things. The first is sorting out our visa offer to ensure that the United Kingdom—like our competitors—offers an opportunity for international graduates to remain in the United Kingdom and work for a period post graduation. The second is to really understand, and where possible improve upon, the strength of our offer to prospective international students.

This context provided the impetus for Universities UK International (UUKi) to commission our recently published report *International Graduate Outcomes 2019* (i-GO).

THE APPROACH

UUKi commissioned I-graduate to survey international graduates of UK universities who graduated between 2011 and 2016. We enlisted the support of individual universities to contact their own alumni. As a result, we were able to gather responses from over 16,000 graduates of 58 UK universities based in 183 countries worldwide. We asked them a range of questions about their experience of studying in the United Kingdom, their careers to date, earnings, and desire to remain connected with the United Kingdom for the purposes of further study, research, business, professional reasons, or tourism.

The majority of respondents were medium-term graduates, between two and five years post graduation. But a significant minority (36 percent) were longer-term graduates

who were between five and seven years post graduation. The balance of respondents by nationality broadly reflected that of international students in the United Kingdom, with the largest group of respondents being from the United States, followed by China, India, Nigeria, and Malaysia. Interestingly, a significant proportion of respondents were currently residing in a third country, rather than the United Kingdom or their home country, illustrating the continued mobility of individuals who have been mobile for the purpose of study, and the extent to which a UK degree can provide a foundation for a global career. This was supported by the finding that 87 percent of respondents felt that they were more likely to do business internationally as a result of their UK degree.

KEY FINDINGS

The results of the study were strikingly positive. 82 percent of respondents said that their degree was worth the investment, with 69 percent believing that it helped them progress more quickly in their career than peers educated elsewhere, and a quarter stating that having a degree from the United Kingdom was the most important thing to their employer.

Over half (53 percent) of respondents believed that they earned above average or well above average compared to their peers. This self-reported earnings premium was corroborated by comparisons between earnings of responding graduates and available data for average graduate earnings in their home country. These comparisons suggest that, for example, the reported salaries of Chinese graduates were on average three times higher than the national average graduate salary for China, according to available data.

We found that, as we expected, a very high proportion of graduates wanted to remain connected with their universities, including for the purposes of further study and research. However, we also found that many expressed a desire to remain connected with the United Kingdom. Seventy-seven percent of respondents say they are more likely to do business with the United Kingdom; 81 percent want to develop professional links with UK organizations; and 88 percent plan to visit the United Kingdom for holiday or leisure.

These last findings are particularly helpful in making the case to the UK government to do more to attract and retain international students. Moves are already afoot to increase poststudy work opportunities. An extension of the current period from four to six months for undergraduates and master's students, and an automatic 12 months for those with PhDs has already been announced. Meanwhile the United Kingdom's recently reappointed universi-

ties minister, Jo Johnson, MP, led work in parliament to attract support for a proposed amendment to forthcoming immigration legislation. The amendment asks government to go further in its poststudy work offer for international graduates and received the backing of Boris Johnson and the UK's new Home Secretary Priti Patel.

LIMITATIONS, CAVEATS, AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

While this research highlights the advantages conferred on the United Kingdom by international students, and the advantages that a UK degree gives them in return, there is much more to do if we are serious about ensuring that there is a strong link between a UK degree and career success. UUKi is currently working on two fronts: expanding support available to companies who would like to take on international graduates through the provision of advice and guidance; and sharing good practice in careers support for international students. The latter topic will be the focus of UUKi's next research report, due to be published this autumn.

Finally, it is important to note that there are additional contributing factors to the outcomes of international graduates that the data in this study cannot wholly capture, including the financial, academic, and English language requirements that students must meet to study in the United Kingdom. Some of the graduates surveyed may have come from an already advantaged background—although, while we do not know the socioeconomic backgrounds of i-GO respondents, we do know that only 12 percent of them entirely self-funded their studies. It is likely that many international graduates who access higher education in the United Kingdom already have significant social and economic advantages that are likely to contribute to career success. For this reason, UUKi is taking a growing interest in the opportunities offered by online and other forms of transnational education in expanding access to those with limited opportunities to access high quality, international standard higher education. However, we know very little about the outcomes of students who study UK degrees abroad, an evidence gap that we must look to address as we develop international higher education for the future. ■