

**Future Diasporas?  
International Student Migration from India to the UK**

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## Introduction

Over the last decade, the number of students traveling to another country in pursuit of higher education increased over 75 percent, estimates indicate some 3.7 million students migrate globally (Varghese, IIEP Research paper, 2008). Current estimates stand at 4.1 million students worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Globalization processes have been a key driving force that has impacted and spurred student mobility. Although the rapid growth of mobility is relatively recent, the desire to acquire a higher education beyond national borders is itself not new; students and scholars have always sought learning opportunities around the world as a way to broaden their educational and cultural horizons. What has changed, however, is the overall context of global mobility, both in terms of who is going where, the mix of host and sending countries and the various social and economic factors that motivate students to pursue educational opportunities outside of their home country.

What has not changed, is the potential for international students who study abroad to permanently settle down in the host country and become part of the wide ranging Indian diaspora. It is a known fact that the 'brain drain' phenomenon was attributed to highly skilled professionals who were educated in India and decided to permanently settled in first world countries, especially in the US post 1960s. Their presence in different sectors of the host's economy, especially the IT sector, medicine, retail and nursing has been widely acknowledged. Global political and economic changes like the spread of international terror groups, the financial crisis and the formation of the European Union, have been accompanied by the tightening of immigration controls and policies, especially the capping of work visas. In such a scenario, amidst increasing privatization of education, the possibilities of the student route resulting in higher chances to work in the host country and hopefully, secure a residence permit cannot be undermined. Do international students stand a higher chance of becoming future diasporas? To answer such a question, it is important to delve into the costs and choices that govern international student migration from India. In this article, we present the data collected by the authors for a research study on international student migration from India to the United Kingdom (UK) sponsored by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs Research Unit on International Migration at Centre for Development Studies. Firstly, a historical background and detailed explanation of the UK Student visa policy is provided to contextualize the data presented. Secondly, the quantitative data based on the VFS UK survey will be discussed on the socio-economic profile of respondents, costs, choices leading to student migration, perceptions about education and destination, future prospects and process of migrating to the host country. This data will be interspersed with data from interviews to lay out the

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<sup>1</sup> OECD Education at a glance – 4.1 million international students in 2010 with UK receiving 12% of total share.

contours of the student migration process. To conclude, some points regarding possible policy interventions will be raised and directions for future research will be highlighted.

The demand for international students exists for various reasons. International students in top host countries like the USA and UK are especially valuable to these markets as they pay premium fees for acquiring their degree, up to three times the amount charged to local students (Lall, 2008). The inflow of international students therefore injects financial resources into host country economies, in addition to providing the much needed funds for the functioning of private institutions. An important motivation for attracting foreign students is also because they raise the performance standards of these universities, which is vital as it bears a positive influence on their global ranking (Khadria, 2001). Another reason why policies are being increasingly designed in favour of student migration (and migration in general) is due to the declining demographic trend of most developed nations. These countries have an ageing workforce nearing retirement, coupled with very low fertility rates and are thereby heading towards a shrinking workforce and population. As fertility rates remain below replacement level in OECD countries, a shrinking workforce is bound to 'intensify labour-market impacts' (Hawthorne, 2008). These countries consequently have a serious need to attract migrants who will form a vital component of their labour force in the years to come.

India is both a regional host country as well as a leading sending country with regard to international student migration. India has one of the world's largest higher education systems, comprising more than 350 universities and 16,000 colleges. The Indian government has enacted policies encouraging and helping more international students from developing countries to study in India. Simultaneously, as the number of international students from India increases, so will the complexity in their mobility patterns. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the total number of students from India studying overseas is 195,107. The top 5 destinations for Indian international students are the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Russia (Table 1). Germany used to feature in the top 5 till 2007 while China is emerging as a popular destination for Indian students.

Table 1: Top 5 destinations and number of students from India studying overseas in 2009

S No.	Destination	Number of Students
1	United States	101,563
2	United Kingdom	34,065
3	Australia	26,573
4	New Zealand	5,710
5	Russia	4,314 (2008)

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2011). *Global Education Digest 2011*. Montreal, Quebec: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

The Institute of International Education reports that India has been the leading source of foreign students in the United States since 2000-2001. In the 2007-2008 academic year, 15 percent of all foreign students admitted were from India, corresponding to almost 95,000 people. The majority of these Indian students pursue graduate studies, as did three out of four Indian students in 2006-2007. In a country profile report authored by Daniel Naujoks for the US based Migration Policy Institute (MPI), the number of Indians submitting applications to US graduate schools shrunk 12 percent for the 2008-2009 school year compared with 2007-2008, according to a report from the Council of Graduate Schools.

Studying in the United Kingdom has been a tradition for many Indian middle-class families. After a temporary slowdown, this movement gained momentum again in the last decade when British universities started to hold student fairs in India and recruit students directly. For this purpose, at least 14 British universities have opened full-time offices in India. In 2007, Indians made up 6.4 percent of the country's 374,000 foreign student enrollments, as reported by the Atlas Project — up from 4 percent in 2003. The UK Higher Education Statistics Agency reports that the majority of them are enrolled in graduate programs, the biggest number in business studies, followed by engineering and technology, and computer science.

The cost of education in Canada moreover, turns out to be inexpensive in comparison to several other countries. A higher number of scholarships are available at Post Graduate (PG) level than for the Under Graduate (UG) education at the Canadian institutions. To seek a visa to study in Canada, a student needs to have his or her admission or acceptance letter from the Canadian institution, academic and tests' scores and sufficient financial resources between Rs 6 lakh and Rs

7 lakh per year to fund his or her education and living expenses in Canada. During their course of education, international students are allowed to work off campus on a part-time basis. On completion of education, a student can work in Canada for two years, except in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

Singapore has launched a 5-star program, open to Indian students with outstanding academic merit (85 per cent and above) Indian students can get five-fold advantages of investing in education at Singapore. Tuition Grant is offered to all International Students and in return the student will enter in to an agreement with the Ministry of Education of Singapore Government. The Government of Singapore undertakes to pay the 75 per cent of the tuition fee for the student. It is a duty of the student after graduation to work in Singapore for period of 3 years which is governed by the agreement in the tuition grant. Dushyant Bachkaniwala, Founder-Director of DaLimit says, "The MOE school students are permitted to work part time during their study and officially the students can work 16 hours per week. Students enrolled under the 5 star program can also apply for permanent residency status". The Singaporean Government is committed to see international education grow, and by 2015 plans to attract 150,000 students. The combination of Asian schooling and Western-style practices has made Singapore an educational hub in Asia, and a number of international institutions, such as INSEAD, MIT, University of Chicago amongst other top-ranked global universities, have created satellite campuses there to serve as a launch pad for their entrance into Asia.

India is the largest source country of new international students to New Zealand and second largest source of skilled migrants according to data released in Migration Trends and Outlook 2010-11 by the Department of Labour, New Zealand. The country comprises eight universities, five institutes of technology and over 25 polytechnics. For a person who desires to study there, the country boasts of offering a secure, learning environment, competitive prices and a highly computerized and advanced set for training and study.

Student applicants who have not yet been admitted to a German university or *Studienkolleg* can apply for a Student Applicant Visa. It is valid for three months and can be converted into a residence permit for the purpose of studying once you have been admitted to a higher education institution. After arriving in Germany, most foreign students need a residence permit.

While substantial research has been conducted on indentured labour, Gulf migration, migration of skilled professionals, marriage migration etcetera from the perspective of host countries, there is a dearth of information and conclusive data on the numbers regarding international student migration from India, the choices and processes involved and the costs of migrating

internationally for education. Various stakeholders ranging from banks which provide loans and remit money from parents to children studying abroad, role of education fairs, education consultants and visa service companies like VFS that facilitate the student migration process have not been adequately studied.

Moreover, students do not come under the purview of international laws that protect migrant workers rights. They face several vulnerabilities due to their young age, expectations and differences in cultural, social racial and economic relations in the host country. In the past few years, news reports have covered the plight of Indian students who were left in the lurch when the host country withdrew licenses and shut down universities, for example the case of London Metropolitan University in UK. In other cases, students were tricked by agents who charged large sums of money and misled students on visa types, course options and costs. Moreover, as our study reveals, most students see higher education opportunities as a means of settling down in the host country and in a majority of cases, students are allowed to work a limited number of hours to pay for their living expenses. They usually work at minimum wages and are a supply of cheap labour in host destinations.

While international agencies like UNESCO, IIEP and host countries have collected some data on this issue, there has been no comprehensive study on international student migration from India from a sending country perspective. Therefore, the Research Unit on International Migration at the Centre for Development Studies conducted a study to understand the costs and choices affecting international student migration. The major reasons for overseas study fall into three categories (Cummins 1993): (a) lack of domestic facilities, especially in certain subject areas, prompted many students/governments to seek education in other countries; (b) the commercial value of a foreign degree encouraged individuals to seek higher education abroad; and (c) knowing and gaining experience in another country and culture encouraged many to seek education in foreign countries. The CDS study is a contribution to the growing literature on student mobility as it reveals that in a majority of cases, student migration is often the gateway for permanent stay in the host country. This is eased by policies in many destination countries that allow students to convert their student status into a residence permit if they find a job within a certain time after graduation, e.g. Australia and to a lesser extent, UK.

With tightening immigration regimes in the West, are Indian labour migrants turning to educational migration to gain easier entry into such countries and eventually secure job opportunities? What are the costs of international student migration in comparison to education in a good public/ private institution located within the country? What is the role played by agents,

diaspora organizations, alumni networks and visa facilitation centres in the student migration process? Traditionally, the United States and the United Kingdom have been favoured destinations for educational migration. What is the role of parents and their educational exposure in the choices leading to international migration for education? Does the shrinking family size and the expanding middle class affect family decisions to migrate for better future? What are the costs involved and how are they met by the student's family, how important is the availability of student loans in influencing decisions to migrate?

These were some of the questions that the research team set out with to try and answer through a study on international student migration from India. Moreover, CDS has been conducting a detailed large survey at the Kerala state level for the past 15 years. Already, five rounds of Kerala migration survey have been conducted by CDS Trivandrum and the data shows that students are emerging as an important aspect to observe through these surveys as well (Zachariah and Irudaya Rajan, 2012). The experience of working on the Kerala Migration Survey indicates that student out-migrants from the state have overtaken job seekers (Figure 1). The data shows that student migration from Kerala has increased from 15% in 1998 to 35% in 2011 ( Figure 2).

Figure 1

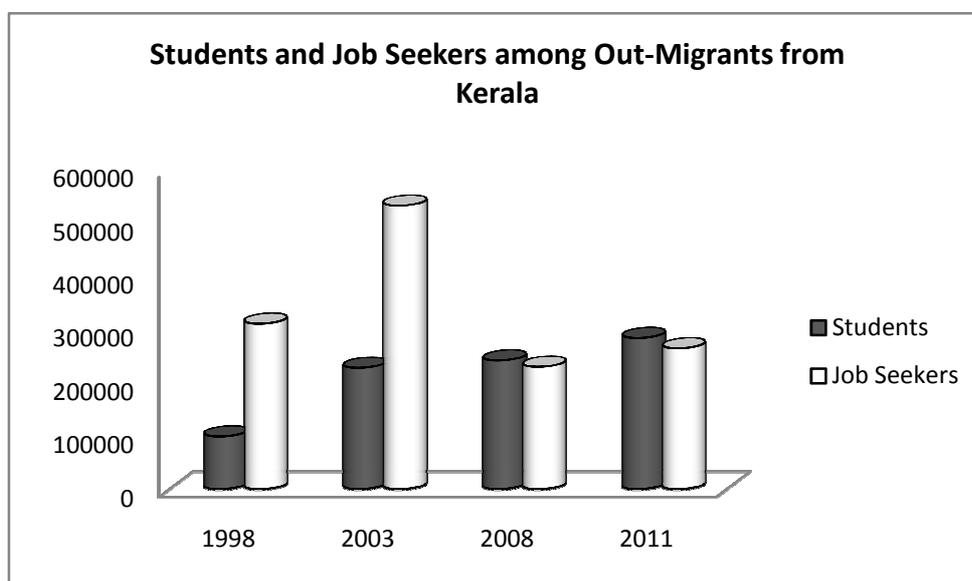
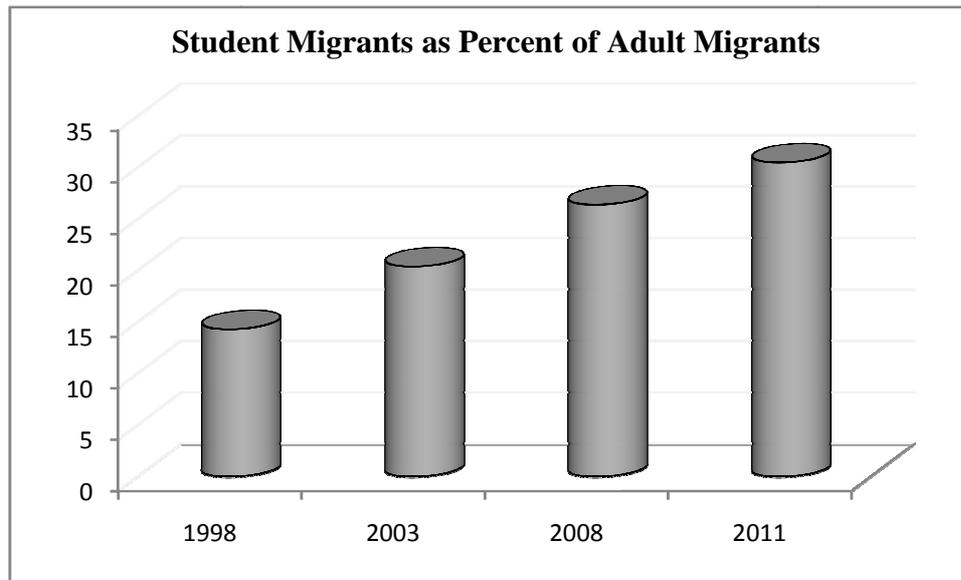


Figure 2



This article is primarily based on data collected through a survey of respondents via a short questionnaire canvassed to prospective students, and supplemented with interviews conducted with current students, parents of current as well as prospective international students from India. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with multiple stakeholders, Indian government officials involved in policy making and programme implementation relating to higher education, companies like VFS, education/ career consultants and alumni networks in India. The research team interviewed Embassy officials based in New Delhi from 5 countries, namely UK, Australia, Canada, USA and Germany responsible for facilitating student visas and universities based in India as well as officials involved in international education policy making in the host country. They were requested to provide relevant data regarding student migration and share their perceptions with the research team.

This paper focuses on data primarily collected through from 112 prospective students applying for student visas to the UK across 5 cities in India in 2012. These questionnaires were placed in VFS centres where the prospective student submitted his/her visa application and were filled by the respondents themselves on a voluntary basis. The study defines prospective students as those who have secured admission offers and confirmed them for 2012-2013, made provisions for financing the costs of migration, paid fees and is applying/ awaiting visa to depart to host country. To canvas the questionnaires to prospective students and accompanying parents, the team sought and received permission to canvass questionnaires at VFS visa services locations via the UK Border Agency (UKBA) in Delhi, Chandigarh, Chennai, Hyderabad and Cochin.

Embassy officials have also shared data collected on numbers of Indian students migrating to host countries over the years, preferred degrees and universities, numbers of Indian students granted residence permits after completion of education, inward receipts for education in India, information on scholarships funded by the government and by universities and information on accredited education agents in India. In addition, the research team met with representatives of the British Council and United States Educational Foundation in India (USEFI). Questionnaire-based and in-depth interviews with prospective students and parents of students studying abroad were also conducted. Researchers approached educational agents in Delhi and Chandigarh during December 2012 to understand the expertise and costs involved in the application process. A consultation was held on February 2, 2013 in Chandigarh with consultants working in the educational migration sector and their opinions and inputs were sought to understand the myriad ways in which international migration of students in India (especially in the north-west region) takes place.

### **International Student Migration to UK**

The United Kingdom (UK) is amongst the most favoured destinations by international students for higher education. The strength of international students in the UK increased from 209,554 in 2000 to 368,968 in 2009. As per data released by the International Institute of Education, most international students in the UK came from China and constituted over 12 percent of all international enrolments in 2009. However, there has been a decline in the number of Chinese students in the UK since 2006. Between 2000 and 2009, the number of Indian students who chose UK for higher education increased phenomenally from 3962 to 34,065. The strong annual growth since 2000 peaked in 2003 when the intake rose by 73.2 percent. As a result of such exceptional growth, Indian students represented 9.2 percent of all international students in UK in 2009, up from a mere 1.8 percent in 2000. Such phenomenal growth in Indian student enrolments could be in part due to the tightening of immigration (and student visa) policies in the US, following the terrorist attack in 2001. As a result of this, the flow of students may have been partially diverted towards the other English-speaking markets like the UK and Australia. However, the US retains the highest share of Indian students, almost 50 percent of all international students from India continue to migrate to the US.

Within Europe, the UK remains the most preferred destination by Indian students for higher education and this can be attributed to a number of factors. Due to the colonial presence for over two hundred years, India has shared a long-standing relationship with Britain and this has often encouraged more Indian students to choose the UK for higher studies. Additionally, English-

speaking countries have a natural advantage over others and this is an important reason why Indian students choose the UK. Familiarity with the English language often ensures that Indian students are able to integrate into a new environment with minimal difficulties.

Despite the advantages listed above, many Indian students have usually preferred the US over the UK for higher education. This is partly due to certain exclusive features of the US education system which give the country a strong edge over its competitors. The US has over 4000 accredited institutions and thus a stronger capacity to absorb students than most other countries. The presence of a large number of institutions also implies that compared to the UK, students can choose from a wider range of institutions and courses within the US. A majority of the most reputed institutions in the world are also located in the US which is another factor that attracts international students seeking quality education. Therefore, the US provides greater variety and flexibility to international students compared to the UK.

One of the main considerations which affect the choice of Indian students is the financial cost of higher education. Both the US and the UK charge premium fees from international students, tuition fees in UK can be up to ‘U.S.\$ 10,000 cheaper, for a similar degree in a British Institution’(Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). However, living costs in the UK are significantly higher than in the US. This makes the UK a more costly destination overall and acts as a deterrent for Indian as well as other international students. What is perhaps, more relevant in the case of India is the perception of higher education in the US. A degree from the US is still considered more valuable and useful in securing better jobs. Therefore, many students choose the US over other countries to ensure the highest returns on their financial investment. Moreover, as most Indian students who migrated abroad for higher education traditionally went to the US, an average Indian student’s awareness of possibilities in the ‘foreign’ market is skewed in favour of the US. Many of the prospective students in India also have family linkages with US returned Indians, which aids the favourable impression about the US for higher studies, this is also an influential factor in the case of the UK.

### **UK International Student Visa Policy: The Indian Experience**

In recent years, UK has taken a number of steps to facilitate student mobility and establish stronger academic ties with India. An example of this is the UK - India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) which was launched by the British Council in 2006, with the aim of promoting educational links between UK and India. In the last five years, UKIERI has made significant progress and established partnerships between universities, facilitated grants and enabled mobility of students between India and UK. These include 182 UK-India partnerships

involving 600 institutions on higher education & research, schools, professional & technical Skills, and 55 individual awards for PhD students and scholarships and other achievements.

An initiative by the UKIERI is the Study India Programme which has enabled 393 British students to visit India since 2006. In light of the success and increased scope for more collaboration, the funding for this project has been extended for another five years (2011-16) to comprehensively cover all areas of education in India. Over 20 UK universities have also set up their regional offices in India and represent a combination of technical (Middlesex and Greenwich) and research oriented universities (like Lancaster and Imperial College). Other universities with regional offices include Leeds, Birmingham, Oxford and Brookes. These universities have partnerships and work towards a establishing a long term relationship with India by engaging in course tie-ups, faculty exchanges and research tie-ups, in addition to student recruitment from India.

Perhaps the most successful strategy for the UK has been the clever promotion of UK universities in India. In cooperation with the British Council, universities have held two large scale education fairs each year, covering nine cities in India. These education fairs have provided a platform to more than 60 universities each year, including some well known universities like King's College, London. They cover a range of issues like visas, employment and subject selection. In addition to this, other cities are also targeted by conducting virtual discussions over the internet. These activities have succeeded to a large extent in providing quality assurance to students, in addition to increasing the visibility of the UK as a higher education destination. Evidently, the payoff for UK has been high as about 27,000 Indian students were recruited through these fairs.

Though the UK benefited from the tightening of visa restrictions by the US, following the 9/11 attack in 2001, recent developments have created a considerable barrier for many aspiring Indian students. The tightening of student visas was initiated in 2008 with the introduction of the Points Based System (PBS). The new student visa system (under Tier 4 of PBS) requires colleges and universities to carefully monitor international students and report those who fail to attend courses after obtaining visas. Universities who wish to recruit international students would require a special license to do so. Matters worsened in early 2010 when the UK Border Agency (UKBA) temporarily banned visa applications from North India (New Delhi, Chandigarh and Jalandar) following a sudden spurt in these applications from 1380 in 2008 to 13,500 the following year.

Though a part of it could be due to a drastic fall in applications to Australia (following the racial attack on Indians), this raised serious concern about the 'student' route being used to find employment in the UK. Following this, the UKBA revoked the licenses of 97 Tier 4 education

providers and suspended the licenses of another 37. The situation has deteriorated since then, sparked off by an early 2011 advert on Indian streets which revealed a scam that sold student visas for legal entry into UK. This incident, coupled with recent occurrences of illegal migration via the student route has given way to tighter regulations. Institutes wanting to sponsor foreign students now have to be classified as a Highly Trusted Sponsor by the UKBA. Student applications are also being put through tighter scrutiny as students are now required to secure considerably higher scores (5.5 in IELTS AND 87 in TOEFL) to be eligible. The most recent step was taken on 25th October, 2011 when the UK banned the financial statements of 1,900 Indian banks for student visa purposes. This has been implemented as part of the reforms introduced to have stricter vigilance over student migration and to ensure that students coming from India have legitimate proof of the funds required to support their stay in the UK.

The series of extreme steps taken to reduce illegal migration are likely to have a strong impact on the flow of genuine students from India. According to Rahul Choulaha, this would make the UK a 'less attractive destination for students as they see fewer prospects in future jobs and immigration'. Thus, the implementation of new visa regulations in the UK may have caused a serious setback in its appeal to Indian students, who are now more likely to look at other destinations for higher education. For example, the Student migration to the UK rose substantially till 2007 but is on a rapid decline since 2010. Application rates are expected to be even lower due to the recent change in policies.

**Table 2: Student visa application statistic to United Kingdom, 2007-2011**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Received</b>	<b>Issued</b>	<b>Issue Rate (Per cent)</b>
2007	34000	22000	65
2008	41000	28500	70
2009	93000	59400	64
2010	59000	41000	70
2011	43000	32000	75

Source: Data provided by the UKBA upon request during interaction with CDS research team in July 2012.

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) is a centralised application process for UK undergraduate study. It makes applying for full-time undergraduate degree courses and Higher National Dipomas (HNDs) straightforward and easy to understand. All UCAS institutions are recognised by the UK government or offer courses that are validated by UK government-recognised universities. Applicants through UCAS can make up to five choices at once on one application, apply to a wide range of different courses and institutions, apply online using UCAS

Apply and track the progress of applications. All international students who apply through UCAS are said to be treated fairly under UCAS procedures and rules.

However, no such institution exists for diploma students, which form a bulk of prospective students as per the CDS study. Diploma students are more prone to be misled in student migration to UK and to Australia. The study also highlights the variety of courses that students at the master level opt for in terms of education abroad, courses that are possibly not available yet in India or very few reputed institutes provide these courses and so the competition is very intense and makes it very difficult to qualify. Students whose parents had studied abroad were more confident of their experience and benefits while there were others who were totally dependent on the agents for guidance to select appropriate courses and costs involved.

The UK government has reviewed and reformed the major migration routes to the UK over the last couple of years. This includes working routes, study, family and employment related settlement. The aim has been to reduce net migration to the UK and to address abuse, whilst ensuring that the UK continues to be a destination of choice for high quality students and skilled and highly skilled workers. UKBA claims that each review included a global consultation on government proposals. The government announced changes to the student route on 22 March 2011. The package of reforms to Tier 4 (student) of the Points Based System aimed to tackle abuse within the student migration system (so the changes below reflect the areas in which abuse of the system had been detected) while continuing to attract and support genuine students wanting to study at good education providers in the UK. The announcement followed an extensive consultation, which generated over 31,000 responses.

By way of background, the points based system (PBS) is an “objective” visa application process in which the applicant must acquire a certain level of points from stipulated attributes, and meet the UK’s Immigration Rules, in order to be issued with a visa. PBS was introduced gradually to work and study routes since 2009. Long term students will have to apply for UK visas under Tier 4 PBS. For courses of less than 6 months or English language courses of up to 11 months, students may apply for a student visitor visa.

The UKBA policy states that university students would retain their right to work 20 hours per week part-time and to do work placements where work/study ratio is 50:50. Students in publicly funded FE colleges would continue to be able to work 10 hours per week part-time. Other students would not be allowed to work part-time and work placements would need 66:33 ratio of study to work. Only postgraduate and government Sponsored students would be able to sponsor dependants. Those dependants would be able to work. Several interview respondents felt that the

UK had become more difficult to work in as compared to Australia where immigration was relatively easier. It must be noted that these reflections are based on the semi-structured interviews for this study were conducted mostly in Delhi and Chandigarh while the questionnaire based data has a dominant Chennai sample.

### **Data from the CDS Study**

As mentioned earlier, the findings presented in this article are primarily based on the prospective student survey carried out in 5 cities across India. 155 total questionnaires; 62.6 per cent males and 37.4 per cent females. 51.6 percent were from Chennai while the rest were from the other 4 cities. 75 per cent of the respondents were Hindu and 72.3 per cent reported to be leaving for postgraduate study.

Most of these findings can be corroborated by the semi-structured interviews where the reasons behind particular answers could be probed, however, some interesting divergences did come up during the interviews which could not be captured in the sample survey. For example, out of the 127 respondents who answered the specific question, 88.2 per cent reported that degree matters more than destination. However, the detailed interviews revealed a different picture. It seemed that destination emerged as a stronger reason in terms of international exposure and future opportunities to work and live in the host country. When asked about the reasons for not studying in India, out of 105 respondents, almost 80 per cent reported that stronger presence of alumni networks abroad aided in securing work opportunities after the completion of education. Other reasons which made it less attractive as a viable option included lack of basic amenities, desire for international exposure, and peer pressure amongst others.

Table 3: Answers to the Qualitative Questions posed to respondents of the survey, 2012

Question	Yes ( Per cent)
Did you take a year off to apply and prepare for admission abroad?	37.4
Do you have any relative who has studied in the UK?	28.9
Do you have a relative in UK whom you can stay with there?	25.7
Does studying abroad improve one's chances of getting work in the destination country?	75.4
Would you like to work abroad after completing education?	50.0
Would you like to work in India after completing education?	81.3
Did you approach any agent to help with the application process?	55.1
Did you find the agents fee reasonable ?	88.9
Did you receive a scholarship?	30.5
Are you taking out an educational loan?	49.6

Source: Field Survey conducted by the CDS.

Table 3 shows the responses to qualitative questions posed via the questionnaire. Among the students, 37.4 per cent said that they had taken a year off to prepare for the application process. Among them, 73 percent had been financed by their parents while 14.3 percent had savings to depend on and another 12.2 percent took a loan. Over 75 percent of the respondents felt that studying abroad improved chances of getting work in the destination country. 50 percent reported that like to work abroad after completing education while 81 per cent said that they would like to work in India after completing education. Almost 50 percent reported to have taken an educational loan and around 30 percent had received some scholarship towards their education in the UK.

The reliance of labour markets (in OECD countries) on foreign born migrant professionals has increased over the years. Australia has the strongest presence of foreign born individuals in its workforce while United States and United Kingdom are increasingly employing more foreigners. However, migrants who obtain their degrees as ‘international’ students outside their home country have greater absorbability in foreign labour markets, compared to overseas-qualified migrants from developing countries. This is because the former are equipped with knowledge resources provided by the host country and thus carry a quality assurance, which improves their ‘work readiness’. On the other hand, overseas-qualified migrants in many cases face considerable delays in finding employment and differential treatment in their salaries due to the perception of education systems in developing countries. Host country employers have serious concerns about the quality of education imparted in many developing countries, as a UNESCO study revealed that many countries still lacked regulatory bodies and quality assurance systems (Hawthorne, 2008).

Therefore, compared to overseas migrants, there is less ‘discounting of skills’ for international students and their suitability as skilled human capital is guaranteed (Hawthorne, 2008). This is an important factor that fuels the global demand for international students. In the European context, the growing interest in recruiting international (or non-European) students is also a consequence of the changes in the education policy perspective. Until the early nineties, educational programmes in Europe promoted regional or intra-European mobility, an example of which was the launch of the highly successful ERASMUS Programme in 1987. In the Bologna Declaration signed in 1999 (which followed the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998), 29 European countries agreed on streamlining national education systems to a three-cycle structure (Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctorate level studies), with the ultimate objective of forming a unified ‘European Higher Education Area’, by 2010. The implementation of the Bologna Process (in combination with country-specific education policies in subsequent years) has therefore promoted many

European countries at the global stage and facilitated international (non-European) student mobility.

Almost 67 percent reported having appeared for the IELTS examination to go to the UK. Several students interviewed, both prospective and current, reported that they have themselves or know several others in a similar position who have written the TOEFL/ IELTS exams many times in an effort to pass the exam. Now, they have to not only pass but also score enough points to make it on the PBS. It seemed that the agent nexus in the northern part of the country, especially in Chandigarh and surrounding areas was more prominent and a lot of money was spent by prospective students in studying for TOEFL/IELTS examinations even before the application stage. Our analysis indicates that the most preferred country was the US followed by UK and Australia, despite the tightening entry level requirements based on English language abilities.

On the 'supply' side, a variety of factors provide an impetus to students to pursue their higher education abroad. An important aspect is the prevalent perception in Asian countries that a foreign degree is more valuable and thus increases chances of better employability. Another factor, particularly true for major source countries like China and India is the rising income levels of middle-class families in the last decade, which has made foreign education a feasible alternative. The existing education infrastructure in many of these countries is weak and continues to remain neglected. Consequently, a growing number of students seek better quality education and therefore look to foreign education markets for the same. Low levels of government expenditure on education in most developing countries have invariably resulted in a serious shortage of recognised institutions, further aggravated by a limited availability of seats. These limitations have compelled students into exploring other avenues to pursue higher studies or further specialization.

An important reason for many Indians choosing to study abroad is the lack of good institutions in India and growing demand for higher education and the incapacity of the existing institutional infrastructure to absorb this demand. The challenge of securing admission in them becomes daunting as several hundreds of students are vying for the same seat. As an example, in Delhi University, which attracts several thousands of under-graduate students from across the country, the qualifying criterion is set very high as colleges struggle with limited physical and manpower resources. Though the cut-offs vary across subjects, most subjects require students to score in excess of 80 percent, with the cut-offs for popular subjects like economics ranging between 90 to 98 percent. Similarly, an engineering aspirant has a very low chance of securing admission into the highly reputed Indian Institutes of Technology or a reputed medical college.

In contrast, foreign universities provide quality education at a cost and as a consequence, a growing number of Indian students belonging to upwardly mobile, middle class families opt for foreign education. This is undoubtedly an attractive alternative for many Indian students who can afford it, who would otherwise be unable to secure admission in reputed institutes. In view of the current trends, this situation is likely to persist and therefore favour the host countries which are likely to benefit/gain from the growing preference of Indian students for foreign education.

The well-established education system in the UK is another important feature which attracts Indian students. Some universities are over a thousand years old! The UK education system comprises of reputed institutions and is supported by a strong infrastructure which provides world-class facilities and thereby ensures the dissemination of quality education. Additionally, the system has the required capacity to absorb the growing number of international students flows every year. A degree from a UK university is therefore held in high regard by many Indians. The increased visibility of UK universities through various mediums has also played a vital role in increasing student enrolments in UK. In this regard, the British Council in India has played a pivotal role in promoting UK as a destination for Higher Education. Our survey also revealed that only 26 per cent of students had considered similar education opportunities in India while an overwhelming 73 per cent were not considering similar courses in India.

Table 4: Estimated cost of comparable education (living and tuition expenses) in India and UK

Cost of Education	In India Reported Students (Per cent)	In UK Reported Students (Per cent)
< 2 Lakhs	16.7	17.6
2-4.99 lakhs	28.8	23.5
5- 9.99 lakhs	36.4	37.3
10 – 14.99 lakhs	9.1	9.8
15 – 19.99 lakhs	6.8	8.8
> 20 lakhs	2.3	2.9

Source: Field Survey conducted by the CDS.

Table 4 demonstrates the fact that the estimated cost for a comparable degree in India was lower than the UK, for each estimate cost bracket. Yet, the data points out, most students would prefer to study abroad than in India. It must be noted that most students, i.e. around 70% would fall into the category of spending any amount between 5 to 20 lakhs for the educational degree. Most households in India would not be in a position to afford such expensive education for their child.

It emerged from the interviews that future prospects of employment and a better life led many to invest in a possibility via the international student migration route.

Not all students are able to secure all the funding required for their education at once. Some depend on sponsorships by relatives or siblings who are working in the destination country or are a part of the diaspora settled in UK. In order to sponsor a student to come to the UK, institutions needed to be accredited by either Ofsted or its devolved equivalents. Sponsoring institutions were required to achieve Highly Trusted Status by April 2012, and be accredited by a relevant agency by the end of 2012. During the transition period there would be an interim limit on numbers sponsored by those institutions which had not meet the above criteria. The study revealed that prospective students and parents felt that reputed universities charge more since they have the Highly Trusted Status and there is increased competition to get in. On the other hand, newer universities are lesser known, more risky and hence cheaper.

The earlier policy allowed students who had completed their course of study to extend their stay in an effort to seek employment in the country. This policy was amended and a halt on letting student stay back was issued. A UKBA spokesperson said: "Students should come to the UK to study not work. That is why this April we stopped the automatic right for students to stay on and find work after their studies."<sup>2</sup> This decision has however been revoked for PhD students completing their study in the UK as of April 6, 2013.<sup>3</sup>

As per the new policy, there would be a limit on the time that could be spent on a student visa to three years at lower levels (NQF 3-5), as now, and five years at higher levels (NQF 6), with exceptions for students studying for professional qualifications or a PhD. Sponsors would be asked to vouch for academic progression where students were not moving up to the next NQF level. Tier 1 Post-Study Work would be closed from April 2012. However graduates with a graduate level job offer with a registered sponsoring employer would be able to switch into Tier 2 (skilled worker) whilst in the UK. For this group, there would be no resident labour market test and the numbers would not be part of the annual limit on Tier 2 visas. A new graduate entrepreneur route has been recently introduced for those students who have world class innovative ideas and want to develop their business in the UK.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-18888210> BBC news article, 'Overseas students 'cannot leave or stay' in visa delays' downloaded on July 30, 2012

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/2013/april/10-rules-april> downloaded on April 23, 2013

In addition, the UK Border Agency is conducting more interviews as part of the visa application process, including for students. Applicants are informed if they are required to attend an interview. If not, their applications will continue to be processed on the basis of the documents they have submitted. Since the end of July 2012, visa officers have been able to refuse an application if they consider that the applicant is not a 'genuine' student. From 20 May 2013, when a person applies for a Tier 4 student visa, they may have to sit a short interview when they attend the visa application centre to submit their application and biometric information. The interview will focus on the reasons for coming to the UK; this is known as a credibility interview. A report of the interview will be sent to the visa officer who will consider it alongside the visa application and supporting documents. The applicant may be called for a further interview if the visa officer needs more information.

Many students apply for scholarships but these are few in number and mostly students based in larger cities have access to information regarding such opportunities. The survey was based in the larger cities of India and the data reveals that only 40 of the 155 respondents had received some form of scholarship towards their education in the UK.

Most students today have to depend upon loans to finance their education. Banks require collaterals which the families of these students have to provide in order to secure the loan. Details of loan sanctioned are required before filling up the visa application form. Most respondents of the survey reported that they had secured loans from commercial banks.

We can infer from the data presented above that that many Indians who go abroad for higher education also seek employment opportunities outside India. US student visa regulations, compared to other countries are more permissible and thus increase chances of finding employment after completing the degree. It is therefore a combination of attaining quality education in addition to employment opportunities which result in more Indians going to the US or the UK for higher education. It has been established that the linkages between student migration, prospective immigration and their role in the future of the diaspora needs to be studied in much more detail. The preliminary results presented above point to interesting patterns and relations which must be explored further. It is important to study other destination countries in comparison to each other to provide important links and explanations. Moreover, a comprehensive policy overseeing student migration will be a step in the right direction. Consultants who work as unscrupulous agents must be regulated and such practices must be understood in greater detail.