

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

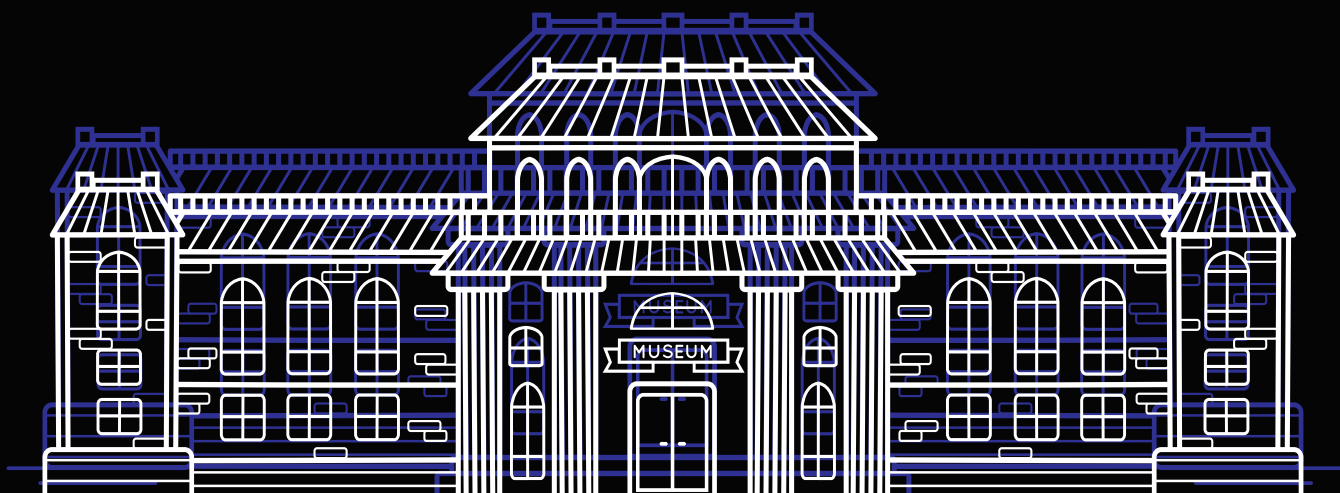
A Hostile Office Report



**Migrants'
Rights
Network**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1

International students are often invisible victims of the Hostile Office. Their perceived temporary status and wealth to study internationally means that they are often disregarded in migrants' rights advocacy, despite facing increasing restrictions on their immigration conditions in the UK. This is why we have conducted this research to understand how international students are treated by the Hostile Office.

In early 2024, we conducted a survey for international students. The results demonstrate the impact of a punitive immigration system and often uncaring universities that leave international students feeling that they are simply treated as an income stream. Within the Higher Education sector this is emphasised by the repeated reference to migrant students' financial "contributions" to universities. Yet many of them face a lack of support when they struggle to meet these stringent financial obligations, and face threats of being reported to the Hostile Office.

In line with previous research we have conducted, international students often face significant financial burdens that go unnoticed, such as currency crises and loans in their country of origin to finance their studies, because their visa requires proof of a certain amount of money to live on. This is likely to be an increased worry from many students due to the extensive costs involved in their study: on top of the £22,000 a year they pay on average in tuition fees alone, immigration fees like the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) have increased and the rising cost of living means that the money saved and earned from their limited hours they are allowed to work doesn't go as far. The lack of financial support therefore left students who responded to our survey feeling like they were a "money grab" for universities.

This is linked to the lack of support navigating the “archaic banking and housing requirements” and complicated visa processes, which universities do not provide adequate help with. Much like the racial commodification of people on different work visa schemes, international students come to be commodified as an income stream, rather than treated as students who need and deserve strong, holistic support. Their worth to the university, therefore, is conditional on their ability to pay extortionate tuition fees, in addition to adhering to stringent compliance requirements.

The prioritisation of money has contributed to the intense and punitive monitoring requirements and surveillance of international students. Attendance and visa monitoring processes have been described as excessive by students, some of whom have had checks go wrong because of university staff error, which then put their student and immigration status at risk.

As a result, there are significant concerns with the mental health effects of the Hostile Environment on students. Many students reported this, but often did not receive adequate support from their universities. The lack of engagement from universities when students are in situations that will affect their visa status - requiring extensions on assignments due to stress, for example - is unfortunately another theme from our ongoing engagement with international students. The treatment of international students and the intense restrictions they are subjected to is a prime example of how the Hostile Office treats migrants, and how the universities have become complicit in this too. The surveillance and limitations on their activities, including the way that deportation is leveraged as punishment, are forms of anti-migrant control. A fundamental function of the Hostile Environment for international students is to surveil them and keep them compliant, through keeping their status precarious. This is why we call for an end to the Hostile Environment, as well as the enforced reporting of students to the Hostile Office.

KEY FINDINGS

- 55% of international students reported negative effects on their mental health related to being an international student. This is from anti-immigrant sentiment in the UK, “isolation from white peers”, visa worries and financial struggles, among other factors.
- 41% of international students surveyed expressed that they have been treated differently, with 31% who have experienced discrimination in housing. This includes university staff prioritising EU and British students and assumptions about their English-speaking abilities based on their nationality.
- 38% said that current visa compliance surveillance measures are too invasive.
- 38% of students were involved in activism before but not at university, mostly because of worry over repercussions affecting their visa (56%) and time (50%).



Students come to study in the UK for a number of reasons: educational opportunities, including the prestige of certain universities, departments and the broader higher education system in the UK; funding reasons, such as scholarships and studentships; job opportunities; and lower barriers to entry, in relation to the teaching language and length of course.

In recent years, international students have been a focal point as part of the Government's aim to cut net migration. As a result, most international students are now prevented from bringing any dependents with them to the UK, and some are unable to afford to stay and work in the UK beyond the expiry of their Graduate Visa because of significant immigration health surcharge and visa fees.

In the midst of this, international students have been subjected to the same racist and dehumanising constructions of worth dependent on 'contribution' as many migrant workers. Specifically, where their right to come and stay in the UK is constantly argued on the basis of financial value. Racialised international students are therefore usually the most impacted, through the way that racism compounds their experiences of anti-migrant policies and systems.



The marketisation of universities, which began in the 1980s, has rapidly expanded the process of commodification of international students¹. Since then, they have been recruited on the basis of the much higher tuition fees they would pay, which provides a significant potential source of income for higher education institutions. Universities now use international students to subsidise the teaching for ‘home’ students². But this treatment of students as an economic resource, an additional income stream, instead of as people, as students, has left them without adequate wellbeing provision and over-scrutinised.

Our Hostile Office campaign examines the structural hostility of the UK’s immigration system - these policies are cruel and often racist by design. Since 2023 we have been researching how this impacts different groups of migrants, particularly those who are less considered in migration research and discourse, or whose experiences are only looked at through the lens of specific policies. By distributing the survey that this report analyses, we were able to view the experiences of international students as a whole under the Hostile Office, where fundamental failings of care for students originates through their commodification. This commodification of international students is a feature, not a byproduct, of the Hostile Office and higher education system. It is visible from recruitment to beyond graduation for international students and is inseparable from the broader structure of the UK’s immigration system.

¹Nick Fosskett, “Markets, government, funding and the marketisation of UK higher education” in ‘The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer’ (2011).

² International Students: A UK Success Story (Russel Group).

AGENTS AND RECRUITMENT

Agents and recruitment practices have increasingly become an issue, as more international students have been joining UK universities and universities have been paying more to agents. We found that 24% of students surveyed used an agent, and that while most were not asked to pay, one student was asked to pay £500. Universities already pay the recruitment fees, and so students should not at all be asked to pay on top of that. From our survey, agents were mostly involved in securing a place at university, but one respondent also had help with travel and accommodation, and another with their visa application.

Sometimes agents offer incentives to prospective students to work with them, such as a laptop, but none of the students we surveyed were offered. One person, however, was forced to work with an agent, because they said they ‘could not contact’ the university directly. Otherwise, people reported that agents provided them with personalised support and guidance, to varying degrees; one student said the agent didn’t deliver on what was promised, and two said the service was only satisfactory, as a result of it being slow or the results not being as expected.

It is clear that more regulation of recruitment agents is needed in higher education, which 72% of students agreed with: 29% of students felt that agents’ relationship with universities was unclear and 29% who used an agent reported that they had concerns but were unable to share them externally - only one student reported being able to. Within this context, 20% of students had come across scams, mainly offering scholarships that did not exist.

The current lack of information around agents and expected behaviour, as well as regulation, is concerning, putting students at significant financial risk. It is also a clear example of the way that marketisation and the commodification of students facilitates poor treatment, and in some cases exploitation, of international students.

In May 2024, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) recommended mandatory registration for recruitment agents, including quality controls in the voluntary Agent Quality Framework (AQF). The Government has accepted the recommendations, so it is likely that much needed regulation and accountability of agents will be improved in the near future.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: AGENTS AND RECRUITMENT

- What to expect from them:
 - Assistance with liaising with universities
 - Assistance with applying to university, and, potentially accommodation and visas
- Look out for:
 - Getting asked to pay - universities already pay a fee to recruiters
 - Mention of scholarships - check this on the university's or other grant body's website
 - Any incentives, like a new laptop or phone - this might be because they have incentives to direct students towards a certain course, which may not be in a student's best interest

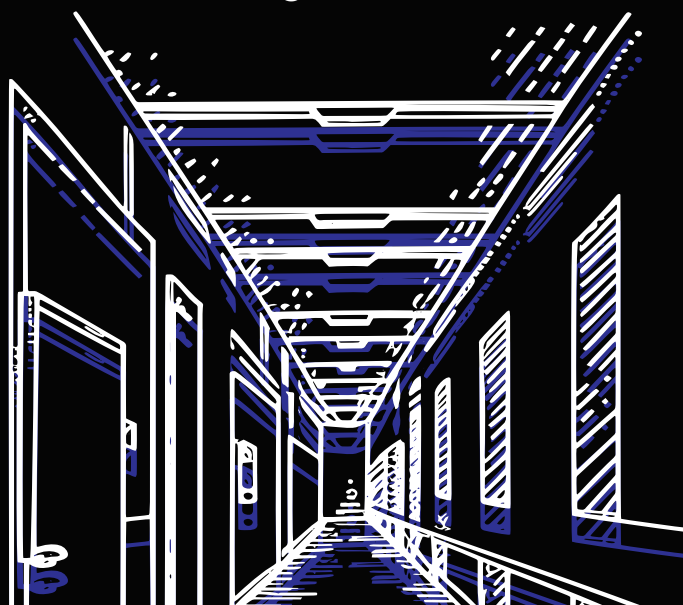
- Agents writing submission materials for you - they often use a template to write prospective students' personal statements, cover letters, emails, or other required submission materials which can affect the outcome of an application
- Claims that agents make about universities - sometimes universities are advertised as world-leading, but they are not featured in rankings. To avoid this poor advertising, check university rankings and reviews online before making a decision. You can find this for UK universities only [here](#) and for universities globally, including UK universities, [here](#).
- While there is no formal regulation or register of education agents, the British Council does hold a [register](#), with training and an ethical code of practice. This is optional, but can provide proof of an agent's trustworthiness.
 - There is also a voluntary Agent Quality Framework (AQF) for higher education agents. The Government has accepted the Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) [recommendation](#) to make it mandatory, but this is yet to be implemented.
- What to do if you have issues with an agent:
 - There is currently no reporting mechanism, although if the AQF is made compulsory there will be greater opportunities to do so
 - If you are concerned about the behaviour of an agent, you should contact the university you are applying to. This could be the Vice Chancellor for International Students, if the university has this position, the International or Visa and Compliance Office, or the Admissions Office.
 - Your agent may also be registered within the country you are in, so there may be a reporting or regulatory framework that you are able to report them to.

ENROLMENT

After obtaining a place at university, many international students experience problems when enrolling. Even where these problems are the fault of their university, this can put their place and immigration status in jeopardy. We have previously supported a student who faced deportation after his university gave him the wrong date to arrive.

36% of the students we surveyed have also reported facing difficulties when enrolling at university. This was largely due to visa delays, which affected 80% of students who had issues. International students, as with other migrant groups, are able to expedite their visa processing for a much higher fee, which many are forced to do in order to retain their university place. The immigration system thereby extracts even more money from students who have already paid their Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS), a tuition deposit and, often, housing fees.

For some, their universities have been incredibly unaccommodating of difficulties around enrolment, even threatening to cancel people's offers, whereas for others, it was their university's fault for their delays, after submitting their CAS or unconditional offer late. There was a lot of inconsistency in how universities responded, ranging from contacting the Hostile Office on behalf of students to providing no support and forcing the student to return to their country of origin.



A student from India also reported “ridiculous” English language requirements, including a test, despite having conducted their education from IGCSE³ to Master’s degree level in the US (the university then dropped this requirement following their complaint). Another student was given incorrect information on where they could (re-apply for their visa from.

It is clear that there is a lack of standardisation of advice and support given to international students, which is concerning given the prevalence of issues faced and the potential consequences in terms of financial investment and status at university and in the country.

³IGCSE is an international qualification equivalent to GCSEs, which is common in international schools.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: ENROLMENT

Visas

- You need to be studying at a recognised student sponsor institution (this will be those with “Student” under the “Route” column)
- You must have an unconditional offer and a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS)
 - English language qualification isn’t necessarily required for courses, so many international students have unconditional offers, but their place is STILL conditional on IELTS scores. Without your IELTS results, you won’t be able to get your CAS number. You can find more information on the required IELTS tests and scores here.
 - It is also important to get your IELTS as soon as possible, in order to prevent any delays should you have to take it again

- Usually, you will have to apply from outside the UK (this doesn't necessarily have to be your country of origin). You can only apply from inside the UK if you meet certain criteria (usually if you are extending or switching from another visa).
 - For your first student visa, you can apply from either inside or outside of the UK
 - If outside the UK, the earliest you can apply for a visa is 6 months before you start your course.
 - If inside the UK, the earliest you can apply for a visa is 3 months before the start of your course. You must apply before your current visa expires. Your new course must begin within 28 days of your current visa expiring.
 - If re-applying for a student visa (e.g. going from undergraduate to postgraduate study), this application must happen from outside the UK
 - You can extend your student visa instead of re-applying if you are continuing your studies in the UK (e.g. going from undergraduate to postgraduate study, or from a Master's course to a PhD programme), but this is subject to conditions. This includes the academic progression requirement, a maximum of 28 days between your current course end date and your new course start date, and the five-year time limit for study on the same student visa (some courses are exempt from this. You can find more information on the government website or from UKCISA)

What if my visa is late?

- Check whether you have received your CAS and, if you are enrolling on another course in the UK, whether your previous institution has sent your confirmation of results to the Home Office

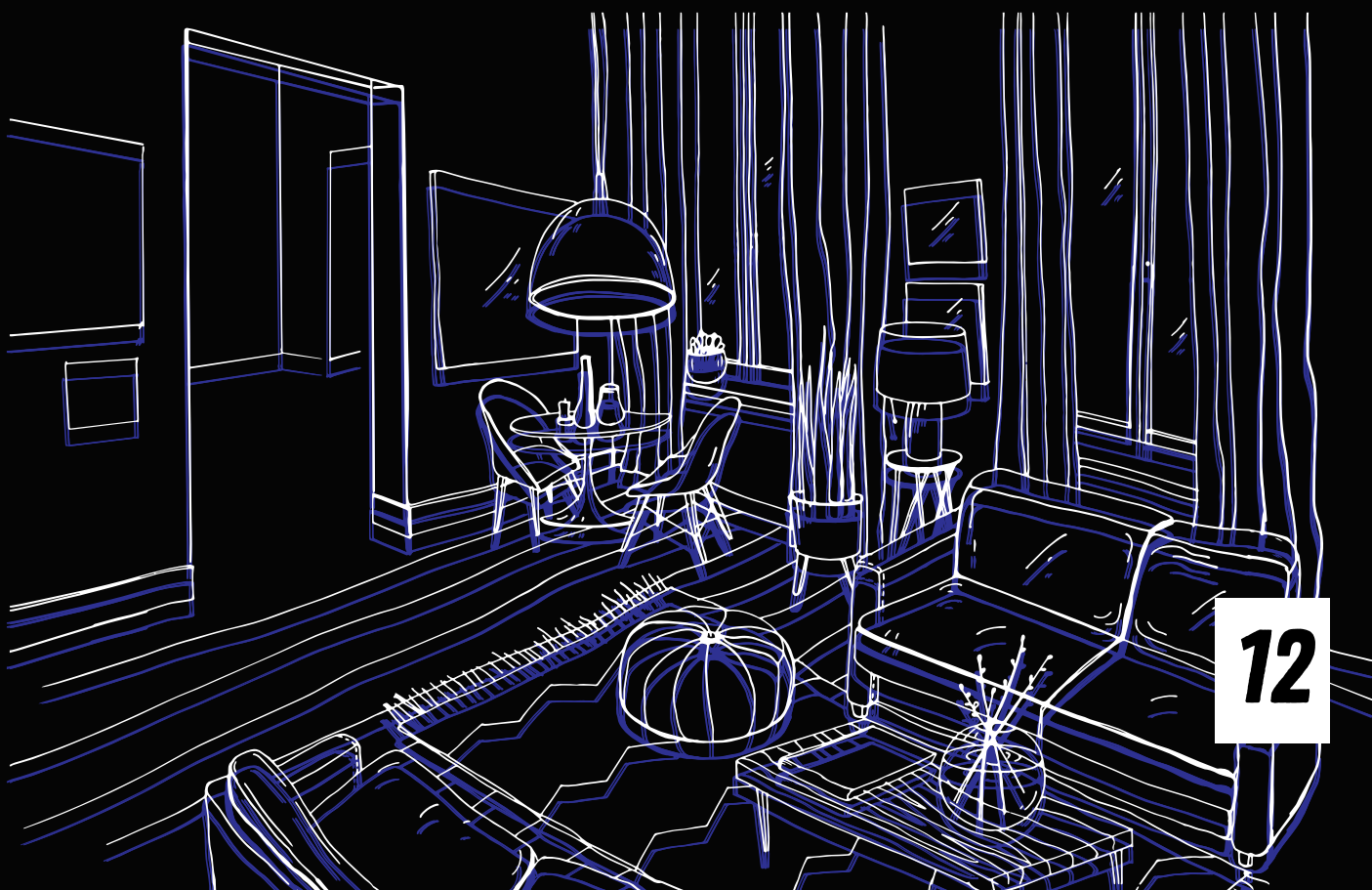
- **Contact your prospective university's visa team. They should be able to contact the Home Office on your behalf.**
 - **Your university should inform the Home Office via the Sponsor Management System (SMS) or adding a sponsor note to your CAS**
- **If your department allows for late registration, they have an obligation to support you**

What if I was given the wrong date to arrive?

- **Contact your Students' Union**
- **You may need legal advice - contact an organisation like UKCISA, Citizens Advice, or your Students' Union, or look on ILPA's directory.**
- **If your course is over 6 months, you can only arrive up to a month before your course start date. This is 1 week if your course is 6 months or less**

What if there's incorrect information on my visa?

- **Contact UKVI within 90 days of issue**
- **If your course finishes in 2025 or later but you visa BRP has an expiry date of 31st December 2024, this is because BRPs are transitioning to e-visas for everyone from 2025**



HOUSING

Housing has been a significant issue for international students, who are usually less aware of the state of housing and requirements to rent in the UK. As a result, international students often face higher costs of housing, discrimination that they are not empowered to challenge, and sometimes worse housing conditions.

GUARANTORS

Most students, at some point in their education, will live in privately rented accommodation - 66% of respondents to our survey had. Often, landlords will require students to have a guarantor - someone who will be financially responsible for ensuring that rent will be paid on time. This is due to not being in full time work and so not being able to prove that they themselves will be able to pay the rent.

Of the 69% of students who reported being asked for a guarantor, 76% experienced problems with this. They either had a guarantor, but they were overseas, or did not have anyone who could act as a guarantor. For one student, their university was able to act as a guarantor, and for another their thesis supervisor and a PhD student acted as theirs. Most (52%) were instead asked to pay a higher fee upfront - usually between 3 and 6 months, but one student was asked to pay between 7 and 12 months. This presents a significant financial burden for international students.



Having to pay multiple months of rent upfront is already a huge cost, but with other pressures on international students' finances, this cost can become unbearable. This is exacerbated by the limit on working hours for international students lessens potential extra income that they could make up. This results in international students being overrepresented amongst student groups who reported to the National Union of Students (NUS) that the higher cost of living is having a “major impact” on their income and that they were “extremely concerned” about their ability to financially manage. It has also been reported that inadequate living cost requirements in visa applications give unrealistic expectations for incoming international students for the true cost of living, which has contributed to their poverty rates over recent years. The continued rise in the cost of living, including steep increases in average rents, has heightened the impact of having to pay more rent upfront.

Therefore, international students are being disproportionately affected by guarantor requirements, particularly if they also have caring responsibilities or come from a lower socio-economic background. This results in outcomes like homelessness, which NUS Scotland found around one fifth of international students had experienced last year, compared to 7% of all students, and which Bangor University Students' Union raised as a specific problem for international student parents.

DISCRIMINATION

Unfortunately, 31% of students reported experiencing discrimination while renting. This looked like:

- Getting fewer viewings and lettings as an international student, which included being explicitly denied because of their visa status. This was the most common experience of discrimination.

- The landlord not sending communications to and ignoring Chinese tenants, despite them receiving communications from the council
- Struggling to find a place to rent when not renting with European or British flatmates
- Being asked to pay more while the university was processing their Biometric Residence Permit (BRP), because rental agents and landlords didn't understand visa regulations

An additional 14% of students were unsure whether they had experienced discrimination while renting, emphasising the importance of disseminating information on people's statutory entitlements and other rights in housing, as well as avenues to escalate challenges to these conditions.

HOUSING STANDARDS

The inability to afford the extreme costs involved in paying multiple months of rent up front, in addition to discrimination-related costs and levies and lack of eligibility for income-based grants from universities can force people into living in substandard housing. This is exacerbated by lack of knowledge of the rights they are entitled to and how to challenge unscrupulous landlords.

Two students had lived in overcrowded housing, i.e. a situation where more people live in a space than is legally permitted, such as more than two unrelated people living in a room together. International students have been living in conditions like this which have had fatal consequences.

41% of international students reported other issues while renting privately:

- Their deposit wasn't held securely
- Their housing wasn't fit for human habitation (e.g. it had mould or needed repairs but were ignored)

- Residents weren't provided with a Gas Safety Certificate, How to Rent guide, and/or Energy Performance Certificate
- The landlord tried to increase rent during the tenancy
- They were asked to pay to visit the property
- No notice was given before their landlord visited the property
- They had a live-in landlord and weren't provided with a contract

Another student complained that there was a fraudulent landlord registered with their Students' Union lettings company, which said they had no record of their crimes. This was despite the fact that the student knew at least five other students had been affected and that the landlord had previously been delisted for not having a leasing licence and not returning deposits.

One student had been evicted under Section 8 (rent arrears or breach of contract). They contacted their local council and a renters' organisation. Others had also sought advice from their local council as a result of these conditions. For two respondents, they had been able to successfully challenge their landlord in court.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: HOUSING

Guarantors

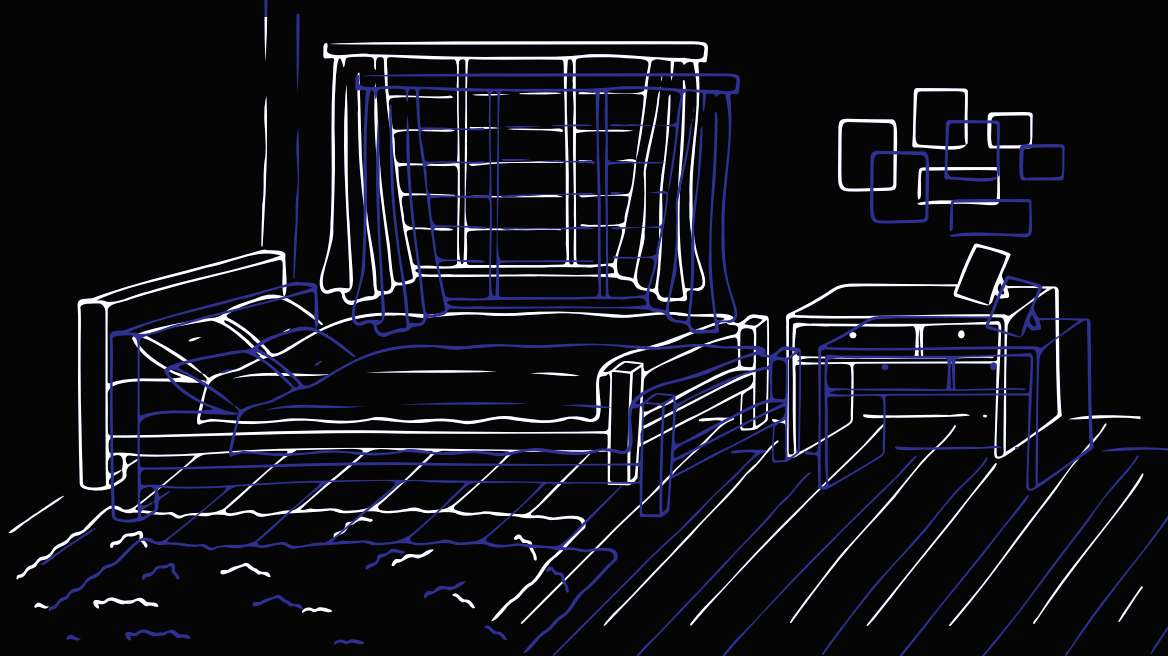
- A landlord/estate agent may ask you to use a guarantor, someone who agrees to pay your rent if you don't/can't.
- Some universities can act as a guarantor if you do not know someone personally who can do this, for example, Imperial College London.
- Unfortunately this is the agent/landlord's decision. Some people do get asked or you can offer to pay multiple month's rent up front as an alternative.

Discrimination

- Please see the housing guide linked below to understand your rights. If you know or think you have been discriminated against you can contact a renters' union (e.g. London Renters Union (if in London), CATU (if in Ireland, including the North), Living Rent (if in Scotland), ACORN), a housing charity (e.g. Shelter), your Students' Union, or a general advice service (e.g. Citizens Advice)

Housing standards

- *Your depository must be held securely with an approved tenancy deposit protection scheme. The scheme will be the Deposit Protection Service (DPS), mydeposits, or the Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS).*
- *You must be provided with a contract*
- *You must be provided with a Gas Safety Certificate, How to Rent guide, and Energy Performance Certificate*
- *Make sure you view the rental property before you sign a contract. This can help ensure that your housing is fit for human habitation*
 - *If your housing is not fit for human habitation you can contact your council, renters' unions (e.g. London Renters Union), or Citizens' Advice*
- *You should never be asked to pay to view a property*
- *Landlords are not permitted to increase rent during the tenancy*
- *Landlords must give 24 hours notice before visiting the property you live in*



Renters' Rights Bill

- **At the time of writing the Renters' Rights Bill is currently going through Parliament. This means that renters will have some additional rights and protections, although we do not yet know at what point they may come into force or even if all of these points will be passed.**
- **Some of the proposals are:**
 - **A ban on Section 21 “no fault” evictions**
 - **The right to request a pet, which landlords can’t “unreasonably refuse”**
 - **A ban on discrimination against prospective tenants who are in receipt of benefits and/or have children**
 - **A limit on landlords increasing rent - they will only be able to do so once per year during the tenancy to the market rate, which requires 2 months notice to the tenant. Tenants will also be able to challenge the amount of the increase.**
- **A full list of proposals can be found on the [government website](#)**

For more information on housing as an international student, check out our [Guide to Private Renting for International Students] produced with London Renters Union.



DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT

When at university, many of the following procedures mark international students as different to 'home' students in more ways than just their fee status. 41% of international students surveyed felt they were treated differently by their university for the following reasons:

- The extensive checks in relation to their immigration status feel unnecessary to them, especially after the checks they already went through at the border
- There is little support and the visa team is not "fit for purpose"
- There are "archaic banking and housing requirements," which universities don't help with or inform people of
- There is a lack of financial support, including the restrictions of the working hours limit, and the moving and visa expenses that aren't covered by studentships. In addition, funding is not paid to students until a month after their studies have begun
- Staff are more "welcoming" to and "prioritise" EU and British students and are less patient with international students, including treating them like they don't speak English well enough to study there
 - The student health service constantly dismissed another student's health problems, including refusing to accept prescriptions from their doctor in their country of origin

"One professor ask[ed] to all those who have an Asian face, if they're following a lecture (assuming their English isn't good enough)" - *International Student Survey Respondent*



MENTAL HEALTH

As a result, 55% of students experienced negative effects on their mental health related to being an international student. Multiple students reported anxiety, including as a direct result of visa worries, financial issues, problems finding a place to live and anti-immigrant sentiment in the UK. Others felt “isolated from [their] white peers”, and suffered from little support and understanding in adjusting to academic life in the UK and in accessing medical care.

"The anti-immigration and vicious comments aimed at international students have given me panic attacks, to the point where I had to go on anti-anxiety medication." - International Student Survey Respondent

In response, students have gone to counselling or other mental health services (53%), university support services, including from their SU (21%), fellow students (21%), their GP (21%), personal tutor (16%), another lecturer (16%), online services, e.g. Mind (11%), and mental health charity helpline (5%). One student experienced adverse mental health effects as a result of being an international student but did not seek help from any support services.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT

- Your university also has duties to you, which should include an anti-discrimination or EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) framework and EDI team that you can contact in cases of discrimination. Your university will also have a complaints system. Students Unions can also be helpful to approach, particularly in trying to change the culture of treatment of international students.

- **Mental health support**
 - You can find our Know Your Rights guide on mental health [here](#)
 - There are a number of ways to access mental healthcare through the NHS, which you are entitled to free of charge, because of the IHS. You can speak to your GP, who may refer you to counselling. Depending on the borough or NHS trust you live in and that your GP is in, you may be able to self-refer to therapy. You can also self-refer to talking therapies, which may take place over the phone or in person.
 - Below are helplines for emergency mental health assistance:
 - Mind: 0300 102 1234.
 - Samaritans: 116 123
 - SANEline: 0300 304 7000
 - National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK: 0800 689 5652
 - [Nightline](#) (specifically for students)
 - If you are concerned that your mental health will prevent you from handing in work on time to progress to next year or to graduate, you can approach your personal tutor, Students Union advisers, student services or other wellbeing services.
 - It can also be useful to get a letter from your GP or another medical professional, including mental health practitioners, that you see

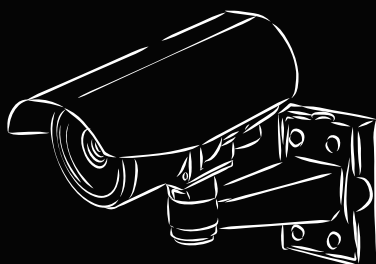


MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE

The immigration monitoring system appears to consolidate this feeling of ‘othering’ for students, who reported extensive, yet varied, forms of immigration and visa compliance requirements in their universities. Regardless of the form that attendance monitoring takes, either attendance and activity monitoring or visa checks, all data is reported to the Hostile Office. As with our research on Right to Work checks, people highlighted these going wrong, which resulted in a warning from the Hostile Office. In all cases reported to us, this was the result of administrative issues, including technical errors and failure of academic supervisors to submit certain materials, i.e. no fault of the student. Despite this, when we have supported students going through this in the past, advisors at their Students’ Union have immediately assumed it was the fault of the student.

The overwhelming majority of students experience attendance monitoring of some kind, but for international students, attendance levels can affect their visa. 83% of international students responded that they experience classroom monitoring, which can take different forms. These included:

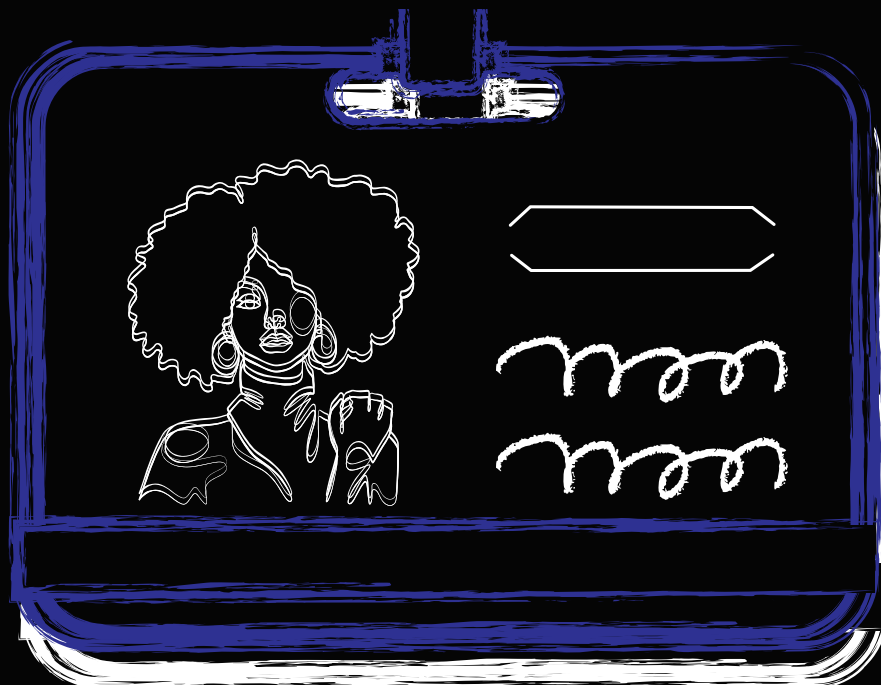
- Lecturer taking a verbal register (45%)
- Writing your name on a paper register (38%)
- Scanning a QR code (28%)
- Tapping into the classroom with student ID (17%)
- Filling in a form detailing their activities, which seemed more common for students on research degrees (4%)



We are also concerned that one student previously had to use their Blackboard app to input a one-time code, but then their university switched to using a location-based app, which they said doesn't work. The inaccuracy of the software is troubling because of the serious potential consequences for international students' visas, but the use of the software itself is also concerning because of the invasiveness of digital border monitoring.

In addition, international students often also undergo visa monitoring. This can look like presenting their visa to university staff on a regular basis, e.g. once a month, which 21% of respondents reported, or having their supervisor register their attendance through a set number of meetings per year, with the data passed onto the Hostile Office (10%). 14% of students mentioned these checks going wrong before, including where someone's supervisor forgot to fill out the attendance form and they got a warning message from the Hostie Office, and another where their supervisor wanted more proof of their activities.

These extensive migration checks feel "unnecessary" and too invasive to 38% of students we surveyed, particularly after going through the "tedious and expensive" process when applying for their visa and going through border control. This serves to 'Other' international students beyond more overt prejudice in relation to accents or ethnicity, as reported above.



We have been supporting a group of students who have been given notice of their visa being revoked by the Hostile Office following inaccurate information being reported by their university. They were wrongly reported as not attending classes after they had fallen behind on tuition fee payments, despite continuing to go to all classes and placements and completing all assignments. These students' country of origin was experiencing a currency crisis, with the majority of them not offered payment plans, which the university had made for some students. Even then, many students were reported to the Hostile Office while making repayments, or received a letter from UKVI more than a month after they had finished making their payments in full.

The reporting system, it seems, is intended to catch students out. Technology not working properly, human error on behalf of a member of staff, or other administrative miscommunications can result in a warning from the Hostile Office and, in rarer cases, their visa being revoked. These checks are another way in which the border is brought into universities and university staff are turned into border officers.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE

Attendance reporting

- Lecturers have been forced to be complicit in reporting requirements, where they are asked to report on attendance when it falls below a certain level. This level will vary between universities, so it is best to check university policy (e.g. for some universities this is 3 weeks of non-attendance, for others it's when attendance falls below 50%)

- Universities will contact the Home Office within 10 working days from being notified of absence (i.e. 10 working days from when your lecturer(s) have told the university you haven't been attending)

Visa reporting

- What to expect from visa checks
 - There will be multiple points throughout your studies when you are required to attend a visa check-in on campus. Frequency may vary, but this can be once per semester. If you are a postgraduate, you will likely have additional, more frequent check-ins over the summer.
 - If you are going to miss this check-in, you will likely be sent a reminder. You may have to provide evidence to register an absence if it is over a certain time period and you cannot make the check-in, e.g. a medical note
 - You will usually be required to bring your Student ID, your BRP (or your phone/device if you have an eVisa) and your passport
- What to do when a visa check goes wrong
 - You can find official guidance from the Home Office on the [government website](#)
 - You should contact the visas and compliance team at your university
 - You may also wish to contact the advice service at your Students' Union, and potentially a migration or students charity, if the issue needs to be escalated further
- What to do when information reported at a check-in is incorrect
 - You can first contact the member of staff responsible for reporting this information and then your university's visa and compliance team, potentially escalating to a formal complaint

- If you are unable to solve the issue internally within your university, you can contact UKVI (UK Visas and Immigration) or a regulator, like the university ombudsman or the Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman (PHSO)
- You can also contact a migration charity, which can support you from a casework perspective and/or campaigning approach, if necessary, and an immigration solicitor, which you can find via ILPA's directory.



SUPPORT

As a result of these problems specific to international students, almost all respondents to our survey had sought support or information. They went to a range of sources for this:

- 71% of students went to university services
- 46% went to other students
- 36% searched online
- 25% went to their Students' Union
- 21% looked at online forums, such as Reddit or The Student Room
- 11% contacted their local council
- 11% contacted Government services
- 11% went to charities
- 4% spoke to immigration providers
- 4% spoke to general advice services, like Citizens' Advice
- And 4% contacted their local MP

For those who accessed support from their university, 35% said they had been supported somewhat well. Only 7% said they were well supported, while 29% felt that support had been poor. For those who accessed support from their Students' Union, 67% found it helpful. The main criticism was that they seemed to offer no certainty or specific help.

Crucially, there are fewer places that international students can seek support, primarily financial, compared to home students. At their universities, only 52% of students said that (financial) support accessible for international students was accessible through their Students' Union, 41% said they were signposted to other services, 38% said their university hardship fund(s), 3% said an international office and 3% said their personal tutor or department. 35% were unsure what support was available, and 7% reported none existing.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: SUPPORT

- As your visa sponsor, your university has certain obligations and responsibilities to you as a student. They will be responsible for you from the beginning to the end of your studies and must guarantee you equal access to anything related to completing your course, including attending graduation and applying for the Graduate visa. They must offer specific support for international students, although they may not be legally allowed to give migration advice, unless staff are OISC regulated.
- Your Students' Union will usually have advisors that you are able to reach out to support, or you can ask UKCISA for support.
- You can also seek support from general advice services like Citizens Advice or from more specific organisations, like us (MRN) or, for housing matters in London, LRU (London Renters Union)
- If you have a complaint against your university and are seeking advice on escalation, you can contact a charity, focusing on students or migrants (like MRN), seek legal counsel, or write to local political representatives, such as your councillor or MP

Financial support

- As an international student (as well as when you are on a Graduate visa), you will most likely have no recourse to public funds (NPRF status). However, you are able to apply for a change in circumstances, which would enable you to gain access to public funds (i.e. benefits, including universal credit, housing benefit)
 - This is something that charities like The Unity Project can help you with
 - There can be future consequences for this, though, as getting NPRF conditions removed could result in your permission to stay being removed or otherwise affect future visa applications

- You should check your university's website (usually under fees and funding or student support sections) to see if there are any hardship funds that you as an international student are eligible to access
- You should also check your Students' Union, which might have a different hardship fund with different eligibility criteria



STUDENT ACTIVISM

Universities' hostility to student activism has specific, severe consequences for international students. While a high proportion of international students had been involved in activism at some point (72%), 52% of them had not been involved while at university (38% were involved both before and at university and 10% had only been involved at university).

This is because universities can often leverage greater punishments against international students versus home students. As such, 56% said their lack of involvement in activism at university was because they were worried about repercussions affecting their visa. Other reasons they listed were time (50%), lack of support (25%), lack of opportunity, and worries over it affecting their job chances.

"I work at a departmental level. I'm not attending protests but I do care. I need to preserve my immigration status especially due to what happened to the Palestinian law student. I'm fully supportive and active politically in my home country (India) and have safety and privilege there. I don't have that here.

*Those who do go and join are those who do not want to stay in the UK." -
International Student Survey Respondent*

For some students who were involved in activism at university, they faced these repercussions. One person was threatened with revocation of their visa and expulsion, and we know of another having to suspend their studies as a result. Other students had to restrict the activities they were involved in, so as to ensure they were not reported to immigration services.

*"I would like Students Union's been more ideologically driven, having manifestos and actually offering different things apart from a popularity contest on social media."
- International Student Survey Respondent*

It is troubling that international students don't feel and often aren't able to express views in the same way that home students are. There is extra punishment leveraged against them in terms of the threat to their visas, and most are not supported by their Students' Unions, by being made aware of their rights when protesting for example, to engage in student politics and democracy.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: STUDENT ACTIVISM

- You have a (limited) legal right to protest, but there are increasing restrictions on this. This includes student politics and activism. For international students, there are ways that this can affect your immigration status, for example if they expel or suspend you this can have consequences for your immigration status. Any arrests could also impact future immigration applications, for example after the expiry of your student or graduate visa, even if they did not result in a charge or conviction.
- There is no legal requirement for you to share your nationality or immigration status with the police, even if you are arrested. If you are arrested, though, police may carry out immigration checks
- The likelihood of arrest will vary with the type of action you plan to partake in. Attending a teach-out during a strike, a rally on campus, or a march in the area you live and/or study in there may still be risks for an arrest but this will be dependent on the circumstances of the protest.

- There are usually opportunities to appeal decisions made against you in terms of a conviction, deportation order and suspension and expulsion, but this will require legal advice and support.
- You have a right to participate in student politics, including standing for election in a student society or as a sabbatical officer in your Students' Union

Other protests rights will also apply to you, regardless of your immigration status. See Green and Black Cross's guides [here](#) (general) and [here](#) (if you are involved in pro-Palestine encampments), and their 24/7 protest support line is 07946 541 511.

For more information please see [Informed Dissent](#) guide to arrest as an international student.



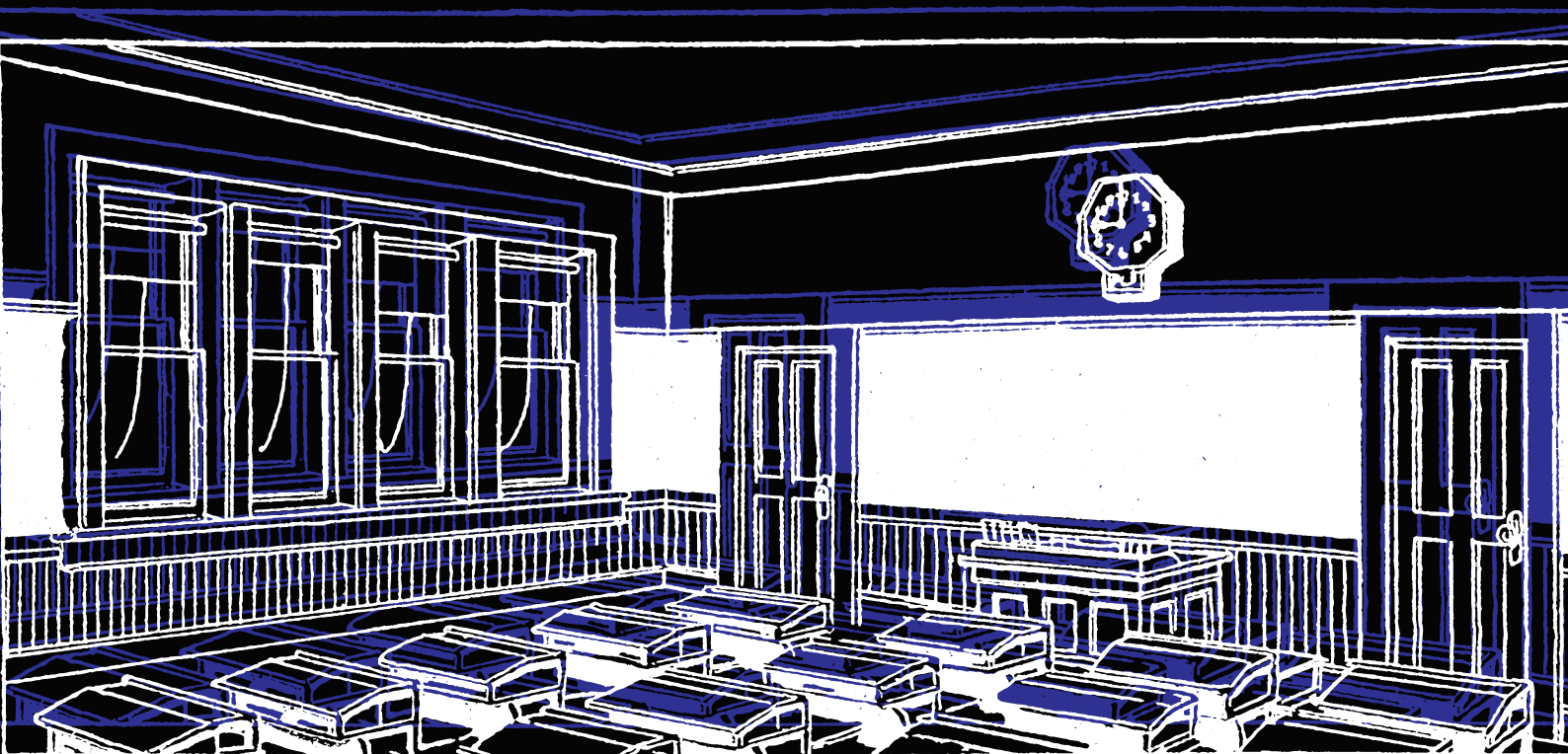
CONCLUSION

Significant inconsistency across universities was visible from this survey, with some being proactive and contacting the Hostile Office to help international students and others reporting them to the Hostile Office even where a clear error had been made on their behalf. This is a cause of great stress for international students, alongside a widespread lack of financial support, including in relation to high visa and immigration fees.

Further internal barriers are created for international students, where their wellbeing and financial security are secondary to universities' priority of collecting tuition fees and the Government's goal of reducing the numbers of migrants, including international students. Excessive and unnecessary internal immigration checks often leave these students in precarity, as they can often and easily go wrong. The removal of the right of many international students to bring family with them to the UK aims to enforce the temporary nature of educational migration, where people are discouraged from long-term settlement here. We have repeatedly seen such policies applied to racialised migrants in the last 60 years.

These internal borders enforce the separation of international and home students that positions the former as belonging less in the UK. This, coupled with increasing xenophobic and racist rhetoric targeted at international students from the media and politicians, reproduces the racism directed at them.

The way that international students are commodified is foundational to the racism that they face. Even those who speak in defence of international students often do so through the lens of financial ‘contribution’, yet these extortionate costs that they are forced to pay, through immigration fees, tuition fees, higher housing costs and lower income, are a core part of the problem. As a result, while international students are presented as a unanimously financially privileged minority, they are acutely affected by the dehumanising and racist immigration system that equates their right to be and stay in the UK with their financial input.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Better support for international students by universities and Students' Unions, including for political participation. All Students' Unions should have a designated international student officer and workers within Students' Unions should receive training on international students' issues and how to address them.**
- **A re-evaluation of reporting systems of universities to the Hostile Office, to ensure that the first action taken by universities is not to jeopardise students' immigration status**
- **Clearer avenues for international students to complain and seek support when they have been failed by their universities.**
- **Having NRPF means that international students are particularly hit hard by the cost of living crisis and therefore vulnerable to destitution. As a result, we call for an end to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) status, which further harms international students, and places them at risk of destitution and suffering.**
- **Expanded university hardship funds that are accessible to international students**
- **An end to the Hostile Environment and dehumanising anti-migrant rhetoric**



For general information about your rights as a migrant in the UK, see our 'Know Your Rights Guide'. The guide is a tool for all migrants living in the UK, and explains what your rights are, how changes in the law may affect you, what you can do if you face challenges and where you can go to for advice and support. You can find the international students section, including information from this handbook, [here](#), and more work from our international students campaign [here](#).

If you would like to learn more about how better practices for international students can be applied at your institution, or get involved in or be kept in touch about our international students campaign, you can contact us for a good practice guide at info@migrantsrights.org.uk.

Do you have any feedback on our Know Your Rights materials for international students? Let us know [here](#).



The Migrants' Rights Network is a UK charity that works alongside migrants in their fights for rights and justice. We co-curate campaigns using anti-oppression practices to create transformational change, extending beyond the individual impact on migrants' lives, to tackle oppression at its source.

Contact MRN via info@migrantsrights.org.uk

Migrants' Rights Network Ltd. is a registered company in England and Wales (06024396) and a registered charity (1125746).





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