



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023-24

27th SEPTEMBER 2023

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC
HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY
SERVICES**

**International Student Migration in
RCT**

Authors: Louise Davies, Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services and Gary Black, Community Safety and Strategic Partnerships Manager

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Elected Members with an overview of the emerging relocation and migration trends of International Students and their families arriving in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 1.2 The report will not include any of the various Home Office resettlement schemes the Council is actively participating in.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Scrutinise the content of the report and the information relating to emerging migration patterns of International Students and their families arriving in RCT and the potential impact on schools and existing council services.
- 2.2 Note that that the Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services and the Director of Education and Inclusion Services will continue to work with the University of South Wales and community partners to ensure appropriate support is provided to the students and their families living in RCT.

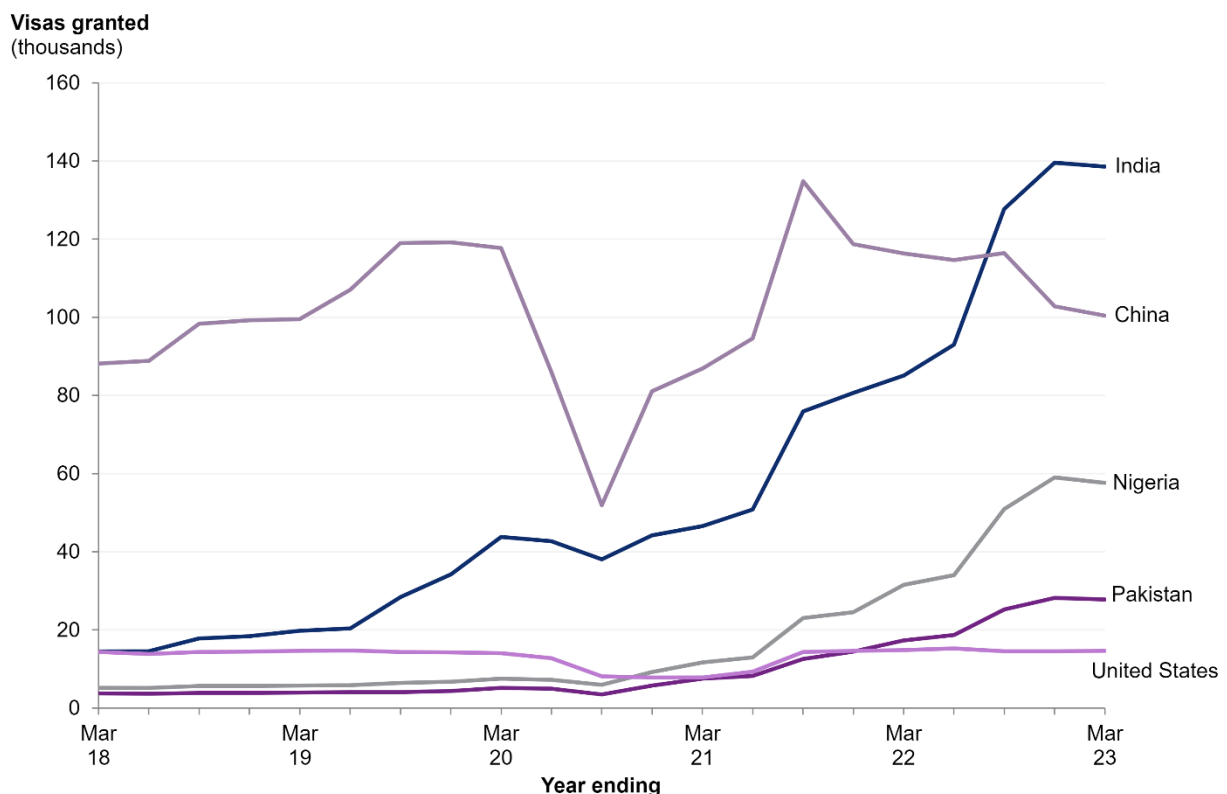
3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 There has been a significant increase in International Students enrolling at the University of South Wales (USW) Treforest Campus who are electing to bring dependent family members with them to live in RCT for the duration of their student visa. While this is permitted migration, there is notable impact of a growing cohort of children attending local schools and families living in our communities who are not able to access public funds.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 A large number of international students (over 300 persons, some including families accompanied with children of school age) have relocated to RCT in recent months, mostly within the Taf area. The cohort are not part of any wider resettlement or asylum dispersal scheme managed by the RCT Resettlement Team. From details obtained to date, Officers understand that the emerging cohort have arrived into the UK on a Student Visa, or as a visitor. These visas (student/post-graduate in combination) can last for 5-7 years and thereafter, visas can be extended if graduates get an employer to sponsor them.
- 4.2 The evolving picture of inward migration by overseas students that has been witnessed locally, which is likely to have been driven by more affordable accommodation within RCT, is also reflected in the national trends of student visas granted over the last year.
- 4.3 In the year ending March 2023, grants of visas to study increased by 23% for non-EEA nationals compared to year ending March 2022. Visas granted to EEA nationals decreased slightly (down 3%).

Figure 3: Sponsored study visas granted to main applicants between year ending March 2018 and year ending March 2023 (top 5 nationalities)



Source: Entry clearance visa applications and outcomes – Vis_D02

- 4.4 Figure 3 shows that there were 138,532 sponsored study visa grants to Indian nationals in year ending March 2023, an increase of 53,429 (+63%) compared to year ending March 2022 and the largest number of study visas granted to any

nationality. Grants to study for Indian nationals have risen markedly since year ending March 2019 and are now around 7 times higher.

- 4.5 Chinese nationals were the second most common nationality granted sponsored study visas in year ending March 2023, with 100,397 visas grants, 14% fewer than the 116,312 in year ending March 2022. Chinese and Indian nationals together comprised half (50%) of all sponsored study grants. Of the top 5 nationalities granted sponsored study visas, Nigerian nationals saw the largest percentage increase, up 83% to 57,636.
- 4.6 Linked to this, the responsibility for ensuring compliance with Student Visa requirements rests with the accepting University who are required to monitor student applications, payment of fees, attendance / engagement / absences. Therefore, the University is best placed for early identification of any breach of visa or potential safeguarding issues.

5. GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT VISAS

- 5.1 There are strict Government regulations in relation to student visa requirements and students must also be able to demonstrate sufficient funds to bring their families with them.
- 5.2 Students must be able to prove they have sufficient funds in place to support themselves with living costs for the length of the course, or up to 9 months if the course is longer than nine months. This equates to £9,207 for the main applicant. Students must also pay a visa application fee of £363 and an immigration health surcharge of £470 per year.
- 5.3 Students who apply to bring families to the UK with them, must provide evidence that they have in place an additional £6,120 for each accompanying family member. The visa application fee and health surcharge fee are also required for each family member.

6. ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN RCT

- 6.1 RCT Officers received anecdotal evidence that a number of International Students, many of Nigerian nationality, were attending Pontypridd Foodbank.
- 6.2 Officers from the RCT Community Safety Team met with Communities for Work+, Pontypridd Foodbank, the Community Member volunteering to assist the International Students and the USW to discuss the emerging needs of the cohort and understand the provision of support to date.

Foodbank

- 6.3 Whilst there were reported to be a number of international students attending the foodbank, there was no process in place for individuals to evidence their need for attending. Discussions took place around the necessity for an efficient process, to ensure the individuals are receiving the appropriate support.

- 6.4 Pontypridd Foodbank has made the decision to now refer students back to USW International Student Support Services to obtain a voucher and apply for a hardship fund, as it is not sustainable for the students to continue to be permitted to obtain items without a valid voucher. This referral pathway will also ensure the students are receiving the most appropriate support.
- 6.5 This new process has resulted in a significant decrease in the number of students attending the Foodbank.

Communities for Work+

- 6.6 Communities for Work+ (CfW+) were initially contacted by Pontypridd Foodbank who, after speaking to the international students, identified that they were looking for employment support. The Foodbank began referring to CfW+ directly for the individuals to access the one-to-one mentoring support provision – focusing specifically on finding employment and accessing training. As the numbers gradually increased it became impossible for Foodbank to continue referring and individuals were advised to telephone the CfW+ office to self-refer to the provision.
- 6.7 Specifically on the mentoring provision, the CfW+ programme has received upwards of 50 referrals from USW international students. Some dependants are still open cases (economically inactive) as they still qualify for support, but due to the CfW+ parameters of eligibility being changed by Welsh Government on April 1st, CfW+ are no longer able to accept referrals for students and therefore are signposting students wishing to obtain support back to Student Services at USW.
- 6.8 The nature of the clients referred has varied, with some clients still in full time education but searching for employment of up to 20 hours (in line with visa restrictions), and others who have left education or who have relocated with family members and are experiencing unemployment.
- 6.9 Many of the referrals made within the Pontypridd area received mentoring support to complete a CV and secure suitable employment. Individuals were keen to receive support due to previous negative experiences, whereby Employers had asked for payment for the offer of a contract / sponsorship. The Mentors were able to source reliable employment opportunities and fund DBS checks for those wishing to work in the care industry.
- 6.10 Other referrals received in the Rhondda and Cynon areas, have often been the result of Community Event attendance, for example, Interlink's Community Event, whereby individuals resettled from overseas having arrived on a student visa and were looking for employment and training for themselves, friends and / or family members.

Education

- 6.11 Below are the figures provided for school places that have been allocated in RCT to children arriving as dependents of international students:

A total of 60 primary places and 32 secondary places were allocated between 1st April 2022 – 31st December 2022.

A total of 98 primary places and 27 secondary places were allocated between 1st January 2023 – 28th July 2023

This equates to a total of 217 school place allocations in RCT to dependents of international students since 1st April 2022. This is in addition to over 70 such children who were attending an RCT school prior to April 2022.

At present (w/c 11/09/23) there are at least 254 children of international students believed to be attending a school in RCT.

- 6.12 There have been an increasing number of enquiries about supporting dependents of international students with free school meals. These enquiries have been made by individuals or organisations on the family's behalf.
- 6.13 Under current Welsh Government policies, free school meals are available for families in receipt of income-based benefits. The cohort within this report have no recourse to public funds, so are therefore ineligible. However, all children in years Reception to Year 2, are entitled to a Universal Primary Free School Meal, which is being extended to Years 3 and 4 from September 23 and Year 5 and 6 from April 24.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL SERVICES & SAFEGUARDING DUTIES

- 7.1 Research has evidenced that this is not an issue specific to RCT but is a wider issue across the whole of the United Kingdom. The matter has already been raised to the WLGA from several Local Authorities. It has also been brought to the attention of the Home Office and forms part of their immigration programme. Changes to the Student Visa system are due to be implemented by the Home Office in January 2024 which will restrict visas that allow dependents to accompany students to a more limited number of university courses across the UK.
- 7.2 In terms of Safeguarding and Children's Services, when a family is presented to children services for support, it is necessary to obtain information from the Home Office about the parents' current immigration status to establish the support options available to the family and whether an immigration-related exclusion to social services support applies.
- 7.3 Migrants subject to No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), or here without lawful status in the UK, are barred from accessing social care where the need arises solely out of their destitution or threat of destitution. However, local authorities are not prevented from providing support to migrants who are otherwise barred access to assistance, where it is necessary to avoid a breach of human rights or the wellbeing of a child in question (Schedule 3 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002).

7.4 In respect of human rights, social services will need to undertake a human rights assessment to establish whether the family can return to their country of origin to avoid a situation of destitution in the UK, or whether there is a legal or practical barrier that means they cannot be expected to return. That said, even when a parent is in an excluded group, social services can still:

- Undertake a child in need assessment.
- Provide emergency support when this is required whilst the child in need and human rights assessment are being carried out.

The law in this area is complex and further legal advice would be required on a case-by-case basis.

7.5 Students and their families with NRPf due to their visa restrictions are not eligible to apply for housing or receive housing related support. Councils do however have limited discretion to provide support to persons presented as homeless and each case would be assessed individually. Where housing services are provided in such situations, there would be financial implications for the Council as migrants and their families would not be eligible for housing or other benefits to offset the accommodation charges.

Community Cohesion & Risk of Exploitation

7.6 Due to the increasing number of resettlement programmes that RCT are actively engaged in, the Council's Community Cohesion team are very pro-active in identifying any community tensions or community cohesion issues. The emerging relocation and migration trends of international students will noticeably make local communities more ethnically diverse and sadly, that presents an increased risk of extreme far right activities. Community Cohesion Officers are working extremely hard with partners to ensure that RCT remains a safe place for all our residents and visitors.

8. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH WALES

8.1 The University of South Wales (USW) are very passionate about the benefits of international students and the crucial role they play in the education landscape and socio-economic fabric of the United Kingdom.

8.2 The USW welcomes 23,000 new and returning students each year from over 100 different countries. Students can choose to apply via UCAS or directly to the University.

8.3 On the USW website there are dedicated pages for international students which set out in detail the requirement to study at USW such as English language, fees, visa requirements, living in South Wales, accommodation, and student support.

8.4 The accommodation page of the website contains a specific section for students who are considering travelling with their families. The section outlines that the USW

do not provide family accommodation and that private rental accommodation is in very high demand. Approximate costs of short and long term accommodation are also outlined. Students are encouraged to travel alone initially, until they have sourced suitable accommodation for their families.

- 8.5 International students receive regular communications in the months leading up to their actual start date. These communications contain information about enrolment, timetabling, IT access, University services and welcome events. There is also information on accommodation, welfare, money and health.
- 8.6 In addition to the usual Freshers Week and Welcome Fest Programme, which are available to all USW students, there is also an International Welcome Programme. This programme is a week long series of social events, activities, and practical tips to help the international students settle in, make new friends, and get used to being in the UK.

Ongoing Support

- 8.7 The USW Immigration and International Student Advice Team are the first point of contact for international students where they can get specialist advice on immigration and non-academic welfare issues.
- 8.8 The University also offers an extensive range of both academic and non-academic support services to all students. These services include:
- Academic services and support.
 - Careers advice.
 - Chaplaincy.
 - Mental health and Counselling.
 - Disability advice.
 - Health and wellbeing.
 - Student money advice.
 - Study skills support.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 9.1 This report is for information and an Equality and Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

10. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 This report is for information and there are no Welsh Language implications arising from this report.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 11.1 There are financial implications arising in Education Services and Schools related to provision of education and support services to the children of International Students. There will be further financial implications arising from any Safeguarding or Statutory Children's Services intervention with any specific child or family.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 12.1 The laws relating to legal migration visas and provision of public funded services or support to persons with NRPF are complex and would need detailed consideration as part of any Council decision to provide or increase support to international student migrants and their families.

13. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 13.1 Not applicable to this report which is provided for information only.

14. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 14.1 Effective migration strategies are key in ensuring the Council achieves the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 “Making a Difference”.
- 14.2 The work outlined in this report is directly aligned to the “Places” priority within the Corporate Plan – *ensuring the County Borough is one of the safest places in Wales, where people from all backgrounds get along with each other and feel safe.*
- 14.3 Effective migration strategies play a vital role in ensuring that Wales remains a safe, attractive, and welcoming place for its residents and visitors, and fulfils our commitment to be a Nation of Sanctuary. Therefore, the work that has been highlighted within this report contributes to the seven elements that The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is aiming to achieve:
1. A prosperous Wales.
 2. A resilient Wales.
 3. A more equal Wales.
 4. A healthier Wales.
 5. A Wales of cohesive communities.
 6. A Wales of vibrant culture and Welsh language.
 7. A globally responsible Wales.

15. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS

- 15.1 This report is relevant to the whole of RCT although there is currently a more significant impact on the Treforest, Rhydyfelin and Pontypridd localities.

16. CONCLUSION

- 16.1 In conclusion, international students and families have no recourse to public funds and Council services are not required, by law, to provide support. However, the Council will continue to discharge its safeguarding responsibilities on a case by case basis where required. This emerging situation has potential financial implications for schools and there is a disproportionate impact on Treforest, Rhydyfelin and Pontypridd although there are families living throughout RCT. The wider community cohesion implications are monitored closely and managed in line with wider

community safety objectives. The Home Office is considering implementing changes to the student visa system and this may have an impact on arrivals into RCT, however that is to be determined.

- 16.2 The close partnership work with the University of South Wales will continue to be developed across all appropriate Council service areas, ensuring that RCT is a safe and vibrant local authority and fully embracing multi culturalism and diversity.