International Student Policy in the UK

Policy on international students in the UK underwent significant changes and development from 1999 to 2015. Throughout this period, rationales for and against increasing recruitment of international students to the UK underpin policies. This chapter presents the key touchstones in policy on international students, drawing on both educational and migration policy.

I used a text-based method. Texts are understood here as snapshots of policy discourses, selectively constructed and socially produced, such that the choices around language and content reveal ideologies. As Shapiro (2001) indicates, texts are expressions of *mediated* social reality, so they cannot be used uncritically as a window onto social events. This chapter lays the groundwork for a critical analysis by first depicting the period as it is represented in the texts. In doing so, it also illustrates the policy formation process in UK international higher education. Describing this as a "process" may, in the light of the characterisations put forward in the previous chapter, be rather too strong a phrase. As an area of policy, international higher education is very fluid, and decisions often appear to be made ad hoc rather than with reference to a strategic plan (Belcher 1987; Walker 2014). Even where strategic plans exist, their implementation is contingent on a range of policy actors and stakeholders, each with their own agency. Therefore, when this chapter states that a document makes a statement, this does not necessarily imply that the statement reflects reality, only that the policy constructs it as reality.

This study examines a diffuse policy field around a single object. As (Knight 2004, p. 17) suggests, on a national policy level international higher education policy includes "(e)ducation and other national-level policies relating to international dimension of higher education; other policy sectors include cultural, scientific, immigration, trade, employment, and culture". Therefore, policy documents have been selected from across these domains to capture the full range of policy on international students.

Higher education policy in the UK has traditionally been devolved to the institutional level. But during this period the role of state power has increased through increasingly centralised quality assurance, financial accountability and funding mechanisms (Deem et al. 2007), with an underpinning assumption that higher education plans a critical role in the creation and maintenance of national competitive advantage (Elliott 1998). Now, responsibility for quality lies with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), no longer run by institutions but instead a quasi-independent body, whose funding is managed by the Higher Education Funding Councils, similarly quasi-independent from government but representing substantial state control (Shattock 2012). Responsibility for universities has been located in different ministries at different times: until 2016 it sat within the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), making the ideological relationship between education, skills and the economy explicit in organisational terms. Therefore, policy is understood here to include the activity of quasi-independent bodies, as well as statements from ministries.

International students, considered as a source of income, can be indirectly implicated in economic and financial policy, which derives primarily from the Treasury, as well as direct from the BIS. International education, classified as education exports, falls under the trade and industrial strategy, as explained in the recent strategy document (BIS 2013a, b). These strategies come under the broader 2011 "Plan for Growth", which highlights the role of education in economic recovery (HM Treasury & Department for Business Innovation & Skills 2011).

Migration or mobility policy has a major impact on international students. It is created primarily from the Home Office, and secondarily from the UK Border Agency. The Home Office sets general migration priorities and the UKBA implements particular visa regulations. Recently the UKBA has been officially disbanded (British Council 2013), and its key functions split between enforcement of immigration law and issuing

of visas (UK Border Agency 2013a, b). It is now known as the UKVI, but this book refers mainly to its functions before the name change and uses the original title of UKBA.

Documents were included if they met four criteria. Firstly, they had international students as their main object or potentially impacted them, understood as limiting or facilitating actions international students may take, from acquiring a visa, to working, studying or altering classroom practices.

Secondly, they were published by a central government agency or centrally funded quasi-governmental organisation as described above, or were referenced frequently in such documents and, therefore, understood as influential in policy formation. This is consistent with the governing-at-a-distance practices of policy in higher education in the UK, which is not created or expressed exclusively through formal documents constructed within ministerial departments. Relevant bodies include Parliamentary activity, quasi-independent public bodies (such as the British Council, Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Migration Advisory Committee), and independent public bodies (such as the Higher Education Academy, the Quality Assurance Agency and the UK Council for International Student Affairs).

Documents from these agencies offer a window into public policy discourses, although they are not in and of themselves formal policy. I do not wish to imply here that these agencies are always perfectly aligned with central government policy—this is not a state-centred analysis. Indeed, it is clear that at times they lobby and contest government policy (e.g. UKCISA 2013). However, inasmuch as, for instance, the judgements of the QAA have implications for regulation it can be seen as representative of policy discourse. The analysis presented here takes account of the relative independence and centrality of the different agencies. But discrepancies do not necessarily indicate the operation of different discourses, as ruptures and discontinuities are typical of discourse (Foucault 1972). Thus, texts originating from quasi-governmental agencies, even where they are critical or diverge from central government policy, are still express, reflect or evidence policy discourses. There are of course a wide range of reports, speeches and press releases from organisations, and this represents only a small selection. It is not representative of all voices in the sector by any means and does not attempt to be so. Prominence has been given to central policy initiatives or information from ministerial departments, either on the basis of the position of the publishing

organisation in the policy process, receipt of government funding, or the genre of the text.

Thirdly, they were publicly accessible or available. Because the focus is on policy discourses, publicly available documents were considered to illustrate the way that international students are talked about in public policy for a (Bacchi 2009, 2012). Those discourses would be most likely to filter into everyday discourses and therefore to impact students and those who interact with them. Therefore, access to archives or privileged information such as internal documents or information obtained through interviews was not sought. Public documents, published by the state, represent the "official" national discourse (Codd 1988).

Fourthly, they were published between 1999 and 2015. 1999 saw the launch of the first stage of the Prime Minister's Initiative, considered to be the first step in developing a set of policies relating specifically to international students. Setting 2015 as the end point allows examination of discursive events which have followed the publication of the Coalition Government's International Education Strategy.

No limitations were set on the genre of the document. Policy was understood not only as formal policy texts, but also on a range of informal genres originating from ministerial departments which represent and refract policy differently (Bacchi 2009): press releases, speeches, web pages and occasional newspaper articles. Including this range of genres captures the range of actions and justifications made, expressive of the values which underpin policy. This also includes research reports which have provided evidence for policy decisions, often commissioned by a government department. To differentiate between documents produced by the ministerial department and those commissioned from a third party, in-text citations use the department names for the former, and names of the authors have been used for the latter.

Documents were identified through a combination of web searches, database searches and use of the National Archive. This method resulted in small, though highly relevant, core sample of documents. In addition, references and inter-textual links were followed up. When one document mentioned another, I would locate and include the second document by a full title search on the above sites or organisational home pages. For instance, the Vision 2020 report (Böhm et al. 2004) was mentioned in multiple documents (DfES 2004; UKCOSA 2004; Bone 2008, Conlon et al. 2011), so I subsequently included it, on the grounds that it appeared to have been influential in policy discourses. Throughout the

study, new documents were identified through this approach, until saturation was reached.

Policies on international students in the UK can be broadly grouped into 3 main stages. Firstly the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) ran from 1999–2004. It was followed by the PMI2, the second phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative, which ran from 2006–2011. Finally, the Coalition's IES, published in 2013 marked the beginning of a new period. These eras and key changes are presented in Fig. 3.1, which also details key changes to migration policy.

THE PRIME MINISTER'S INITIATIVE (PMI)

As of 1998, there was "no corpus of government policy on internationalisation of HE as such, (although) the utterances of ministers make clear their recognition of the commercial and diplomatic value of the 'education export industry'" (Elliot 1998, p. 41). The PMI, as mentioned in the introduction, aimed to attract 50,000 additional higher education international students to the UK within 6 years (British Council 1999), and to make Britain "the first choice for quality" (British Council 2003, p. 14). This was to be achieved by a "package of measures" (Blair 1999) including: revisions to the immigration rules for students (Roche 2000); the development of the Education UK brand as part of a professionalised approach to marketing higher education; and the expansion of the Chevening scholarship scheme (Blair 1999). The Chevening scholarship is run by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and was established in 1983 as part of the Pym Package (Walker 2014). It is targeted at future leaders of developing countries and offers substantial funding and alumni support and networks and constructed as a public diplomacy initiative (Wilson 2014).

Immigration changes simplified visa procedures, by granting a visa for the duration of a programme of study, instituted a right to work alongside full-time study (Roche 2000) and facilitated switching between visa categories to work after graduation (Home Office 2002). These changes occurred in the context of a number of significant legislative initiatives to gain control of the asylum and migration system (Seldon 2007). It was also only 2 years after the publication of the Dearing Report, which recommended the introduction of domestic tuition fees of £1000 (Shattock 2012). These were introduced in 1999, in part in response to the funding crisis in higher education since 1995.

Year	Government	Stage	International student policy events	Migration policy events
1999	New Labour: PM Tony Blair	Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) to recruit more international students	PMI launched; market research for Education UK brand begun	Immigration and Asylum Act passed; visa applications for students made easier; right to work parttime on student visas established
2000			Quality strategy launched	
2002			Recruitment targets reached; SHINE international student award launched	Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act; right to work post-graduation
2004				Right to recruit international students restricted to accredited institutions
2005				Crackdown on 'suspect colleges'
2006		Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI2)	PMI2 launched: focus on student experience, employability, partnerships	Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act; Points–Based System introduced; students' right to appeal restricted
2007			Education UK brand 'refreshed'	Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) introduced
2009	New Labour: PM Gordon Brown		Funding for pilot projects to improve student experience; Teaching International Students project	Tier 4 system introduced; review of Tier 4; Bogus college scandal'
2010 (January– April)				Reforms to Tier 4: highly-trusted status introduced; right to part-time work restricted; English language level raised and restricted to secure tests
2010 (May– December)	Coalition Government: PM David Cameron			Policy to reduce net migration levels introduced
2011			PMI2 officially ends Launch of Britain is GREAT campaign	English language requirements raised; border interviews reintroduced; permission to work and right for dependants to accompany students restricted
2012				Post-study work route (Tier 1) closed; right to recruit restricted to HTS; minimum salaries for international graduates required; border interviews expanded
2013– 2015		Coalition International Education Strategy	International Education Strategy (IES) published; first industrial strategy for economic growth	Landlords and employers required to check immigration status of tenants and employees, respectively

Fig. 3.1   International student policy and migration policy

Targets were also set for further education recruitment, and English language schools and independent schools (British Council 2003). The governance of the PMI was led by the British Council, and the PMI pulled together four government departments (Education and Employment, Trade and Industry, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
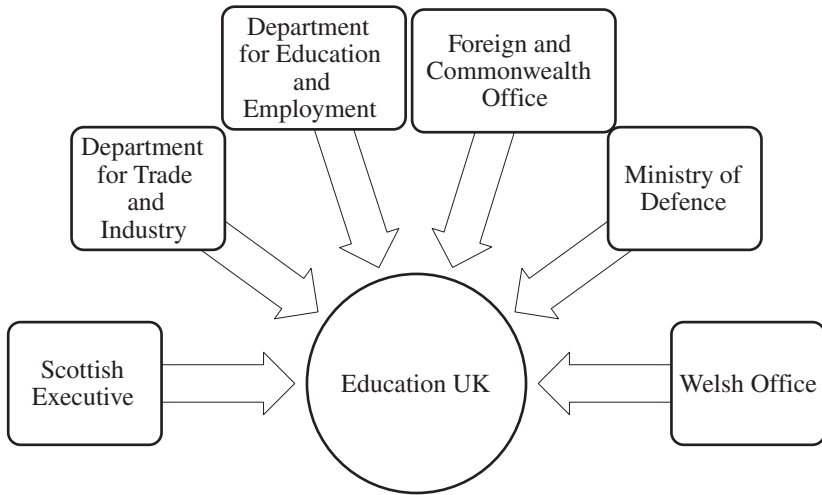
Fig. 3.2 Funding for Education UK brand (based on information in British Council 2000)

(FCO), and the Ministry of Defence, the Scottish and Welsh devolved assemblies, and the British Council to develop an integrated policy approach (British Council 2003) (see Fig. 3.2). This was organised under the leadership of the Department for Education and Employment (later Department for Education and Skills), with the British Council managing the Education UK brand, and the Foreign Office retaining control of the Chevening scholarship scheme (British Council 2003).

The Education UK brand development was a major touchstone of the initiative. Based on a programme of market research, the perceptions of potential students, of staff and agents and higher education institutions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the UK sector were synthesised into what was claimed to be a coherent vision and brand. The brand "footprint" identified was of British Education as meaning "a dynamic tradition; the new world class; being the best I (international students) can be" and is "responsive; welcoming; alive with possibilities" (British Council 1999, p. 1). It was possible to develop a brand for the entire higher education sector, since the dissolution of the binary divide between universities and polytechnics in 1992 (Shattock 2012).

The aim of this process was to develop an umbrella identity for Britain, which could be marketed overseas by the British Council and by individual institutions within it. This brand sought to differentiate the UK from other competitor countries such as Australia and the USA and particularly to shed some of the negative perceptions of the UK. It comprised advertising campaigns, scholarship programmes, student awards like the SHINE International Student award, and competitions such as the "Real UK campaign…designed to inspire and inform prospective students and challenge negative or stereotyped perceptions of the UK" using celebrities and an emphasis on creative industries to reinforce the "cool Britannia" image (British Council 2003, p. 16). Perceptions of the UK as a nation, and consequently its higher education, as part of the "old world order", alongside a "lack of professionalism" in HE marketing and recruitment are cited as contributing to the UK's vulnerability in the face of increasing competition (British Council 1999).

To this end, the "Education UK brand" was developed under the PMI (British Council 1999; British Council 2000). It was initially created to increase direct recruitment and by emphasising UK HE's "affordability, dynamic tradition, new world class, diversity (and) welcome for international students" (British Council 1999, Para. 65), with a "clear definition of excellence that UK education provides" (Blair 1999). This is argued to be necessary due to a "blurring of the attractiveness factors of the UK and major competitors as national and institution brands become increasingly global" (British Council 2003, p. 7). This brand includes visual identities, logos advice for institutions on marketing, a database of education agents, and promotional materials (British Council 2003; British Council 2010).

In order to make Britain the "first choice for quality" (Blair 1999), the British Council Education Counselling Service developed a quality strategy for institutions to develop, to improve their overseas reputation. This emphasised students' academic, accommodation, lifestyle and career experiences. Institutions are instructed to develop statements of expectations for students and demonstrate their commitment to quality control (British Council 2000, p. 13). The emphasis on developing a reputation for quality meant that institutions were expected to demonstrate a commitment to "improving the quality of the international student's total experience" (British Council 2000, p. 13). In part, this meant establishing clear expectations, but it also appears to suggest changes to teaching, learning and

support services. This represents a significant central interpellation into nominally autonomous institutions.

The 91% increase in international student numbers by 2002, within 3 years of the launch, was presented as a policy success solution to the problem of competition (British Council 2003). By 2005, the PMI had succeeded in its stated objectives: the recruitment targets were exceeded by 43,000 students in both higher and further education (Blair 2006). However, the rapidly changing context of international higher education meant that the work done on the Education UK brand, for example, was rapidly imitated by competitor countries (UKCISA 2011a), in particular, Holland, New Zealand and Malaysia (Geddie 2014). In fact, despite the rise in absolute numbers, the UK's market share actually declined from 1997–2003 by 3% (Böhm et al. 2004). The increase in numbers may instead be attributed to the overall increase in global student mobility, to an increase in demand rather than supply (Findlay 2011). It could also be attributed to tightening migration policy after 9/11 in the USA, which led to a loss in market share (Choudaha and de Wit 2014). Trends like transnational education, e-learning and private education providers, among others, are described as contributing to a "rapidly evolving world market" (BIS 2010, p. 2), in which the goals set by the PMI were no longer adequate. Therefore, its aims were refined and expanded in the PMI2—the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education.

THE PRIME MINISTER'S INITIATIVE FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION (PMI2)

The PMI2 set recruitment targets of 100,000 international students. Like the PMI, the PMI2 was introduced at almost the same time as a change to domestic financing. From 2006, a Graduate Contribution Scheme was established, where fees were covered by a student loan, to be repaid after graduation (Shattock 2012). This represented an increase to £3000 annual fees. The PMI2 also broadened the scope from the PMI, including targeting diversification of source countries, and reputation management. It aimed to double the number of countries sending significant numbers of students to the UK, improve student satisfaction ratings, change perceptions, improve employability and grow partnerships (DIUS 2009; UKCISA 2011a). Some scholarships were also funded (DIUS 2009), although these constituted only approximately
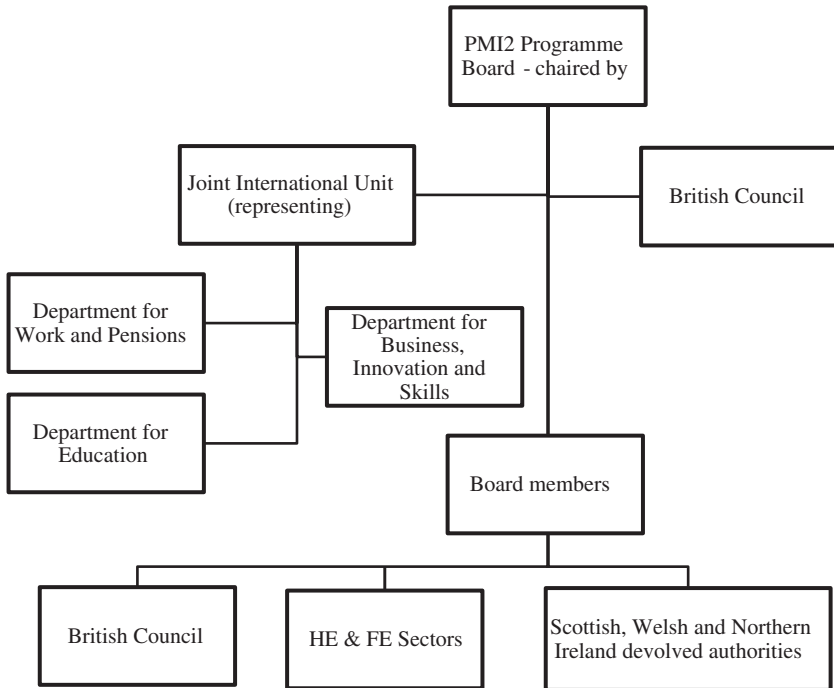
Fig. 3.3 Management of PMI2 (DIUS 2009; British Council 2010)

5–8% of annual expenditures from the total PMI2 (DTZ 2011). Each of these key areas is explored in more detail below, and key dimensions of migration policy follow.

The change of title in PMI2 reflected the development from recruitment targets into a more sophisticated, longer-term endeavour to embed the increases in international recruitment in a broader network of partnerships and institutional activities (DIUS 2009), demonstrating a more nuanced understanding of the education marketplace. The governance of PMI2 also changed and was led by a board jointly chaired by the British Council and the Joint International Unit, which represented the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' (BIS) international education activities (British Council 2010), as detailed in Fig. 3.3. In addition, the Home Office was consulted on those areas which affected migration policy. It is apparent that the Ministry of Defence and the

FCO are not included in the management of PMI2, unlike the PMI. Yet the introduction of the Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) in 2007 was overseen by the FCO suggesting they remain involved in key areas. The ATAS requires students in "certain sensitive subjects" (such as biotechnology, engineering and computer science) to obtain permission to study, in the interests of preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Kemp et al. 2008, p. 69). Although the 7/7 London bombings are not referenced in the ATAS documentation, there is a clear link to be drawn here. Given that the Points-Based System for migration management was also introduced during this period (UKBA 2008), this suggests that migration policy was seen to be more distinct from international education policy under the PMI2 than under the PMI.

Marketing and communication strategies remained largely the responsibility of the British Council and the Education UK brand (DTZ 2011). "The brand is designed to convey both the educational benefits of studying in the UK and the range of social, cultural and career advantages that a UK education offers. Crucially, it also positions the UK as a powerful partner and source of expertise in education more generally" (British Council 2010, p. 13). This underscores the shift in focus away from direct recruitment and onto strategic collaboration, positioning the UK as the world's paid consultant, prioritising "system-to-system" engagement, direct cooperation between governments aimed at developing domestic higher education systems, for example through partnerships. The Education UK brand was sustained through the continued expansion of the Education UK website, the issue of trademark licences to UK universities, the development of a network of education agents, and a range of marketing campaigns in priority countries (DTZ 2011). The brand is described as "built around a 'tradition of innovation'" (BIS 2010, p. 11), emphasising the UK's modernity in contrast to its perceived traditional, elitist image. It was intended to articulate a shared vision of the distinctiveness of UK HE (BIS 2009). It also situated the UK as an expert partner for other countries. Campaigns sought to approach and "inspire" students directly through social media and indirectly through training agents (BIS 2010).

Diversification of markets aimed to double the number of countries sending over 10,000 students by 2011 (DTZ 2011). Reliance on a few key countries, namely China, India and Nigeria for the majority of students appeared to render the sector vulnerable to unpredictable shifts.

Yet in executing the marketing and promotion strand above, these key countries actually took priority (BIS 2010), perhaps because they were predicted to be the biggest source of growth (Böhm et al. 2004). This target was not achieved (DTZ 2011).

Improving the student experience was one of its main aims of the PMI2 (BIS 2009; DIUS 2009), as student feedback collected during the PMI suggested that this was a weakness for the UK. It was measured in national-level surveys under the PMI2 (UKCOSA 2004; Ipsos Mori 2006). The student experience encompasses learning and classroom interactions, social life and accommodation, and support services (Archer et al. 2011). Thus, "soft issues such as host culture, social activities, informal welcome atmosphere, local orientation and friendship, together with matters relating to money" (Bone 2008, p. 3) take on greater importance relative to education. PMI2 funded several projects to "explore ways of making life easier and more rewarding for international students in the UK" (British Council 2010, p. 20) managed by UKCISA (2010a). These were claimed to have contributed to improving ratings for student satisfaction obtained under the International Student Barometer (a proprietary tool run by i-graduate) (Archer et al. 2010a), and positive evaluations were incorporated into marketing messages. The academic dimensions of student experience came under particular focus, as did finance and accommodation (UKCOSA 2004; Hyland et al. 2008), and social and cultural integration (Archer et al. 2010b). Student experience projects, such as intercultural mentoring, skills podcasts (UKCISA 2010a) and the "Internationalising Student Unions" project (DTZ 2011), were funded.

While satisfaction was found to be high, expectations often clashed with reality (Archer et al. 2010a) particularly with regards to application, arrival and study. Several intervention projects, therefore, sought to resolve this dissatisfaction with the provision of information to manage expectations (Archer 2010b; UKCISA 2011a). For example, the International Student Calculator (UKCISA 2011a) apparently addressed financial concerns by offering a more accurate prediction of expenses (UKCOSA 2004; Ipsos Mori 2006). Other PMI2 projects such as the Teaching International Students project conducted with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) sought to enhance the cultural awareness of academic staff and thereby improve classroom experiences of international students (Ryan 2010; DTZ 2011). Other projects aimed to encourage greater integration and value diversity among students, at least in part to offer cross-cultural experiences as part of a high-quality,

inclusive education for both international and home students (Hyland et al. 2008). Shortly after the official end of the PMI2, the QAA (2012) published guidance for institutions on supporting international students, which consolidates much of the information acquired through the student experience strand of the PMI2 for staff and institutions.

Developing partnerships and distance learning meant establishing collaborative arrangements including "teaching programmes, student exchanges and strategic links at institutional level" (UKCISA 2010, p. 4) and developing distance learning and transnational higher education opportunities through technology (BIS 2009). These developments did not lead to the physical presence of international students in the UK, however, so will only be touched upon here, and in subsequent sections.

Employability became a significant element of the PMI2, framed initially as part of the student experience, but later as a distinct agenda. A UK higher education is presented as "an entry ticket to the best paid employment and a preparation for a globalised world of work" (BIS 2009, p. 26). In essence, it is considered that international students choose to study in the UK to gain an advantage in the labour market through a British qualification, as a "return on investment" (PMI2 Strategy Group 2006). The PMI2 sponsored research and projects, managed by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS), intended to develop international employability for graduates (BIS 2010; AGCAS 2011; UKCISA 2010). It ran a series of events to train careers staff, engage employers and support students directly, for example, by publishing country specific employability guides and running a virtual career fair Fig. 3.4.

In sum, PMI2, with its key themes of employability, student experience, partnerships and marketing, still sought to increase recruitment of international students. But it did so with a longer term, more nuanced understanding of the factors which influence student decisions than did the PMI. The increasing project activity and greater involvement of the sector in the governance suggest a more networked, diffuse approach to policy development and implementation in this period. In parallel, significant changes occurred within migration policy which impacted international students.

Migration Policy

Migration policy is primarily executed by the Home Office, on advice from the Migration Advisory Committee and policy guidance from the Cabinet and administered through the UKBA at the level of visa
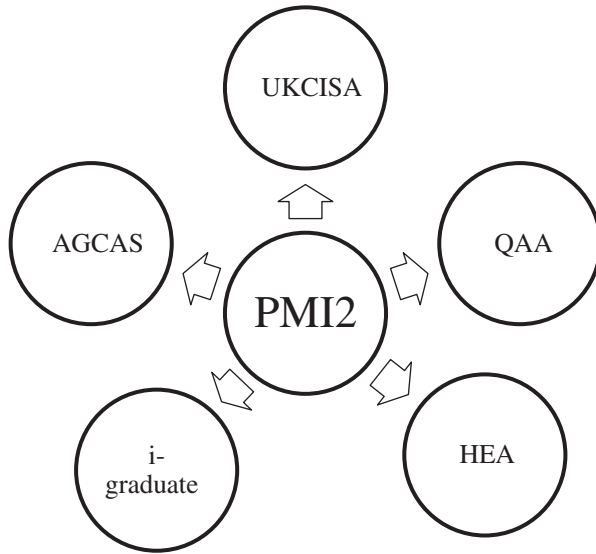
Fig. 3.4 Non-departmental agencies involved in implementation of PMI2

issuing and border controls (see Fig. 3.5). This governance structure has remained stable, although the UKBA has since been renamed UK Visas and Immigration, with a slight redefinition in terms of responsibilities.

Alongside the PMI2, significant changes to migration policy were made. In 2006, the Points-Based System (PBS) was introduced, which sought to make the visa decision-making process more consistent and transparent (Home Office 2006). It aimed to "to increase the skills and knowledge base of the UK" by quantifying qualifications, experience and income, and correlating this with labour market needs. The independent Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) was established in 2007 to offer advice based on expert knowledge of the economy and labour markets, in particular in compiling lists of occupations in which the UK has a labour market shortage (Public Bodies Reform Team 2014).

The PBS "tier" relevant to international students, Tier 4[1], was introduced in 2009 and included the following changes:

- education providers, known as sponsors, taking responsibility for the student while they are in the UK (Home Office 2006);
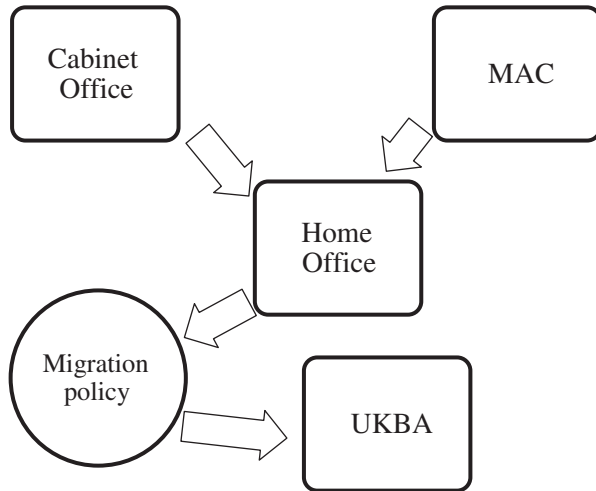
Fig. 3.5 Migration policy governance and implementation

- issuing licenses to educational sponsors (HEIs primarily but also language colleges) (UKBA 2008);
- restricting which students would be considered eligible, to "guard against the risk of bogus students" (ibid., p. 6);
- UKBA relying on documents for checking of applications; and
- UKBA undertakes "active checking" while students are in the UK.

Students earn points by having an offer from an eligible HEI and sufficient financial funds to live and pay fees during their studies (Home Office 2006). An increased burden of record keeping and administration was placed on the sponsors, and adult students were from this point on expected to have qualifications before arriving. In practice, however, it appears that many students still experienced issues with this system (UKCISA 2009), including perceptions of excessive cost (exceeding £1000 in some cases), delays, difficulty proving funds and confusion about the application form and process.

Alongside the introduction of the Tier 4 system, a scandal broke around "bogus colleges", when a number of institutions (mostly private language colleges) were found to be "operating courses which (were) really a means to low-skilled employment" (UKBA 2008, p. 4). In 2008,

an unknown number of students were found to be studying at unregistered or inadequately resourced colleges due to the lapses in licensing procedures (Home Affairs Committee 2009). Such colleges were operating with very limited teaching facilities, falsifying attendance data and diplomas. Students were found to be working considerably more than 20 h a week, often in black market employment. In the light of these criticisms, in 2009, Gordon Brown introduced a review of the Tier 4 system to address "abuses" of the system (Gower 2010), and "crack down on bogus colleges" (Travis 2010) in the context of a broader move to restrict illegal immigration (British Council 2010). It was argued that the new Tier 4 regulations would rectify this situation (UKBA 2009). The reforms targeted courses below degree level at private colleges and further education (UK Border Agency 2010, p. 8) and introduced the "Highly Trusted Sponsor" (HTS) status, without which institutions would not be able to sponsor international students for visas (UKBA 2011a). The number of institutions with HTS status was restricted (Johnson 2010). Procedures for inspection and monitoring were discovered to be flawed and new processes, such as the "highly trusted sponsors" register, were introduced (National Audit Office (NAO) 2012). English language requirements were raised, rights to work were restricted, and acceptable language tests were limited to "secure tests" (Johnson 2010). Without justification, Common European Framework of References for Languages level B2 is set as the minimum requirement: "B2 in listening, reading, speaking and writing is the appropriate level for those coming to study at level 6 (undergraduate) and above" (Home Office 2011, p. 11). This was contested in a court case by English UK on behalf of language schools but became part of the Immigration Rules in 2010, with broad consent from the rest of the sector (UKBA 2011b). It also became a requirement for students to be assessed through "secure", independent tests of English rather than in-house testing by institutions. The right to work during courses and the number of hours was also curtailed, in the name of restricting applications to "genuine students". These changes were poorly received by the sector (Acton 2011; Universities UK 2011b).

Despite these reforms, the Tier 4 system was widely criticised by the media as a "weak point in Britain's defences" (Gower 2010). Although it is evident that "suspect colleges" were being investigated in 2005 (Blair 2005), blame was laid at the door of the PBS.

Coalition Migration Policy

In 2010, a general election was held, in which coverage of immigration was comparatively scant, suggesting policy convergence by the main three parties towards the political centre ground (Flynn et al. 2010). Such silence may also be attributed in part to the rise to prominence of the British National Party, with the main political parties seeing that major debates on immigration would give credence to the former's xenophobic stance (Gaber 2013). There was cross-party support for the principle of a PBS, although in the Conservative Manifesto, the student visa route was considered a weakness of the system and measures were proposed to tighten up on this route (Conservative Party 2010, p. 21).

A hung parliament as a result of the election led to the formation of a Coalition Government between the majority Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats. The immigration position at the outset was fundamentally similar to that of New Labour: "The Government believes that immigration has enriched our culture and strengthened our economy but that it must be controlled so that people have confidence in the system" (HM Government 2010, p. 21). This sustains the duality of acknowledging the economic potential of immigration while seeking to reduce "unwanted" arrivals. The only mention of international students in the document situates them in the field of immigration policy, not education or economy: "We will introduce new measures to minimise abuse of the immigration system, for example via student routes," (ibid.). There is a link discursively created between the international student and "abuse of the system" which is not, in this instance, mitigated with an acknowledgement of their contributions, as had been the rhetorical convention hitherto.

Significant changes are apparent in migration policy from the New Labour governments of Blair and Brown to the Coalition Government of 2010. The Blair policies, while still oriented towards reducing illegal migration, emphasised making student migration easy and attractive, by targeting part-time work, application procedures, access by dependants and post-study work opportunities. This included the introduction of the points-based migration system. In contrast, the Brown government began a process of tightening up requirements around English language, eligible institutions and part-time work (Johnson 2010). The Coalition Government continued this process, under the broader aim of making substantial reductions to net migration.

As part of the 2010 election campaign, Conservatives pledged to reduce net migration "to tens of thousands rather than hundreds of thousands" (Home Office 2010), as it was seen to be "out of control", "unsustainable" (Green 2010), and causing negative social impacts and a lack of public confidence in the system (May 2010a). These conclusions were reached on the basis of a UKBA report which found that 21% of students who applied for visas in 2004 were still legally present in the UK after 5 years (Achato et al. 2010). Though contested by Liberal Democrats members, it became a defining tenet of the Coalition administration (Gower and Hawkins 2013). To achieve this ambitious reduction, significant reforms were announced by Home Secretary Theresa May (2010b), which primarily affected Tiers 1 and 2 of the PBS but also implicated the Tier 4 student visa route. While consistently acknowledging the contributions of "genuine students" (May 2010a; Green 2010), a succession of changes were made to student visa routes (see Fig. 3.1 for details) in consequence, aimed at reducing "abuse of the system". These changes were expected to "cut the number of student visas issued by around 80,000 a year" (Cameron 2011a).

Further restrictions on work, work placements and the status of dependents were also imposed and the Post-Study Work route (Tier 1) was closed (Gower and Hawkins 2013), despite opposition from the sector (UKBA 2011b). In 2012, the work opportunities for graduates were modified so that international students could switch into a different Tier (either 2 "Skilled Worker" or 5 "Temporary worker") if they could find a graduate-level job of a minimum salary (Gower and Hawkins 2013) or develop an entrepreneurial scheme. To qualify for a visa, students now had to demonstrate "progression" from their previous qualifications to their current course (UKBA 2011a). Finally, English language levels had to be proved through a particular list of "secure" tests (of which IELTS is by far the most preferred) and "targeted" spot-check interviews at the border were also reintroduced (Gower and Hawkins 2013), where the student could be refused entry if they could not hold a simple conversation to the border agent's satisfaction. These border interviews were expanded to over 100,000 interviews in 2013–2014 to assess whether students are "genuine".

This policy shift had consequences for students and the sector. Students were particularly dissatisfied at the closure of the Post-Study Work route and confused by the frequent changes in rules and guidance (UKCISA 2011b). They also found the cost of visa applications

excessive, which has increased threefold in the last 5 years (UKCISA 2013a). This has led to a reduced sense of the welcome afforded to international students in the UK, potentially making the UK vulnerable to competition from more welcoming destinations. Universities found the burden of compliance under Tier 4 significant, with an average cost of over £300,000 per institution and a sector wide total of £66,800,910 in 2012–2013 (HEBRG 2013) and significant impacts on student advisers (Mavroudi and Warren 2013). Yet Prime Minister David Cameron (2011a) has argued that this package of reforms would "do nothing to harm Britain's status as a magnet for the world's best students" and "reject(s) the idea that our policy will damage our universities".

While the reforms were primarily aimed at the FE and English language sectors, full-time student numbers from outside the EU fell by 1 per cent in 2012–2013 for the first time since the 1980s (Marginson 2014). From 2011 to 2012, Tier 4 visas issued fell by over 60,000 (Gowers and Hawkins 2013), and although overall student numbers recovered by 2013, significant falls of over 20% since 2008 were seen in students from India, Pakistan and other South Asian countries (IEC 2014a). The majority of these reductions happened in the further education and language school sectors, with only a small reduction among HE institutions (Sachrajda and Pennington 2013). These findings suggest that despite low awareness of changes to migration policy among students, they can nevertheless impact perceptions among international students, with potential ramifications for the international education market. Thus the International Education Council (2014a) has called for more "positive messaging" from Government on international students.

At this time, there was also a debate about the definition of "migrant" and whether international students should be considered migrants or not. The Government uses the UN definition of migrant as someone who resides in a country for 1 year or more, which necessarily includes almost all international students (Secretary of State for the Home Office 2013d). Yet international students do not generally perceive themselves to be migrants (Mavroudi and Warren 2013), nor does the majority of the public (Blinder 2012). Other countries adopt definitions which exclude students, considering them temporary migrants, but the Government has rejected the possibility of adopting these (Secretary of State for the Home Office 2013d). If international students were excluded from the net migration figures, student visas would not be impacted by the Coalition target. Throughout these reforms, the

Government has reiterated that no cap is being placed on international student numbers (Cameron 2013). However, it would appear unlikely for the migration targets to be achieved without reducing international student numbers. Thus, reforms to Tier 4 were introduced in 2011.

It is in this context that the International Education Strategy was introduced.

COALITION INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION STRATEGY

The International Education Strategy (IES), published in 2013, was the first of a series of industrial strategies (BIS 2013a), and was released with an "accompanying analytical narrative" (BIS 2013b). This policy aims to increase the income resulting from "education exports" and constitutes international education as "education exports". These exports include: international students; transnational education (TNE); English language teaching; education technology; and partnerships with other countries and emerging powers in particular; publishing and educational supplies; research and development, and further and higher education as well as schools and colleges (BIS 2013a). This marketisation model is consistent with that of domestic higher education. After the Browne Report was published under Gordon Brown's government, institutions were permitted to charge "market-priced fees", in practice up to £9000, which came into effect in 2012 (Shattock 2012). The IES is a plan for the UK to capitalise on the economic opportunities available in the global market. It argues that the UK's history, "global names", and "education brand" place the country in a strong position, yet still requires additional activity to ensure success, which is understood as growth.

Firstly, the IES aims to provide a "warm welcome" for international students, to support the predicted increase in numbers. This is to be achieved by offering "a competitive visa system" (BIS 2013a, p. 36), with no cap on student numbers which is nevertheless working towards "eliminating the immigration abuse and poor standards which affected international students in the past" (ibid., p. 37). Students are also to be protected from unscrupulous education agents, political or war crises at home and visa problems. Syrian students affected by the recent crises are mentioned as an example. Large scholarship programmes organised with emerging powers such as Brazil, Indonesia and China are to be welcomed. Finally, relationships with alumni and UK graduates are to be

sustained to maintain engagement. Indeed, as of 2015–2016, the numbers of places on the Chevening scheme has been tripled (British High Commission Kigali 2014).

Secondly, a new approach to "building the UK brand" is outlined (BIS 2013, p. 58). The Education UK brand is brought under the centrally coordinated Britain is GREAT campaign. This is described as "providing a single, recognisable and distinct identity for the whole of the UK …(to) promote excellence beyond attracting international students via the Education UK recruitment service to cover all education exports" (BIS 2013a, p. 57, emphasis mine). The GREAT campaign attempts to establish a national brand identity for the UK, to promote tourism and industry, as well as education.

The GREAT campaign is supported by UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and is led by the national tourism agency, Visit Britain. It was also linked with the London Olympics in 2012, and with tourism and industrial promotion campaigns, linked through a visual campaign associated with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS 2011). The Education UK Unit, a joint BIS/UKTI initiative, is charged with identifying opportunities for education exports in key markets and supporting UK providers to take advantage of them (BIS 2013a). Heavily reliant on the symbolism of the Union Jack flag, the campaign is primarily visual (Pamment 2015). Posters employ powerful visual symbols, instantly recognisable images of the UK, largely evoking historical traditions, and launch events included celebrities with global recognition such as Victoria Beckham and Lennox Lewis (DCMS 2011). The "pillar" relevant to international education is "Knowledge is GREAT Britain". It includes images of iconic university buildings, mainly historical and highly ranked institutions, or striking architectural innovations, and students engaged in traditional academic activities, in libraries and laboratories, alongside half a Union Jack flag. This positions such institutions and buildings as emblematic of the rest of the UK. Other "pillars" include: heritage, countryside, shopping, innovation, business, culture, entrepreneurship, music, sport and technology. Through sponsoring education fairs at which multiple universities advertise in countries all over the world, the GREAT campaign aims to increase recruitment (e.g. British Embassy Luanda 2015; Johnson 2015). The campaign has been hailed as a considerable success, citing a return of over £500 million for

an investment of £37 million (The House of Lords 2014, p. 614), which has led to an increase in investment in 2013–2014.

The remaining policies address the support for transnational education and its quality assurance, education technology, commercial relationships, improving the mutual recognition of qualifications, promoting outward student mobility, and education for development (BIS 2013a). These policies are presented as responding to a list of apparent challenges, namely a lack of coordination between agencies, institutional structures which inhibit growth, visas, new providers, increasing national competition and "changing customer relationships".

The lack of coordination between agencies and institutions is presented as a barrier to growth (BIS 2013b), and this strategy establishes a plan for "central co-ordinated activity" through the International Education Advisory Council, in which institutions will "actively consent" (BIS 2013b, p. 71). Figure 3.6 details involvement in this council. It appears superficially similar in intent to the organisational structure of the PMI2 but is led by a government body, rather than a quasi-independent agency like the British Council, representing a centralisation of control. UKTI also takes a more significant role, positioned as organising
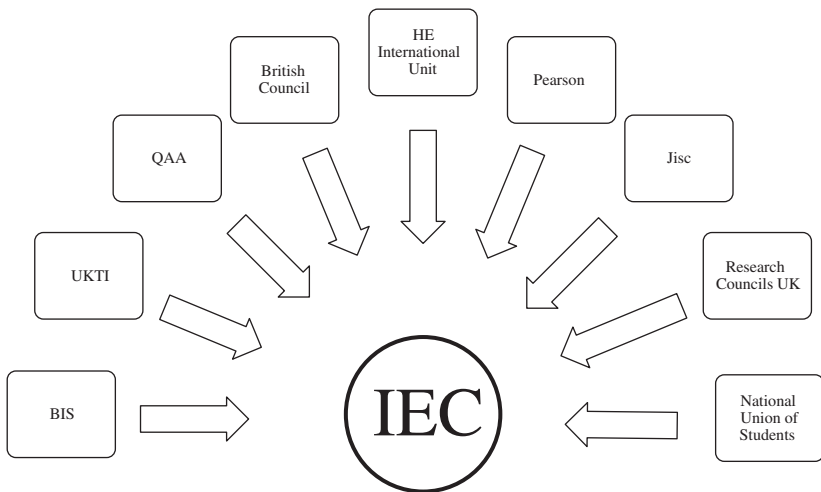

Fig. 3.6 Representation of higher education bodies on the International Education Council (IEC)

"brokerage and support" for partnerships and "high-value opportunities" in international higher education (BIS 2013a, p. 38).

A lack of capacity for extensive growth due to governance structures is the next major barrier. The IES proposes to stimulate traditional universities into competitive responses by facilitating the entry of private providers into the market, described as "disruptive new business models" (BIS 2013a, p. 31). Charitable status and the institutional desire to avoid diluting their brand through excessive expansion are cited as reasons why institutions may resist expansion (BIS 2013b, p. 71). Planning constraints are also mentioned with regards to physical infrastructure availability, particularly in London. However, institutions continue to predict a growth in international student numbers of 6.8% on average (HEFCE 2013). The accompanying analytical narrative also mentions the possibility of establishing new institutions (BIS 2013b). While no comprehensive solution is offered to remove this obstacle to sector growth, the implication is that higher education institutions will be moved towards an increasingly marketised model, in which they will be expected to expand to sustain national economic growth.

Misperceptions of the visa system constitute another barrier to growth. The strategy suggests that the UK visa system reforms in 2011, as mentioned above, have led to the UK being wrongly perceived as "not welcome(ing) students as warmly as we used to" (BIS 2013a, p. 28), and that changing these negative views is essential. The message for international students is that there is "no cap on the number of students who can come to study in the UK and there is no intention to introduce one" (BIS 2013a, p. 35). There is no allusion here to the drive from the Coalition Government to reduce net migration or to how that might impact perceptions (see above).

Competition is still presented as a significant challenge, as with both the PMI and PMI2. In the IES, however, the emphasis is on increasing income in the sector overall, whereas the PMI stressed improving market position in international higher education. The IES also emphasises the threat to traditional providers from new types of providers, such as for-profit online universities (BIS 2013a). The policy, therefore, suggests that "established UK providers"—meaning state-sponsored universities—need to imitate the "autonomy, flexibility and entrepreneurial approach" typical of new types of providers (BIS 2013a, p. 32). It also highlights competition for overseas students, both by new and existing destination countries. However, the prediction is for an expanding

market, in which the UK can increase its absolute student numbers, matching the offer from competitors rather than gaining market share.

"Changing customer relationships" is listed as the sixth and final challenge (BIS 2013a, p. 34). This does not refer to individual students, unlike the PMI, but rather to strategic partnerships with emerging powers. Examples are given of new relationships between countries supplying and demanding education and a list of eight priority countries is given: China, India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Colombia, Turkey, Mexico, Indonesia and the Gulf. The accompanying analytical narrative explains the demographic and economic reasoning behind these choices in terms of potential growth (BIS 2013b). It is notable that three out of the eight were already in the top ten source countries for international students in 2012 (HESA 2015).

The International Education Council (IEC) has met only four times to date and appears to focus through working groups on barriers to growth, "attracting legitimate international students" (i.e. visa system issues), education technology, the international student experience and recruitment (IEC 2014b). In addition, the Department for International Development (DfID) now has a taskforce for higher education, which aims to catalyse the development of higher education in domestic education systems. These working groups made recommendations, but as yet there is no evidence of impact. The work of the committee suggests that increasing international student recruitment is one of their key agendas (*ibid*). No documentation is available for meetings after 2014.

Under the Coalition IES, new relationships between policy actors are established. In this era, it is the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) which takes the lead. Figure 3.7 summarises these relationships.

It seems that the Prime Minister's Office was less involved during the Coalition IES than during the PMI and PMI2. Similarly, although the DfES was involved particularly during the first era of the PMI, it is not directly involved with the International Education Council. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office was also involved under the PMI, but not under the PMI2, and is represented by their non-departmental public body, the British Council. While the British Council took the lead on policy development and implementation under the PMI and PMI2, this responsibility appears to be reclaimed by the BIS under the Coalition. Similarly, while the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) had significant responsibilities under the PMI2 for funding research and projects, it seems less central to policy development under
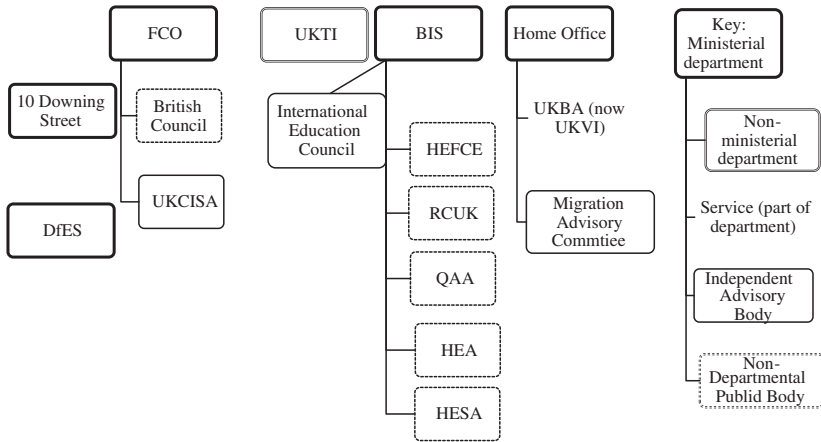
Fig. 3.7 International student policy actors for England under the Coalition

the Coalition. Non-departmental bodies under the aegis of the BIS play some role in different areas of international student policy, namely the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and the Higher Education Academy (HEA). With David Cameron's resignation in 2016 and the subsequent ascension of Theresa May as Prime Minister, the BIS was dissolved and responsibility for higher education returned to the Department for Education. The implications for international education policy are at time of writing unknown, but the 2013 International Education Strategy appears to still be in effect, likely until at least 2018. Under the Coalition, relations with devolved authorities of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland also become less evident. Governance of international student policy is, therefore, a complex area in the UK and one where there is little research. This chapter demonstrates the dispersed nature of policy in international higher education: until the publication of the IES in 2013 (BIS 2013a), there was no "formal policy" (Marshall 2012), but there were state-sponsored activity and discourses in the field.

Two additional changes to migration policy have been introduced in the Immigration Bill in 2014 which affect international students. Firstly, despite clear opposition to the measures established through consultation (Home Office 2013a), the Government has imposed a National Health Service levy for migrants. For international students, this adds

approximately £1000 to existing charges (UKCISA 2013a). The argument made is that students, like other temporary migrants, can access health services "without necessarily having made any previous contribution to the NHS or potentially, for example in the case of many students, without making any contribution during their stay either" (Home Office 2013b, p. 15). Secondly, landlords and banks are now required to check the immigration status of their potential tenants and customers, respectively (Home Office 2013c). For international students, this could prevent them securing private accommodation prior to arrival and due to long UKVI waiting times (up to 3 months), may delay the process even after their arrival (UKCISA 2013b). Thirdly, the Government proposes to simplify and change civil penalties for employers who hire illegal immigrant labour (Home Office 2013c). The implication for international students is that they will have to provide published evidence of term dates to their employers, to demonstrate when they do and do not have the right to work full time. For international students, it appears that increasingly tight regulations and increasing fees in different areas are creating a more hostile environment.

CONCLUSION

In sum, while international students are mentioned first, current policy prioritises transnational education and education exports such as technology and publishing. In addition, there has been an increased emphasis on the outward mobility of British students (Bevan 2014; BIS 2014a). While mentioned under PMI2, these aspects of international higher education are foregrounded in the IES. The emphasis in the IES on those education exports where students are not physically present in the country may be linked to the targets to reduce net migration. However, it is important not to exaggerate the differences between the Coalition policy and the PMI. There is significant continuity, in that all three policy eras stress the importance of recruiting and attracting more international students, by offering a warm welcome. They acknowledge the benefits of international students and overlap with migration policies. The shift towards privileging transnational education and strategic partnerships is already apparent in the PMI2; the IES consolidates it (DPMO 2014; BIS 2015). The policies are differently positioned: Tony Blair introduced the PMI as a foreign policy and diplomatic initiative, whereas the IES is squarely positioned as an industrial strategy. This economic narrative

is present in the PMI, where the financial benefits of international students are mentioned from the outset, but comes to dominate in the IES. Thus policy changes are not abrupt, but gradual, and trends established under one administration are upheld, reinforced and developed in subsequent governments. The consensus that international students should be recruited to the extent that they benefit the UK, however, does not change radically.

NOTE

1. Tier 4 is the Study route under the Points-Based System. Other "tiers" are designed to accommodate different ranges of skills and employment situations. Tier 1, for example, is intended for highly skilled workers and Tier 2 for skilled workers with a job offer (Home Office 2006). Under this system points are allocated for experience, qualifications, English language, and in the case of students, finance.

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