

# The New Geopolitics Of Global Education

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Tridivesh Singh Maini

9 December 2022



*Geopolitical issues have affected the people-to-people links and higher education adversely. While the UK, like other developed countries in the West, is keen to attract talented professionals as well as students who could contribute positively towards its economy, it is mooting the idea of restricting the inflow of international students who get admitted into 'low-quality degrees', and also bring in their dependents through the student visa route. On the other hand, Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy makes a clear reference to strengthening people-to-people contact with different parts of Asia and seeks to enhance Canada's international student program with permanent residence and job opportunities for students from the Indo-Pacific.*

Like the United States of America, other western countries – the UK, Canada, Germany, and Australia have been trying to reset their economic ties with China after the downward slope in recent years. It is not merely trade and investment, but even the people-to-people links and higher education which have got adversely affected because of the downward slope in ties between China and these countries. Chinese students have been the most dominant group within the international student community in the UK, Australia, and the US, but in recent times there has been a drop in the number of Chinese students enrolling in universities in the UK and the US as a result of strained ties. While China has been dissuading its students from studying overseas, UK and US have been trying to diversify their international student pool.

One of the dilemmas for all these countries, especially Australia and the UK, is that while they want to reduce dependence upon Chinese students, and attract quality international students as well as talented professionals, their approach towards the intake of foreign students from developing countries, is simplistic and they tend to view it from very simplistic binaries.

International students contribute an estimated GBP 26 billion annually to the UK economy. However, UK is mooting the idea of restricting the inflow of international students who get admitted into ‘low-quality degrees’.

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In the UK for instance, the UK-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) had to be delayed after UK Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, expressed scepticism with regard to easing out work rules for Indians. Braverman said: “*I have concerns about having an open borders migration policy with India because I don’t think that’s what people voted for with Brexit*”.

UK is also considering the possibility of reducing the number of international students enrolled in UK universities. In 2022, 4,86,868 sponsored study visas were granted to international students. Indian nationals were issued 1,17,965 visas. UK’s decision to provide international students a two-year period after their degree to search for jobs under the Graduate Route policy has made it an attractive destination.

While the UK — like other developed countries in the West — is keen to attract talented professionals as well as students who could contribute positively towards its economy, it is mooting the idea of restricting the inflow of international students who get admitted into ‘low-quality degrees’, and also bring in their dependents through the student visa route. Braverman had flagged both of these issues.

Said the British Prime Minister’s deputy spokesperson on the possibility of UK reducing the intake of international students: “*We’ll be considering all options to ensure that the immigration system is delivering to the British people. That includes looking at the issue of student dependents and low-quality degrees.*”

There is scepticism, however, against this policy with many rightly arguing that international students contribute to the country’s economy and that any reduction in international students will have to be offset by increasing fees for domestic students. According to estimates, international students contribute an estimated GBP 26 billion annually to the UK economy. International students also sustain jobs in different parts of the country including those regions that the UK government is seeking to make more progressive.

One country which, in recent years, has been focusing on attracting talented international students and skilled professionals is Canada. In a recent move, the North American nation with an eye on encouraging more workers, who could positively contribute to its

economy, has also sought to make it easier for spouses and dependents of work permit holders to work. While announcing the same on December 2, 2022, [Sean Fraser, Canada's Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship](#) said: “Today we are making an announcement that will make it easier for employers to find workers and for families to remain together while they're here.”

Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy seeks to enhance its international student program with permanent residence and job opportunities for students from the Indo-Pacific who could contribute to the country's economy

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Interestingly, even [Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy](#), released last month, makes a clear reference to strengthening people-to-people contact with different parts of Asia. In this context, the strategy states that it will seek to enhance visa processing capacities so as to ensure that visa applications of different categories such as student visas, and work permits are dealt with in a timely manner. The [strategy](#) also says that it seeks to enhance Canada's international student program with permanent residence and job opportunities for students from the Indo-Pacific who could contribute to the country's economy in different ways.

In conclusion, while it is true that each country must watch out for its own interests and guard against illegal immigration, it is important not to view immigration from a skewed lens. UK needs to realize that students and professionals while benefitting from the opportunities in the UK also contribute to the country's economy.

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### **About the author**

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#### [Tridivesh Singh Maini](#)

Tridivesh Singh Maini is a New Delhi-based Policy Analyst. He is associated with The Jindal School of International Affairs, OP Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana.

