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**Home Affairs Committee “*developing a consensus on an effective immigration policy*”**  
**GuildHE’s Written Response to the Call for Evidence**

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**20 January 2017**

**GuildHE**

1. [GuildHE](#) is an officially recognised representative body for UK Higher Education. Our members include universities, university colleges, further education colleges and specialist institutions from both the traditional and private (“for profit” and “not for profit”) sectors. Member institutions include some major providers in professional subject areas including art, design and media, music and the performing arts; agriculture and food; education; maritime; health and sports.

**Opening comment**

2. GuildHE recognise and celebrate the financial, cultural and intellectual value of international students to the UK, and believe that this should be reflected in the government’s immigration policy.
3. We believe that the global reputation of UK universities hinges upon the teaching and research of their academics – many of which come from overseas. Furthermore, that the day-to-day operations of UK HEIs are reliant upon international technical staff. We have a number of concerns around tightening restrictions around academics and other staff entering the UK.

**International Students and Migration**

4. GuildHE strongly believe that international students play an important role in the HE sector, and in British society. Alongside contributing around £14bn to the UK economy every year, they add resources to our institutions and intellectual capital to our academic and research base. <sup>1</sup> They help to sustain courses in high priority subject areas and expand the horizons and perspectives of our UK students many of whom will work in international companies.
5. Furthermore, the classification of international students as immigrants is at odds with public perception. A ComRes poll conducted for Universities UK last September revealed that only a quarter (24%) of British adults think of international students as immigrants. Of those that expressed a view, 75% said they would like to see the same number, or more, international students in the UK, a figure which jumped to 87% once information on the economic benefits of international students was provided.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that by treating international students as immigrants, and restricting their rights or freedom of movement, will not address the public’s concerns over immigration.

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<sup>1</sup> A Manifesto for International Students, UKCISA, 2015

<sup>2</sup> Universities UK – International Students Poll, ComRes, 2016

6. There is already a reduction in the number of non-EU international students in the UK. The UCAS End of Year Cycle Report for last year reports that this is the first time they have fallen since 2011, and reflects both a decrease in applications and a decrease in acceptances.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that the result of Brexit will negatively impact the numbers of EU applicants for the next cycle. This could be somewhat mitigated by a fair and welcoming international student immigration policy.
7. In their report on the financial health of the sector, The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) cited Brexit and the impact of the uncertainty around visa requirements as a risk. Moreover, that institutions are becoming increasingly reliant on overseas fee income to contribute to the full economic costs of their teaching and research operations (for the benefit of all students) and to ensure that they can continue to be financially sustainable.<sup>4</sup>
8. The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) recently released a report indicating that that if the Home Office follows through on plans to place further restrictions on international students coming to the UK, the economy could lose almost £2 billion a year. This figure is comprised of £463 million less per annum in tuition fees, £604 million a year less in non-tuition fee expenditure, and £928 million less a year from the detrimental impact on universities' supply chains. This loss would be additional to the billions of pounds that would be at risk from any big cut in the number of international visas for students.<sup>5</sup>
9. The same report also suggested that any changes as a result of Brexit will ultimately have a negative impact on smaller institutions, with only the oldest universities (such as Oxford and Cambridge) standing to gain financially.<sup>6</sup>
10. For GuildHE members, the universities most at risk are our creative institutions. At Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts, international students make up around 20% of their population. At Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and University of the Creative Arts, they account for around 10% of their membership. In a new GuildHE report, it highlights that creative industries contribute £84.1bn to the UK economy, and the economic impact of creative focused institutions is £8.4bn each year.<sup>7</sup> Given the high numbers of international students at these institutions, if they were to lose their international student intake this could lead to detrimental losses to their income and their abilities to contribute so highly to the UK economy.

### University Staff and Migration

11. In order to maintain their outstanding global reputation, British universities must also ensure they are attracting the highest quality staff from all over the world. Much of the world-class teaching and research is delivered by international academics. Furthermore, many UK institutions are reliant on a proportion of overseas technical staff to ensure that the operational aspects are fulfilled.
12. In 2014-15, 31,120 non-EU staff were employed in UK universities, making a vital contribution to our world-leading research base. A further 43,015 EU staff were recorded as working in higher education.<sup>8</sup> This is almost 20% of staff in the entire sector – a significant proportion.
13. The quality of teaching and research at universities depends on being able to recruit academics who are specialists in their field, irrespective of nationality. Furthermore, expertise in a specific field takes many years to acquire – it is not possible to up-skill domestic workers simply and quickly.
14. In order to maintain positions in global university rankings, universities must prove that they have a diverse and international community. For example, the QS survey takes into account international student population and international faculties. Immigration policy that does not welcome international students and staff to UK universities could put our institutions at risk of not continuing to compete successfully in a global field.

<sup>3</sup> End of Year Cycle 2016, UCAS, 2016

<sup>4</sup> Financial health of the higher education sector, HEFCE, 2016

<sup>5</sup> Determinants on International Demand for U.K. Higher Education, HEPI, 2017

<sup>6</sup> Determinants on International Demand for U.K. Higher Education, HEPI, 2017

<sup>7</sup> The Economic Value of Creative Focused Universities and Colleges, GuildHE, 2016

<sup>8</sup> HESA, 2014-15

## Migration and communities

15. Universities play a large role in fostering and developing international communities on their campuses. This, coupled with student opportunities to go abroad (such as Erasmus +), leads to a greater understanding of different races and cultures amongst those who attend university.
16. Universities in areas of little migration are likely to bring greater diversity to their local communities. International students are likely to bring tourism (visiting friends and family), and a positive impact of the economy.

## Recommendations to the Committee

17. The immigration system should not be complex or difficult for students or staff to navigate or for organisations to administer.
18. There is no evidence-based case to consider students as migrants, and all those genuinely entering the UK to study should be warmly welcomed.
19. In order to remain world-leading in higher education, the UK must continue to fund the recruitment of international academics and technical staff.
20. That the committee communicates the economic benefits of international students and university staff to government, and the £2bn loss that could be accrued as a result of tighter controls.

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