

The student perspective on improved India-UK ties

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Sanam Arora, LSE student and President of the National Indian Students Union, writes that increased Indian student enrolment at British universities is to the benefit of both countries.

Prime Minister David Cameron's visit to India – his second in a period of two-and-a-half years – in the company of the largest-ever trade delegation marks the rise of India and its prospects for the not-so-distant future. Thanks to this visit, Britain's message is clear: India is the future. This idea has also been aptly reflected in the words of LSE Director Professor Craig Calhoun, who, while accompanying the British prime minister in India, [stated](#), "no country is more important than India."

As both an LSE student and President of the National Indian Students Union UK, I am delighted to see Britain and LSE's attempts to deepen the special relationship with India. I couldn't help but notice that Prime Minister Cameron opened his speech at the Unilever offices in Mumbai by talking about students—and it is this appreciation that the future of both our countries lies in the youth and their ability to move easily for education and trade between India and the UK that I seek to emphasise.

Britain continues to welcome Indian students to UK universities. Before leaving for India, the prime minister clarified that there is no limit on the number of Indian students who can enrol at British universities. But recent policy changes have impacted the prospects for Indian students considering studying in the UK who see their international education as a gateway to an international career. Tough [new rules](#) introduced last year regarding post-study work visas have been a deterrent: in 2011-12, postgraduate applications to LSE from Indians [fell by 20 per cent](#). An increasing number of Indian students are considering alternative destinations such as Australia to pursue higher education. The fact that the number of applications from Indian students saw a slight increase in 2012-13 is simply testament to the fact that Britain has historic and cultural ties with India and offers new students a close-knit community of Indians to connect with; this welcoming atmosphere cannot be taken for granted going forward.



If Britain wants to encourage trade with India, it must create opportunities for students from India seeking exposure in order to develop their careers. Contrary to popular belief, the goal of most Indian students applying to British universities is not to settle abroad; rather, it is to network and understand the systems of developed nations, which they can subsequently deploy in their home country. This desire for professional development and opportunities to develop India into the world's leading economy should be encouraged, not stifled—especially since such student engagement is to the benefit of both countries.

Indian students are a major source of income for British universities, and are likely to leverage alumni networks to develop trade ties with the UK in future. From the Indian perspective, nothing is better than having British university-trained students return to the country after graduation. India is currently suffering a brain drain as some of its brightest citizens pursue education and employment abroad.

In this context, I suggest that Britain incentivise prospective students from India while keeping both countries'

requirements in mind. The UK should develop a two-year employment or internship scheme under which Indian students enrolled at British universities are able to gain practical training and work experience in the UK, subject to the condition that these students will return to India. For its part, the Indian government should create schemes to entice these returning graduates to public sector jobs to maximise their impact. Once employed in the public and private sectors in India, these highly educated workers will drive India's development as well as trade with the UK. Such a scheme will serve the needs and aspirations of both nations through their most important resource—their youth. After all, no gains can be made in bilateral and trade relations if opportunities for academic and professional development are not provided for the next generation.

Return to India At LSE for more updates about Professor Calhoun's trip to India.

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