Students are being made to queue through the night

Artwork by Felino Vonitius, undergraduate student, University of the Arts London

Foreign students made to queue through the night

Hundreds of foreign students are having to queue outdoors through the night to register with the police over fears it will damage the UK’s reputation abroad.

International students from 42 countries were recently required to register within seven days at a single office in south-east London. The volume of students and a staff cut appear to be creating very long waits. The Metropolitan Police said it had extended the opening hours.

The footage shows foreign students waiting in long queues outside the Overseas Visitors Records Office saying students are starting to queue at 4am to avoid waiting. The office does not open until the morning. It continues: “To the interest of health and safety we would kindly request that you do not start queuing at this time as it forces us to close our queues as early as 6.30am.” The website also warns there will be occasions when the office has to close at very short notice. “The students who are queueing there are outraged that they are having to do this.”

Daniel Stevens, NUS International Students Officer, Universities UK, said it had raised the matter at the meeting with the Universities Minister David Willetts. It said similar issues occur every year but that it seemed to be particularly bad this year in London, where a third of the UK’s 180,000 foreign students come to study.

The revelation comes after concerns that poor handling of student reputations with potential students abroad after a London university student was arrested for overstaying his Tier 4 visa.

Daniel Stevens, filmed the queue in the early hours of the morning and sent the video to the BBC News website to highlight the issue. He said that some time before the office opens a member of staff comes out and starts counting the queue, letting some people in. Then much of the rest of the queue is turned away, only to return the next night for more of the same.

He said: “The students who are queueing are outraged that they are having to do this. It is causing them anxiety, and it seems unacceptable that students be asked to queue for hours, often in terrible weather, and be expected to arrive between 06.30 to have any chance of being seen.” Concerns that foreign students do not feel welcome in the UK have already been raised. “A lot of foreign students have just arrived in the UK this week and they are new to the country here. They want to be vocal but they are intimidated, particularly because the police are involved... The ones who are turned away are the most unhappy because they do not know what to do or whether they can start their courses.”

He said it was not clear why international students were being required to register in this way as the UK Border Agency already holds all their details. And he pointed out that other foreign nations were having to queue there as well, including foreign teenagers attending the English board school.

A spokeswoman for the Home Office said the way the UK Border Agency requirement to register overseas students is implemented is a matter for the local police. The Metropolitan Police said in a statement: “There have been lengthy queues recently at the Overseas’ Visitors Unit at the Tower Four Vic Office at Brandon House, 180 Borough High Street, SE1... This is usual for September and October, as the opening of universities means an influx of students from countries whose registration with police is required by law.”

PR disasters: University and College Union general secretary Sally Hunt said such poor arrangements were damaging Britain’s international reputation. “At a time when we need to be attracting the brightest brain power in this country, and are already facing huge competition from other countries, we seem to be including foreign teenagers attending the English board school.”

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