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Dear Sir,

You report ("Now it's a U-turn on student visas: PM wants to relax rules preventing university migrants", 9 July 2012) that the government may be considering removing non-EU students from immigration figures.

The Office for National Statistics analyses immigration using the United Nations definition of a long-term international migrant as "a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence."

Agreeing definitions such as these for statistical series helps ensure a sound and well-understood basis both for measurement and statistical analysis. Changing definitions, therefore, must be on the basis of sound statistical needs and argument, and carry the support of statisticians.

Yours,

Hetan Shah  
Executive Director