

# Research says 'fee refugee' fear may be exaggerated

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Claims by some commentators that undergraduate students from England may become 'fee refugees' to escape rises in higher education tuition fees could be overstated, according to a new study by academics at the University of York.

An analysis of cross-border movement of applicants from the UK home nations and the Republic of Ireland in the last decade indicates that they are the result of longer term trends rather than prompted by students' desire to pay less for higher education.

Dr Paul Wakeling, of the University's Department of Education, who led the study, analysed data on student enrolment destinations across the five countries for the period 2000–2010.

The study, published in British Educational Research Journal, finds little evidence to support the notion that student mobility is driven by economic 'rationality'. Enrolment rates have risen despite increases in tuition fees and there is a long-term trend for students to stay at home.

Students appear not to be 'pushed' out-of-country by higher fees, but may be discouraged from moving if fees are lower in-country. The study also concludes that student mobility within the UK and Ireland follows well-worn paths from and to specific countries and institutions.

Dr Wakeling says: "In the UK, various commentators have predicted marked shifts in student mobility in response to variation in tuition fee

prices by country, trends expected to sharpen following substantial planned rises in tuition fees from 2012.

“Our research suggests these fears may be overblown and that changes in cross-border movements of students are long-term trends, with little indication of [students](#) moving around to get the cheapest deal. Indeed we strongly suspect that those who would most benefit financially from moving are also the least equipped (financially and culturally) to do so.”

Dr Wakeling says the study represented a simple analysis, treating changes in student funding regimes across the UK and Ireland in the period 2000–2010 as a natural experiment.

**More information:** The article ‘The effect of tuition fees on student mobility: the UK and Ireland as a natural experiment’ by Paul Wakeling and Katie Jefferies is published in *British Educational Research Journal* at [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10 ... 01411926.2012.658022](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00131801.2012.658022)

Provided by University of York

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