

UK universities still welcome international students despite change of visa and fees policies

Xinhua

Updated: 2011-05-11 00:15:00



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LONDON, May 10 (Xinhua) -- UK universities still welcome international students despite of recent changes of visa and fees policies, said Professor Steve Smith, president of Universities UK, in a press conference here on Tuesday.

Regarding student visas, Smith said that "initial proposals to cap international student numbers were dropped," so students who want to legitimately study in UK universities can still be able to do so and are as welcome as before.

It was feared that the British government would put a cap on the number of international students as part of the political leaders' promise to reduce immigration, which was made in the election campaigns last year.

On the other hand, the government did lift the upper limit of student fees from 3,000 pounds to 9,000 pounds. But Professor Smith explained that is for domestic and EU students, and there is "no pressure" to increase fees for international students like that.

The international students are already charged higher than UK students at present time. The reason is that UK students are partly funded by the taxes, said Smith.

So his overall message is that international students are still welcome to UK universities, and the recent changes of visa and fee policies have very limited influence on international students.

Smith is the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter, and the incumbent President of Universities UK, which is the representative organization for the UK's universities.

Right now there are hundreds of thousands of international students at UK universities, and the biggest single source is mainland China, with 56,990 students at UK universities in 2009/10, according to Universities UK.

"Chinese students bring cultural and academic benefits to the UK," said Joanna Newman, director of the UK Higher Education International and Europe Unit, who co-chaired the press conference.

She told Xinhua that Chinese students at UK universities could help enhance the relationship between the young people of the two countries. "There are long-term relations formed at university."

"The UK students have the benefit of understanding more about China which is an incredible important country for the UK to work with."