

Russian Students in U.K. Unmoved by Kremlin's Call to Come Home **World**

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Photo: Alena Fedotova is studying for a master's degree in communications in London: "I don't sense any negativity stemming from the fact that I am from Russia."

From RFE/RL, Apr 19, 2018; reported and written by: [Natalya Kondrashova](#)[Aleksandr Valiyev](#)[Robert Coalson](#) Russian students studying in the United Kingdom have expressed skepticism about a recently unveiled initiative from Moscow aimed at luring them home. "This project might be attractive for those who feel some sort of pressure or discrimination because of their origin and regret that they came abroad to study," said Alena Fedotova, who is studying for a master's degree in communications at Goldsmiths, University of London. "I don't have that problem. In fact, I don't sense any negativity stemming from the fact that I am from Russia." Russia's Rossotrudnichestvo aid agency launched its appeal on April 16 under the tongue-in-cheek name [Highly Likely Welcome Back](#), referring to an earlier statement by British Prime Minister Teresa May in which she said that London believed it was "highly likely" that Russia poisoned former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter with a deadly nerve agent. "I am not considering going back to Russia under this proposal," Timur Khairov, who is studying machine building at the University of Bath, told RFE/RL. "I don't feel any negativity here. Everyone is very polite. "In fact, I don't understand the... [Russian government] initiative at all," he added. "I think it would be better to offer Russian students a program under which they can study abroad if they agree to return to work in Russia." The Skripal incident was the latest in a spate of developments over the last decade souring Russia's relations with the West generally, and the United Kingdom particularly. An unnamed Rossotrudnichestvo official told RIA Novosti that many countries, particularly in Europe, have demonstrated "Russophobic attitudes on the activity of our compatriots, which purposely narrow their opportunities for self-realization." Under the proposal, returning students would be accepted to study at the Foreign Ministry's prestigious Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) or other state institutions or would be given jobs in the Russian Far East. "The matter of the safety of our young people studying abroad has become critical," said Oksana Buryak, moderator of the Rosstrudnichestvo press conference that announced the project. But none of the handful of Russian students who spoke to RFE/RL expressed any concerns for their safety. "I'm definitely not going back to Russia under this program or in any other way," said Sofya Zakharova, who studies history at the University of York. "I feel free here, while in Russia it feels like I have to conform to stereotypes. I'm not saying that is wrong, but it doesn't suit me. I like it that, in England, people have every chance to participate fully in society despite their orientation or religion or nationality.... Moreover, people here aren't afraid to criticize the government." [⋮] [https://www.rferl.org/a/i-feel-free-ru ...o-come-home/29177349.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/i-feel-free-ru...o-come-home/29177349.html)