



Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Secretary of State
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

10th May 2024

Dear Home Secretary,

Higher education sector united in call for Graduate route to be maintained

We write as organisations representing those working across the higher education and international student recruitment sectors.

Ahead of your consideration of the Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) report on the Graduate route, we are urging the Government to maintain it in its current form. Any changes would be extremely damaging to the UK's reputation and standing as a leading global study destination and research powerhouse, with a severe impact on the economy both nationally and across the regions.

We recognise the Government's concerns about immigration levels, however as the statistics your department published earlier this month have shown, recent changes to migration policy have delivered the Government's desired outcomes. There has been a substantial reduction in the number of applicants for dependant visas as well as for main applicants hoping to study in the UK. The latest figures from UK universities show these trends look set to continue – 88% of respondents surveyed this month reported a decrease in postgraduate applications from those living overseas for the September 2024 intake compared to a year ago and 62% reported a decrease in undergraduate applications. Any changes to the Graduate route could turn a sharp contraction into a collapse. It is also recognised that the vast majority of international students leave within 5 years.

The UK's reputation as a world-leading study destination has already suffered damage from these changes. For the first time ever, the US has been ranked top for international students' first-choice study location due to its quality education and employment opportunities. In addition, new figures from the education consultancy AECC Global show that 48% of prospective international students would likely change their study destination if the Graduate route duration was reduced.

The provision of education to international students is one of the country's most successful export sectors, contributing £42bn to the economy in 2021/22. The benefits of this are felt across the length and breadth of the UK, with each constituency benefitting to the tune of £58m on average. New [research](#) published this week has shown that the benefits to the UK in higher tax revenues from hosting these Graduate route visa holders are estimated to have been £588 million in 2022/23 (or £10,410 per main Graduate route visa holder).

Any move to restrict the Graduate route will not only impact on economies across the country, going against the Government's 'Levelling Up' mission, but have a significant impact on university

finances. Our members are already reporting job cuts as the income from international students falls and further restrictions will inevitably harm universities' ability to support domestic student places, as well as lead to reductions in world-leading research and development.

Further restrictions to international students would also be hugely out of step with public sentiment. [Polling](#) by Public First found that 64% believed the UK should host the same, or more international students and that 62% recognised that international students gave more to the economy than they took out.

The recent reforms to migration policy are already having a significant impact, to which the sector is trying to adjust. The Government should now recognise it has achieved the drop in demand and immigration it sought to achieve and resist further measures which risk undermining the success of the UK's higher education sector. We urge you to consider this, as well as the wider impact on constituencies up and down the country, as you respond to the MAC review.

Yours,

Catriona McCarthy
Chair, British Universities International
Liaison Association

Alex Proudfoot
Chief Executive, Independent Higher
Education

Rachel Hewitt
Chief Executive, MillionPlus

Dr Tim Bradshaw
Chief Executive, The Russell Group

Anne Marie Graham
Chief Executive, UK Council for
International Student Affairs

Vanessa Wilson
Chief Executive, University Alliance

Jamie Arrowsmith
Director, Universities UK
International

Copied to:

- Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education
- Luke Hall MP, Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education
- Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer