



By email: pmpost.ext@no10.gov.uk

13 May 2024

Dear Prime Minister,

Graduate Route Visa

Scotland's universities and cities are close partners, working together to create vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous places in which to live, work, study and do business. They are both focused on the creation of sustainable growth, high-value jobs, and a diverse range of social and cultural opportunities for the benefit of the people who choose to be there.

We share the view that the future success of any city and its residents will depend, at least to some extent, on the presence of strong global connections, international appeal and on determined efforts to maximise international opportunities for local benefit. International students and graduates are a key part of that dynamic.

Scotland is proud to welcome over 82,000 students from over 170 countries across the world. Scotland's higher education sector is a global success story, with the quality of teaching and excellence of research of our universities serving as strong pull-factors to students wanting to progress their higher education in all corners of Scotland, from Aberdeen to Edinburgh. We're pleased to offer international graduates the opportunity to work in the UK for a fixed period, as it completes the journey from the acquisition of knowledge and skills to its application within our economy. Furthermore, they are valuable assets in supporting the sustainable growth of our cities and their regions, underpinning the vitality of our city centres through increased footfall and their recognition internationally as global centres of business and innovation.

The economic benefits that international students bring to Scotland go far beyond its universities, making a fundamental contribution to regional and national economies. Research shows that international students make a net positive contribution of at least £4.75bn to the Scottish economy. The benefits of this major export success story are felt across every parliamentary (MP) constituency, with the average net impact of international students for each constituency in Scotland estimated at £71m, equivalent to approximately £750 per resident. This sits above the UK average, which is £58 million per constituency and £560 per resident, and the economic benefits secured in Scotland are second only to London. As such, any measures taken to limit international student numbers would hit Scotland's cities hard.

We are deeply concerned at the prospect of further reform to the graduate route for international students, in response to the Migration Committee's (MAC) review. Policy changes which put the UK's post study work opportunities on a less competitive footing than our global competitors risks damaging an economic success story. International students will be more predisposed to choose Toronto over Glasgow and Melbourne instead of Edinburgh.

All of the evidence points to the fact that post study opportunities are a driving influence for students when looking where to study abroad, given it is a considerable investment, with 63% of over 20,000 prospective international students saying only last year that it would have a major impact on their decision-making.¹ Data from as recently as February this year, suggests that the UK's existing changes to graduate visas and the uncertainty of a potential review hanging over the graduate route, has led to as much as 49% of the prospective student cohort reconsidering the UK as their preferred destination.² If that figure were to replicate across into the reality of recruitment here in Scotland, it would be devastating, with ripples across Scottish cities.

Further restrictions on the graduate route visa are not in the interests of Scotland's cities or their people. Economically, it makes no sense at all and would be to the significant detriment of the people and places working hard to build positive futures after the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and a cost-of-living crisis.

There is no evidence to suggest that visa restrictions for international graduates would be rewarded at the ballot box. UK-wide polling consistently shows that the public supports giving international graduates in the UK a time-limited opportunity to work after studies. Only 8% of international students are interested in permanent residency in the UK beyond their studies here (and there are now significantly higher salary thresholds on the skilled worker visa for any international graduate hoping to stay in the UK long-term). As a consequence, the public do not view international students as part of the wider debate about migration. Reform of the graduate route would be the wrong answer to an entirely different question.

As the UK Government comes to consider the MAC's recommendations over the coming days, we ask that it gives very careful consideration to the economic consequences that such a decision would have in every city and regional economy. Further restrictions to the graduate route would benefit literally no one and could potentially come at the cost of undermining regional growth and prosperity right across Scotland.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Iain Gillespie, Convener Universities Scotland and Principal University of Dundee



Councillor John Alexander, Chair of Scottish Cities Alliance and Leader of Dundee City Council

Cc: Rt Hon. James Cleverly, Secretary of State for the Home Department

¹ <https://thepienews.com/news/idp-emerging-futures-3/>

² <https://studytravel.network/magazine/news/0/30443>