

3 May 2024

Professor Brian Bell  
Migration Advisory Committee  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Peel Building NE  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
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Dear Professor Bell,

I am writing with evidence from the British Academy to feed into the Migration Advisory Committee's rapid review of the Graduate Visa Route.

International students are a success story for the UK, bringing major social, cultural and economic benefits. It is demonstrably the case that international students boost businesses and local communities, underpin the provision of high-level education and skills for home students, and enable universities to invest in R&D activity. Indeed, modelling by [London Economics](#) shows that a single cohort of international students produces a net benefit of £37bn for the UK economy. They are also fundamental to the health of the humanities and social sciences in the UK, as well as to the UK's prosperity more generally, since these disciplines contribute significantly to an economy that is an 80% services economy with high performing creative, legal, heritage, economics and finance and tourism sectors.

Recent visa policy changes and increased costs have introduced barriers that threaten to impede the flow of international talent and stifle the vibrancy of the UK academic and research landscape. These changes are only making the UK an even more unattractive location for international students at a time of significant global competition and when the UK is aiming to achieve strategic advantage in science and technology.

Any change to the Graduate Visa Route will have a significant impact on UK universities financial sustainability. A fall in international students will impact course viability and finances across the entire sector, contributing directly to course closures and staff redundancies. A policy that reduces international student numbers is also in contradiction with the Government's [International Education Strategy](#), which committed to increasing the numbers of international students studying in the UK to 600,000 per year.

The financial sustainability challenge is already of major concern. In in 2021/22, in England, the additional funding available from all surplus-generating activities was nearly £2 billion short of the cost of sustainably delivering research activity and educating UK students. These pressures are replicated across the devolved nations. Uncertainty around the Graduate Visa Route may already be deterring international students from pursuing higher education in the UK and thus impacting UK universities financial sustainability. For example, a significant [decline of up to 44%](#) for PGT students has been reported for the January intake. Government changes to immigration rules need time to bed in and to have an impact before other measures taken.

We also note the rapid review's focus on abuse of the Graduate Visa Route. [Home Office analysis](#) has shown, however, that students have the highest compliance rate of any visa category, with 97.5% of those who arrive and do not move onto a different visa leaving the UK after their studies.

The Graduate Visa serves as a vital bridge that facilitates the transition of international students into the workforce, contributing to the UK's economic growth and global competitiveness. By allowing graduates to remain in the UK for a designated period after completing their studies, the Graduate Visa enables them to gain valuable work experience, forge professional networks, and make meaningful contributions to various sectors of the economy.

In recognition of the significant contributions of international graduate students to the UK and to contribute to the sustainability of UK higher education institutions, the Graduate Visa Route should be retained, and adequate assurances given for its sustainability. The Graduate Visa provides international graduate students the assurance that they would not need to leave the country immediately after their studies. For those who choose to begin their careers in the UK, it gives them time to secure employment and contribute to the UK's workforce. This makes UK higher education more attractive to international students and helps UK higher education institutions deliver the recruitment necessary to generate the required finances, sustain courses and create job opportunities.

Your sincerely,



Professor Simon Goldhill FBA  
Foreign Secretary & Vice-President