



House of Commons
Houses of Parliament
London
SW1A 0AA

23 May 2023

To all MPs

Dear Colleague,

Re: Reforms to the student route to reduce net migration

I am writing to inform you the Government has published a Written Ministerial Statement on the reforms to the student route to reduce net migration. This package of reforms will cover the whole of the UK as immigration is a reserved matter.

The Government committed to bringing net migration down in the 2019 manifesto and remains committed to doing so. In December 2020, we ended decades of uncontrolled migration from the European Union and put in place a new points-based immigration system to give ministers full control of our borders. For the first time since we joined the EU, we gained complete control of who comes to the UK and the ability to operate an immigration system that we can flex to the changing needs of the economy and labour market, as well as tailor to the skills and talent needed by UK businesses and our NHS.

But immigration is dynamic, and we must constantly iterate our approach to take account of changing migrant flows and respond to evidence of abuse or unintended consequences. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) published data in November 2022 which estimated that net migration in the year June 2021 to June 2022 was at 504,000 up significantly on the previous year, and higher than pre-Brexit volumes. They partly attributed this rise to temporary factors – such as a post-Covid surge and safe and legal routes, like the UK's Ukraine and Hong Kong schemes.

The immigration statistics also highlighted an unexpected rise in the number of dependants coming to the UK alongside international students. Around 136,000 visas were granted to dependants of sponsored students in the year ending December 2022, a more than eight-fold increase from 16,000 in 2019, when the Government's commitment to lower net migration was made. This does not detract from the considerable success that the Government and the higher education sector have had in achieving the goals from our International Education Strategy, meeting our target to host 600,000 international students studying in the UK per year by 2030, for two years running, and earlier than planned – a success story in terms of economic value and exports.

The International Education Strategy plays an important part in supporting the economy through the economic contribution students can bring to the UK, but this should not be at the expense of our commitment to the public to lower overall migration and ensure that migration to the UK is highly skilled and therefore provides the most benefit. The proposals we are announcing today will ensure that we can

continue to meet our International Education Strategy commitments, while making a tangible contribution to reducing net migration to sustainable levels. The terms of the graduate route remain unchanged.

Following close working with the Department for Education and HM Treasury, I am pleased to announce a package of measures to help deliver our goal of falling net migration, while supporting the Government's priority of growing the economy.

This package includes:

1. Removing the right for international students to bring dependants unless they are on postgraduate courses currently designated as research programmes.
2. Removing the ability for international students to switch out of the student route into work routes before their studies have been completed.
3. Reviewing the maintenance requirements for students and dependants.
4. Steps to clamp down on unscrupulous education agents who may be supporting inappropriate applications to sell immigration not education.
5. Better communicating immigration rules to the higher education sector and to international students.
6. Improved and more targeted enforcement activity.

We are committed to attracting the brightest and the best to the UK. Therefore, our intention is to work with universities over the course of the next year to design an alternative approach that ensures that the best and the brightest students can bring dependants to our world leading universities, while continuing to reduce net migration. We will bring in this system as soon as possible, after thorough consultation with the sector and key stakeholders.

This package strikes the right balance between acting decisively on tackling net migration and protecting the economic benefits that students can bring to the UK. Now is the time for us to make these changes to ensure an impact on net migration as soon as possible. We expect this package to have a tangible impact on net migration. Taken together with the easing of temporary factors, we expect net migration to fall to pre-pandemic levels in the medium term.

We recognise that no one single measure will control immigration. As the impacts of temporary pressures becomes clearer, we will keep matters under review. The Government will seek to continue to strike the balance between reducing overall net migration with ensuring that businesses have the skills they need and we continue to support economic growth. Those affected by this package will predominantly be dependants of students who make a more limited contribution to the economy than students or those coming under the Skilled Worker route, minimising the impact on UK growth.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP

Home Secretary