

**Letter from Vice-Chancellors of Northern Universities  
to the Prime Minister**

20th May 2024

Dear Prime Minister

We write as the Vice-Chancellors of a range of northern universities to urge you to accept the findings of the Migration Advisory Committee which has, in its review of the Graduate Visa Route, recommended that this visa arrangement should be retained in its entirety.

Our universities are integral to the economic resilience of cities and towns who are already grappling with the significant economic disparities between the North and South of England. That North/South structural economic inequality is mitigated by the world class research, tailored support for innovation in local businesses, and valuable routes for local young people, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, that our universities across the North provide.

The government's own International Education Strategy's vision was explicit in its strategic aim to bolster one of our world-leading export industries - an industry that is larger than the pharmaceutical sector.

Universities from Sunderland to Sheffield, Leeds to Lancaster, Liverpool to Teesside, Bradford to Huddersfield, and York to Newcastle will all be harmed by the removal or reduction of the GR visa. It is an intrinsic part of the educational offer that has made the UK so attractive to brilliant students from all around the world.

The latest analysis from Universities UK (UUK) demonstrates that, since the International Education Strategy launched, "growth in international student recruitment to the UK has delivered a boost of more than £60 billion to the UK's economy".

On top of their visa fees, international students who find work and start businesses contribute billions of pounds in income tax, national insurance and VAT annually. They are also usually net contributors to the NHS through the NHS surcharge.

The changes that the government have already introduced - removal of student dependents' visas and the rising costs of visas - have already had an enormous adverse impact on the numbers of students coming to the UK.

The announcement of the MAC review caused further significant reductions in international students applying for places at UK universities, with students also reporting that they do not feel welcome to study in the UK. This sentiment analysis is reflected in a national downturn in postgraduate international enrolments in January 2024- by more than 40%.

The Graduate Visa Route is regarded by students in key markets like India as an integral part of their educational experience. The MAC review made clear that the removal of this route would make the UK less attractive and thus would cause considerable financial detriment to universities around the country. International student tuition fee income has long cross-subsidised underfunded research and has increasingly become critical to cross-subsidise the teaching of UK undergraduate students because of the frozen tuition fee. Universities cannot continue to absorb the costs of teaching UK undergraduates without some form of alternative funding source.

**In the North of England, the international student cohort from the first academic year in this decade (2020/21) alone was worth £7.2billion. Universities are now reporting reductions in applications of as much as 80% in some areas and that reduction in income will have a catastrophic impact on the region's economy.**

That sudden and adverse financial contraction will lead to an inevitable reduction in the capacity of our brilliant Northern Universities in terms of both teaching and research. In turn, this will adversely impact all of our regional economies, stifling skills, innovation and productivity, and choking off the life chances of thousands of young people.

And it is not just innovation in science and technology - STEM subjects - that will be adversely impacted. It will impact badly on social science and the arts and humanities; disciplines that underpin our imagination and analysis of what humans are capable of - enabling us to pursue our greatest ambitions while avoiding potential pitfalls.

Major new opportunities like the advancement of artificial intelligence need anchoring in ethics; our creative industries rely on a powerful mix of new technologies and artistic creativity; the potential of genetic biotechnologies needs balancing with an understanding of what ordinary people think is right and acceptable; and so on..

Access to all of the potential this innovation can bring needs to be available to all parts of our society. Universities of all types - ancient, modern and in-between - open up opportunities to benefit from the innovation we generate. They work hard to offer choices to young people from our more disadvantaged communities, choices that would otherwise not exist.

There is an increasing need for high value skills integral to support the advancement of science, technology and engineering disciplines. Major economic harm to our universities would mean that the UK cannot keep pace with our competitors in providing world class education, putting our economy and prosperity at risk.

Put simply: The UK and the North- including your own constituency- needs these skills and needs international students because of the benefits they bring to the UK economy and to our towns and cities.

Yours sincerely,

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Professor Nic Beech, Vice-Chancellor, University of Salford  
Professor Sir David Bell, Vice-Chancellor, University of Sunderland  
Professor Karen Bryan OBE, Vice-Chancellor, York St John University  
Professor John Cater, Vice-Chancellor, Edge Hill University  
Professor Shirley Congdon, Vice-Chancellor, University of Bradford  
Professor Bob Cryan, Vice-Chancellor, University of Huddersfield  
Professor Paul Croney, OBE, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Teesside University  
Professor Chris Day, Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle  
Professor Charles Egbu, Vice-Chancellor, Leeds Trinity University  
Professor Tim Jones, Vice-Chancellor, University of Liverpool  
Professor Charlie Jeffery CBE, Vice-Chancellor, University of York  
Professor Koen Lamberts, Vice-Chancellor, University of Sheffield  
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