



MIGRATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Migration Advisory Committee

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14th May 2024

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
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Dear Home Secretary,

I am pleased to inform you that we have published the Migration Advisory Committee's (MAC) rapid review of the Graduate route, a copy of which has been provided to your office.

Our report provides insights on the five questions posed in your commissioning letter. We have not found evidence of widespread abuse on the Graduate route, where we define abuse as deliberate non-compliance with immigration rules, and we conclude that the route is not undermining the integrity and quality of the UK higher education system. However, we have reason to believe that some agents and subagents recruiting international students are mis-selling UK higher education and exploiting students in the process. We expect the impact on public finances of Graduate visa holders on the route to be small but positive, as most appear to work, are young, and have no recourse to public funds.

Having laid out in full our answers to these five questions in our report, we provide three sets of recommendations:

- **We recommend retaining the Graduate route in its current form.** We found that the Graduate route is broadly achieving the objectives set out by the Home Office, while also supporting Government education policy as outlined in the International Education Strategy. The changes to the rules on student dependants which were implemented in January and are in effect a change to the dependant rules of the Graduate route, will likely have a significant effect on Graduate route usage going forward. Whilst initial data suggests these changes are already substantially reducing international student numbers, we believe their full impact should be assessed before considering further changes. Implementing additional restrictions or closing the route now could risk overcorrection. Given international student fees help make up the financial deficit that universities have from teaching domestic

students and research, any significant restrictions to the route should only be considered once the structural funding issues in the higher education sector have been addressed. This speaks to the broader point that any changes to migration policy will likely involve trade-offs across other areas of Government policy.

- **We recommend that the Government establishes a mandatory registration system for international recruitment agents and subagents** which encompasses the quality controls in the voluntary Agent Quality Framework, consulting with the Devolved Administrations to ensure UK-wide coverage. **We recommend that universities should be required to publish data on their spend on recruitment agents and the number of international students recruited through such means annually as a starting point to improving disclosure.** Whilst most agents play an important role in promoting the UK and in supporting international students, we found some examples of bad practice from certain agents. Our recommendations should help ensure that the quality of UK higher education is upheld, and students are protected from exploitation.
- We provide several recommendations on data and monitoring for the route and the wider immigration system which are outlined in our report. Firstly, **we recommend that the Government should only open new migration routes or make significant policy changes when it has a clear plan for how it will collect and monitor data to assess the effectiveness of the route against its objectives and understand wider impacts. We also recommend that the Home Office introduces a requirement for universities to provide it with confirmation of the course outcome (e.g., class of degree) on the Student route, in addition to confirmation that a course has been successfully completed which is currently required.** We note that some of the data you referred to in your commissioning letter was incorrect. This data was not referring to those that had switched from the Graduate route to the Skilled Worker route, rather it covered those that had switched from the Student route to the Skilled Worker route. This takes us to our next recommendation; **we recommend the Home Office undertakes a review of the data variables used for analytical purposes across the largest visa routes (including the Skilled Worker route, Student route and Graduate route) to develop a clear definition of what these data represent, and the quality of each variable collected. Finally, we recommend that the Government explore and make further use of the HO/HMRC matched data.**

We look forward to your response to our report and to receiving the Immigration Salary List commission shortly.

On behalf of the Migration Advisory Committee,

Yours sincerely,

B. Bell

Professor Brian Bell
Chair, Migration Advisory Committee

CC: Tom Pursglove MP, Minister of State for Legal Migration and the Border
Matthew Rycroft, Home Office Permanent Secretary
Simon Ridley, Home Office Second Permanent Secretary
Daniel Hobbs, Director General Migration and Borders Group