



Home Office

Baroness Williams of Trafford  
Minister of State

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Lord Cormack  
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Reference: MIN/0009612/20

25 June 2020

Dear Patrick,

Thank you for your letter of 26 May addressed to the Home Secretary on behalf of Professor Mary Stewart, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lincoln regarding the impact of Covid-19 on educational institutions and the proposals to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on institutions.

As you can appreciate, Covid-19 represents an unprecedented challenge for our nation. We are working tirelessly to mitigate the risks Covid-19 poses to our economy and to the education sector. The situation is rapidly changing, and the approach we are taking is being adapted regularly, based on evolving circumstances.

Our priority is to ensure the safety of all individuals within the UK, however we understand the pressure Covid-19 is putting on the education sector and we are striving to support the sector as much as possible.

Throughout the pandemic, the Government has continued to engage with the education sector virtually in accordance with social distancing restrictions. Forums such as the Education Advisory Group, have helped to shape the Government's response to Covid-19. Feedback received from the sector influenced the concessions which have been introduced and has outlined the requirement for further support in specific areas.

The Tier 4 specific guidance has been reviewed regularly throughout the pandemic and has been updated based on interaction with the sector, the guidance was most recently updated on 16 June and can be found at the below address:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-tier-4-sponsors-migrants-and-short-term-students>

As you will note from the guidance an extensive series of measures have been enacted to support the education sector and international students during this difficult period, however we cannot stand still in response to the pandemic as further support measures may be required to support our world-leading education sector.

The measures which have been introduced so far include permitting Institutions to provide tuition via distance learning, to enable students to continue to access tuition remotely in accordance with social distancing restrictions. Students can also commence new courses of study via distance learning, either from within the UK or abroad. Distance learning would usually be prohibited under the Tier 4 visa route. This provision will be in place for the entirety of 2020/21 academic year as it is acknowledged some form of social distancing measures will be in place for some time to come.

The concessions also include amendments to make it simpler for students to extend their visas or apply for further courses of study from within the UK. Any student whose leave has expired since 24 January, or is set to expire prior to 31 July, can contact the Coronavirus Immigration Team to get their leave extended until 31 July. This will ensure no individual is penalised for circumstances outside their control and individuals who are unable to travel due to restrictions on flights and border closures, will not be considered to be overstayers.

We have also enabled individuals within the UK based on Short-term study or Visit visas to exceptionally switch into Tier 4, provided they meet the requirements of the route. Individuals on Short-term study visas would usually be required to leave the UK in order to apply for leave under Tier 4 from their country of residence. Students whose Tier 4 leave expires prior to 31 July can also apply for further leave from within the UK, provided the new course of study commences prior to 01 October, under usual circumstances, the new course of study would be required to commence within 28 days of the expiry of the current visa.

The attendance monitoring policy has also been relaxed in accordance with the challenges posed by Covid-19 to ease the reporting duties an institution is required to adhere to. Institutions are not required to report students for missing expected contact points due to Covid-19 and can record online study as contact throughout this period. This includes students who are no longer attending classroom-based tuition and students who are unable to attend due to travel restrictions or illness. Institutions are also not required to withdraw sponsorship for individuals who defer their studies for a period in excess of 60 days due to Covid-19. These measures enable institutions to retain current international students where they would otherwise be required to withdraw sponsorship under the Tier 4 rules.

We acknowledge the difficulties which Covid-19 poses to the education sector regarding the recruitment of international students. Therefore, the ability of Higher Education Providers (HEP) to self-assess the English ability of their students has been temporarily extended to encapsulate students applying for pre-sessional courses in addition to students studying at degree level or above. Work is also underway to restart the overseas operations to enable students to submit applications, currently around 60 VACs are open overseas, with a further 47 to follow later this month. Additionally, 12 Sopra Steria sites in the UK are open with more coming on line later this month. Further sites will open across the global operation once local restrictions are lifted and it is safe to do so.

Our world-leading universities will always be open to international students and we are working directly with other countries to retain our universities world-class reputation and will continue to engage with stakeholders, both overseas and in the UK. Government departments, with support of the sector are working together to reassure prospective students that the UK higher education is 'open for business', remains world class and is looking forward to welcoming them in the future. This includes support for the sector led #WeAreTogether campaign and communications that will directly target prospective

international students, making clear the UK offer.

In the International Education Strategy (IES), the Government committed to the goal of increasing the UK's educational exports to £35 Billion by 2030 and increasing the number of international students within the UK to 600,000 per year. We remain committed to these ambitious targets to ensure our world leading institutions continue to attract talented individuals from around the globe. Earlier this month, the Universities Minister announced the appointment of Sir Steve Smith as the International Education Champion, fulfilling one of the headline ambitions of the IES. The role of International Education Champion will be to work with organisations across the breadth of the education sector, including universities, schools, the EdTech industry, vocational training, and early years schooling providers with a brief of boosting the number of international students within the UK. The Champion will also target priority regions worldwide to build networks and promote the UK as the international education partner of choice.

The announcement of the Graduate route represents a significant improvement in our offer to international students, the route will enable students to work or look for work without restriction, for two years after the successful completion of their courses of study. The Graduate route will be launched in the summer of 2021.

To be eligible for the Graduate Route, students must successfully complete a degree at undergraduate level or above with a HEP with a track record of compliance and hold valid leave as a student when the route is introduced. Students who have already commenced their courses will be eligible for the Graduate route, provided they hold valid student leave when the route is introduced.

We have been clear students who commence a course of study via distance learning will not be disadvantaged in relation to the Graduate route. Students commencing a course via distance learning will remain eligible for the Graduate route, provided they enter the UK prior to 06 April 2021 and complete a minimum of the final semester within the UK. Details of the Graduate route have been published in the factsheet below, further details of the Graduate route will be published shortly.

<https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/10/14/fact-sheet-graduate-immigration-route/>

I am placing a copy of this letter in the House of Lords library.



**Baroness Williams of Trafford**

