



The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak  
The Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street, SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

**Please protect the Graduate Route**

I write on behalf of the [National Indian Students and Alumni Union UK](https://www.nisau.org.uk) (NISAU UK), the representative body of Indian students and alumni in the UK, committed to both the welfare of young Indians in the UK and to furthering the UK-India educational relationship.

We request you to urgently commit to safeguarding the Graduate Route.

Last week the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) found no evidence that the Graduate Route is being abused and recommended that it is retained in its current form. This is of critical importance to the UK's higher education sector, including for example:

- For the wellbeing of those international students who are already studying in the UK to whom we owe a duty of care.
- To the educational experience of those international students who are considering their study abroad options. Indeed, 70% of Indian students have told us that the ability to gain meaningful work experience is a critical element in their decision to choose between competing international destinations, of which the UK is one.
- To the education of home students, whose experiences are enriched by the diversity and global perspectives that international students bring to the classroom, a requirement that is even more important post-Brexit.
- For the health of the UK's world-class higher education sector and the local economies around our universities.
- For the UK economy, on an ongoing basis as one of our largest exports - modelling by consultancy London Economics shows that a single cohort has a net economic benefit of £37bn to the UK economy. As well as through the soft power that Britain's international graduates generate for the country over time, including through furthering ties of trade and diplomacy.
- To addressing some of the country's pressing skills shortages across key sectors, including in our NHS and education.
- To the country's labour force, where we know how much employers value the chance to work with a pool of diverse young people and the global perspectives they bring to their businesses.
- To the vision you have set for the UK in becoming a science superpower. Your Growth Plan rightly recognises that future prosperity relies on the UK becoming an even better and more competitive place for research and innovation. To achieve this, we need the world's best talent to choose to study, research and innovate in the UK. However, the best will go to where the best offer is, and any worsening of the Graduate route will make the UK's offer significantly worse.

Some find merit in reducing the hard work of young people to '*deliveroo visas*'. In actual fact international students and graduates are by and large extremely hard-working young people who have typically invested tens of thousands of pounds into their UK education, alongside their dreams and aspirations for a better future. They trust our country with their futures, often by taking out expensive educational loans. It is only reasonable that they would want some return on this very significant investment. And the return they seek is the very simple opportunity to gain meaningful work experience for a temporary period of time. In today's world where employability is a key outcome of education, we should not separate work experience from the study experience. In this context, the Graduate route allows the



opportunity to gain this work experience for a temporary period. It is non-extendable and does not count towards permanent settlement. This means that neither students nor graduate visa holders should be considered 'immigrants' in the context of the long-term picture of migration, which to our mind should be used as the basis of policymaking, to address any concerns around immigration.

Which begs the question of whether the public is actually worried because of international students. A recent poll from Survation has found that the majority of voters think cutting student numbers is the wrong immigration priority for the UK and understand the important economic contribution international students make to this country. 66% think that the Graduate route should allow international graduates to work in the UK for the two permitted years — or even longer. Only 4% want the government to focus on reducing international student numbers.

The impact of the UK's international graduates goes beyond economics and politics. Indeed, as we have found through our own experience of the [India UK Achievers Honours](#), Britain's Indian graduates have an extraordinary impact around the world across all sectors and industries; with the common theme of delivering global good. Our ability to attract and nurture such talent to deliver such good in the world will be severely limited with any worsening or removal of the Graduate route.

The MAC has also recommended better regulatory control and oversight of those agents that promote British higher education abroad. We welcome this and would be honoured to support the implementation of this recommendation.

Prime Minister, it is clear that from every angle that the Graduate route is critical to our universities – a strategic asset we should be celebrating, and to the prosperity of the UK. We are therefore calling on you to make the right decision on the Graduate route – please make no change to it, nor any adjacent changes that may make the UK a less welcoming or less attractive destination for international students.

Yours sincerely,

Sanam Arora

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sanam Arora", is positioned below the typed name.

Chairperson  
National Indian Students and Alumni Union UK

CC:

- The Rt Hon Lord Cameron, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, UK
- Dr S Jaishankar, Honourable External Affairs Minister of India
- The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan, Secretary of State for Education, UK
- The Lord Offord of Garvel CVO, Minister for Exports, UK
- The Lord Karan Bilimoria CBE DL, Co-Chair UK All Party Parliamentary Group for International Students
- Sir Steve Smith, UK Government International Education Champion
- Scott McDonald, Chief Executive, British Council
- Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive, Universities UK