STUDY ABROAD

UNITED KINGDOM'S
Immigration White Paper 2025

What students should know

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Amongst the Bangladeshi students aspiring to pursue higher education abroad, the United Kingdom is a popular destination for various reasons. However, with the UK immigration policies coming under further scrutiny, it's important to be aware of the recent developments surrounding the student visa and how it can potentially affect you before you set out to the UK for your studies.

Due to criticism about the rising number of immigrants, the UK government had already introduced multiple changes to its student visa policy, including a dependent ban on students coming to study postgraduate taught courses, as part of its immigration policy changes in 2024. The effects of those changes were seen immediately.

The UK saw a 14 percent decrease in the number of sponsored student visas in 2024 compared to the previous year. The biggest declines were seen in students coming from countries like Nigeria, Bangladesh and India. This drop in international students has also contributed to a decline in net immigration to the UK by around 20 percent.

Now, the newly elected Labour government seems to be looking to double down on efforts to reduce net immigration, with Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer introducing his Immigration White Paper. White papers are documents introduced by the UK government that set out

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their proposals for future legislation. According to him, the immigration White Paper includes a "comprehensive plan" to tackle high net immigration.

While the Immigration White Paper covers various sectors of immigration, special attention was given to student visa policies, and changes are proposed with the intention to reduce international students. The reasoning given for this was that a large number of overseas students moved from university into low-paid work and applied to move from a study visa into the asylum system. A large number of these asylum applications reportedly appeared to be fraud.

However, international students are still important to the UK due to their contribution to the economy. Thus, the drastic changes that were rumoured to be proposed before the white paper was published were not brought forward.

Regardless, some proposals were still made that will make it harder for students to choose the UK as their study abroad destination if implemented.

The first notable proposal is the reduction in the length of the graduate visa or post-study work permit, which has been proposed to be reduced to 18 months from two years. This will be less than the current length of post-study work permit in Australia and Canada, which are two years and three years, respectively.

The Graduate Visa is a key factor for many students in choosing the UK, including Md Tanzim Islam, a BBA graduate from University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) who is currently planning to apply to study MSc in Business Analytics in the UK soon.

"I plan to apply for a full-time job in the UK after graduation but I am worried that it will become harder for me to secure a job within limited time, if the proposals in the white paper are implemented such as reduction of length of the post-study work permit," Tanzim says.

The white paper also mentioned considering 'introducing a levy on higher education provider income from international students, to be reinvested into the higher education and skills system'. This can lead to an increase in tuition fees at universities throughout the UK for international students.

In addition to that, proposals also stated that sponsoring institutions will face tougher requirements in order to recruit international students and will be subject to a Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA), which will be an annual assessment used to monitor each sponsor's level of compliance. Sponsors that fail may have their sponsorship licence revoked and temporarily be removed from the Register of Student Sponsors for up to two years.

In addition to the above-mentioned changes, other changes are also proposed that may affect a student's plans after graduation, such as the standard qualifying period for settlement in the UK has been proposed to be increased to

10 years from five.

This is a matter of concern for many students who have already moved to the UK. One of them is Mohammad Fardin Rohid, who is currently pursuing an MSc International Banking and Finance degree at London Metropolitan University.

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While there is a lot of discussion going on around these proposals, it is important to remember that these changes are not yet law. Thus, none of the changes mentioned has been implemented yet, and it is yet to be decided whether these changes will come into effect if they do.

Regardless, any student planning to go to the UK in the near future should keep an eye on the reforms and see if they can affect them, as the UK government's drive for reducing net immigration is very real. This whole situation may put the Bangladeshi students in an uncertain situation in terms of whether to select the UK as their study abroad destination in the future.

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