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Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP
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Dear Mr Crawford,

Post Study Work Visas

Thank you for your letter of 20 January addressed to the Home Secretary. I am replying as the Minister for Immigration.

I understand that your request for evidence relates to your work programme on the passage of the Scotland Bill.

As you are aware, the cross-party Smith Commission agreed that that the Scottish and UK Governments should work together to:

(2) explore the possibility of introducing formal schemes to allow international higher education students graduating from Scottish further and higher education institutions to remain in Scotland and contribute to economic activity for a defined period of time.

The Smith report neither referred to, nor recommended, the reintroduction of the former Tier 1 (Post Study Work) Visa, or the former Fresh Talent: Working in Scotland Scheme which it replaced.

You ask for the views of the UK Government on the merits of reintroducing such a scheme. The Home Secretary has been clear that there are no plans to reintroduce the former Post Study Work visa, which was subject to abuse and undermined the UK's work migration routes. This is the position set out in the Written Statement laid recently by the Secretary of State for Scotland. It is consistent with: the response to the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Justice in his meeting of 15 July with the Home Secretary; the position of the UK Government set out in the Westminster Hall debate of 20 October on this issue; the evidence that I gave to the Scottish Affairs Committee on 9 December; and the evidence given on 19 January to that same committee by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

It is the view of the UK Government that there is already an excellent post-study work offer for graduates of Scottish universities seeking to undertake skilled work in the UK after their studies:

- those with an offer of a graduate-level job paying an appropriate salary may take up skilled employment through Tier 2, with no limit on numbers;
- we have introduced a Tier 1 route for graduate entrepreneurs;
- we have made provisions to switch into Tier 5 for graduates wishing to undertake professional training or an internship before pursuing a career overseas; and
- PhD students can stay in the UK for an extra year under the Doctorate Extension Scheme.

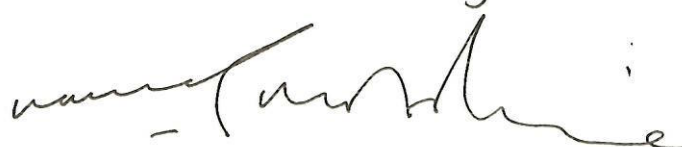
The UK Government believes that the current schemes available to graduates of Scottish universities are precisely the type referred to in the report of the Smith Commission.

The increasing number of visa applications made by international students to study at Scottish universities – up 11 per cent since 2010, with a continued year on year increase of 2 per cent in the year ending September 2015 – shows that Scotland remains attractive for international students as a destination of study with the current post-study provisions in place. This view is also supported by data published earlier this month by the independent Higher Education Statistics Agency:

- Between 2013/14 and 2014/15, there was a 3% increase in the total number of full-time non-EU student enrolments at Scottish universities (up to 26,335).
- Between 2013/14 and 2014/15, there was a 3% increase in the number of full-time, non-EU new entrants at Scottish universities (up to 14,745).
- Between 2013/14 and 2014/15, there has been a 7% increase in the total number of Indian student enrolments at Scottish universities, and a 10% increase in the number of Indian students enrolling in their first year at Scottish universities.

We want to ensure that international graduates attending Scottish universities are fully aware of the strength of the post-study opportunities we already have in place to work in Scotland having completed their studies, as well as seeing that employers in Scotland are able to harness the opportunities to recruit international graduates.

Despite the convincing evidence in support of the current scheme I recognise that it is important that such schemes are kept under review; to ensure that they continue to deliver for all parts of the UK. As the Secretary of State for Scotland made clear in his evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee last week, if there are different views as to how best to make this work, then the case needs to be argued. I welcome the current inquiry by the Scottish Affairs Committee and the separate initiative established by the Scottish Government Minister for Europe and International Development and I shall look carefully at the reports of both and at any recommendations made to improve further the current scheme.

Yours sincerely,


Rt Hon James Brokenshire