

Mobility: Immigration alert

May 2023



United Kingdom

New restrictions to the Student visa route

Executive summary

On 23 May 2023, the UK government announced new restrictions to the Student visa route which will substantially cut net migration while protecting the economic benefits students bring to the UK. The proposed changes will restrict the ability of international students to bring family members to the UK on all but post-graduate research routes and ban people from using student visas as a backdoor route to work in the UK.

Background

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated that net migration in the UK exceeded 500,000 for the period June 2021 to June 2022. Nearly 500,000 student visas were issued during this period, while the number of dependents of student visa holders increased to 136,000. The increase was also partly due to factors such as the introduction of the [Ukraine](#) and [British Nationals \(Overseas\)](#) visa schemes.

Key developments

The proposed changes to the Student visa route are designed to allow the UK government to continue to meet its commitment to the International Education Strategy (which supports the UK economy through the economic contribution of students) and its pledge to the public to cut migration numbers, to ensure that migration to the UK focuses on highly skilled individuals and provides the most benefit. The government also clarified that the terms of the Graduate visa route remain unchanged.

The new reforms will come into effect for students starting their studies in January 2024. The government will work with the higher education sector to explore alternative options to ensure the brightest and best students can continue to bring dependents when they study at the UK's world-leading universities.

To prevent misuse of the visa system, overseas students will be stopped from switching from the Student visa route to work routes until their studies have been completed. The government will also review the funds students must have to demonstrate they can look after themselves and their dependents while in the UK.

Impact on employers

Currently, students can switch to the Skilled Worker category at any point during their studies. Once the proposed changes come into effect, Student visa holders will not be able to switch until they have completed their studies.

Key steps

EY will continue to monitor these developments. Should you have any questions, we encourage you to contact one of our immigration professionals.

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EYG no. 005102-23Gbl

2101-3682263
ED None

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