

UK GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES CONSULTATION ON MAJOR REFORM OF THE STUDENT VISA SYSTEM

Today the UK government published a consultation on the reform of Tier 4 of the Points Based System - the student entry route to the UK.

The consultation will run for eight weeks, until 31 January 2011. The UK wants a student visa system which continues to attract quality students to our universities but which is more selective and more robust.

The proposed key areas of reform are:

- Raising the level of courses students can study, with only Highly Trusted Sponsors able to offer courses to adult students below degree level.
- Introducing tougher entry criteria for adult students
- Ensuring students return overseas after their course
- Limiting the entitlements to work and to sponsor dependants
- Simpler procedures for checking low-risk applications
- Stricter accreditation procedures for education providers in the private sector.

There are no proposed changes to the Tier 4 Child student visa.

In launching the consultation, Immigration Minister Damian Green said:

“I believe attracting talented students from abroad is vital to the UK but we must be more selective about who can come here and how long they can stay.

“People imagine students to be those who come here for a few years to study at university and then go home - that is not always the case. Too many students coming to study at below degree level have been coming here to live and work, rather than studying. We need to stop this abuse.

“Today’s proposals follow a major review of the system, and are aimed at a more selective system and, crucially, reducing the numbers to meet our target of reducing net migration to sustainable levels.

“This Government wants high calibre students with the genuine desire to study to come to our country for temporary periods, and then return home. We want to hear views of our proposals from a wide range of people so that our reforms meet this objective.”

The Government is committed to making changes across the immigration system to achieve its overall aim of reducing net migration. The student route accounts for two thirds of migrants entering the UK each year.

UK Border Agency’s Asia Pacific Regional Director James Sharp added:

“The government has made clear that it wants to encourage all those genuine students coming here to study at the UK’s world class academic institutions.

“However we also want students who come to the UK genuinely to study and then return to their home country with enhanced career prospects. We welcome views on our consultation to ensure our final policy achieves this balance”

The consultation will run for eight weeks until 31 January 2011, and can be found at: www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/student-consult-online