

GMS Flash Alert

Immigration Edition

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United Kingdom - Restrictions on Student Visas Announced

Subsequent to a parliamentary debate on 23 May, details relating to the tightening of student visa rules in the U.K. have been released.¹ The drivers for the restrictions are²:

- The Home Secretary's commitment to meeting the pledge made by the Conservative government in 2019 to reduce net migration to the "tens of thousands."
- Addressing the unexpectedly high number of dependants accompanying international students. Immigration statistics indicate that around 136,000 visas were granted to dependants of sponsored students in the year ending December 2022 which is an eightfold increase from 16,000 in 2019.
- Clamping down on what the Home Secretary views as "unscrupulous agents who may be supporting inappropriate applications to sell immigration not education."

WHY THIS MATTERS

The restrictions on international students will impact employers' access to talent and skills that are not available in the United Kingdom. Further, placing restrictions on when international students can switch into the worker routes will result in potential logistical challenges and additional costs for employers running annual Graduate Programmes.

Further Details

The below restrictions are set to be introduced by the U.K. government from January 2024:

- International students will no longer be able to sponsor family members as dependants under all student immigration routes (with the exception of post-graduate research routes).
- International students will be restricted in their ability to switch from the student visa into the sponsored worker routes until they have completed their studies.
- The “maintenance requirement” will be amended for students seeking to qualify for a student visa. This means that the available funds that students must prove they hold to qualify for a student visa will be reviewed.
- Improved and more targeted enforcement against international student agents who may be facilitating student visa applications that are not genuine.

KPMG INSIGHTS

Government rhetoric around reducing net migration to the “tens of thousands” has become more prevalent recently. International students and employers of international students may wish to monitor U.K. government policy around immigration in light of recent pronouncements and commitments – this may help them to assess and prepare for any impact on students’ ability to come into the U.K. to pursue education and employers’ ability to attract, recruit, and retain global talent.

Employers operating large annual Graduate Programmes with set start dates in the summer and autumn should start reviewing their student recruitment policy, and timelines for visa application processing. If international students with student visas cannot switch into the worker routes until they have completed their studies, the end-to-end timeframes together with the submission routes used to support these will need be assessed to help ensure start dates are not adversely impacted.

Consideration should be given to implementing communication strategies to address and alleviate any concerns that the announcements may have had on international students joining Graduate Programmes in summer and autumn 2023.

If foreign nationals intending to move to the U.K. to live and study or multinational employers seeking to employ foreign national students have questions about entry requirements and eligibility under the appropriate migration programmes or require clarification on what the new restrictions mean for them, they should consult with their qualified immigration counsel or a member of the Immigration team with KPMG in the U.K. (see the Contacts section).

FOOTNOTES:

1 See on the U.K. government webpage, "[Immigration update: Statement made on 23 May 2023.](#)"

2 See Hansards, Volume 733, "Immigration Update," at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-05-23/debates/23052378000021/ImmigrationUpdate> .

Contact us

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