

In The News

The UK has good news for Indian students—and, perhaps, bad news for the US

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Shareholder Irina Plumlee was quoted in a recent Quartz Magazine article, which discusses the UK returning to its pre-2012 rule of letting foreign students get work visas for up to two years after graduating.

Close on the heels of prime minister Theresa May's exit, the UK is bidding farewell to her post-study work rule for international students.

As home secretary, in 2012, May had slashed the time foreign students got to find a job, from two years after graduating, to just four months. This week, her successor Boris Johnson said he plans to reverse the restrictive immigration policy, which had hit Britain's popularity as a global education destination.

The longer period of respite will open the door for more foreign students to come to the UK, experts believe. (However, recent graduates whose Tier-4 student visas have already expired won't be eligible for the extended stay.)

Chancellor of the exchequer Sajid Javid and former universities minister Jo Johnson both took to Twitter to applaud the move.

Former students, too, seemed upbeat. "As a UK alumus, I appreciate that it'll open up new career opportunities for deserving Indian students looking to build their CV in the international job market," said Mayank Maheshwari, co-founder & COO at University Living, a global student accommodation marketplace. "This will also encourage students applying to neighboring European countries with similar visa allowances to re-consider the UK as their top study abroad destination."

MAKING A COMEBACK

Seven years ago, the withdrawal of the post-work study visa had hit the Indian student population in the UK hard, and fewer international students had opted to study there. However, enrollments were bouncing back as the country started fostering a more welcoming immigration environment

This year, sentiments improved further. In March, the UK removed PhD-level occupations from the tier 2 skilled work visa immigration cap. In May, restrictions on hiring immigrants for a slew of professions—veterinarians, web designers, psychiatrists, medics and architects—were lifted, and the startup and innovator visa routes were introduced. Three months on, the government said it was looking at establishing a points-based immigration system to fast-track visas for elite researchers and specialists in science, engineering and technology.

Now, the two-year post study visa is the icing on the cake. "Perhaps the UK regains some of the attractiveness it may have lost due to the change in work visa policy and the uncertainty of Brexit since 2016," said Andrew Lim, director of quantitative research at New American Economy (NEA), a coalition of business leaders and mayors launched by Michael Bloomberg and Rupert Murdoch to influence public opinion and policymakers toward comprehensive immigration reform.

The purportedly right-wing immigration research group Migration Watch is far from over the moon. “This unwise and retrograde step will likely lead to foreign graduates staying on to stack shelves, as has happened before,” the organisation’s chairman Alp Mehmet said in a statement. “Our universities are attracting a record number of overseas students so there is no need to devalue a study visa by turning it into a backdoor route for working here.”

But this new graduate immigration route is not a play-by-play return to the old system. “This new route has been introduced after a series of reforms, and the success in increasing the number of genuine international students who chose to study at our world-leading universities,” a British High Commission spokesperson told Quartz.

What’s more, the UK’s openness is not the only thing working in its favour. The US is simultaneously becoming more hostile.

US VS UK

From the over 750,000 Indians studying abroad in 2018, more than 211,000 Indians enrolled in American universities.

What makes the US attractive is its well-established post-graduation work visa programme, or optional practical training (OPT), for foreign students to work for a year after graduating. Students in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) get 36 months. “During this 12- or 36-month period, students can find, and be sponsored for, H-1B jobs that allows them to work in the US for six years,” said Poorvi Chothani, managing partner at immigration law firm LawQuest.

However, that’s easier said than done in Donald Trump’s America. The H-1B work visa, already a gamble since it’s a lottery system, is facing severe scrutiny, given the more stringent criteria, and more burdensome paperwork to more requests for evidence (RFEs) and rejections.

“With the recent H-1B development, this could make the UK the only choice for some students,” said Lum Kaminishi, chief editor of VisaGuide.World.

“This may be particularly true for nationals of India and China who are currently subjected to the longest waiting times for the US green cards,” said Dallas-based immigration expert Irina Plumlee, adding that the UK offered a more solid path towards permanent immigration.

The US is already feeling the wrath of its moves. Forthcoming research by NAE finds international student applications to the US fell for the first time in more than a decade during the 2016-2017 academic year. This, at a time when the international education market worldwide is rapidly expanding and countries like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and now the UK, offer more generous or clear pathways to working visas post graduation and immigration.

“Economically, in the short-term, this means the US could be seeing stagnation or worse in the education sector,” said NAE’s Lim. In the 2017-18 school year, international university and college students contributed \$39 billion to the US economy and supported more than 455,000 jobs in the United States. With this income in jeopardy, “the US (risks) falling behind in terms of research capacity, innovation, and scholarship, to the benefit of more proactive countries,” Lim added.

But hiring international graduates won’t be a cakewalk in the UK either, Chothani argues. “An employer must prove that there is no local British or EU worker to fill that job,” she explains. “This is called labour market testing and is an onerous process that can also be expensive.”

The full article can also be viewed by [clicking here](#).

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