



Global Immigration alert

May 2024

United Kingdom

Migration Advisory Committee publishes rapid review of the Graduate route

Executive summary

On 14 May 2024, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), an independent body that provides evidence-based advice to the UK government on migration issues, published a [rapid review](#) of the Graduate route and an explanatory letter to the UK Home Secretary.

Background

The [Graduate route](#), which was introduced in July 2021, offers an unsponsored visa which allows foreign students to remain in the UK for up to two years (three years for PhD students) after completing a course in the UK. To be eligible, a student must hold valid leave under the Student route and have successfully completed an undergraduate, postgraduate or doctoral degree with a higher education provider with a track record of compliance. Graduate route applicants do not need to provide evidence of their financial ability to support themselves, have a job offer or receive a specific salary. Graduate visa holders are authorized to work (or look for work) during their leave. Although their visa cannot be extended, they can switch to another immigration route before their Graduate visa expires.

On 4 December 2023, the UK announced a [five-point plan](#) to curb abuse of the immigration system. The plan included a request to the MAC to review the Graduate route to “prevent abuse and to protect the integrity and quality of UK higher education.” On 11 March 2024, the government [commissioned](#) the MAC to carry out a rapid review of the Graduate route, including presenting evidence to support the government’s understanding of how this route is operating in practice and to what extent it is supporting the original objectives. In the

commissioning letter, the Home Secretary requested the MAC to provide a full review of the following:

- ▶ Any evidence of abuse of the route, including the route not being fit for its intended purpose
- ▶ Who is using the route and from which universities they have graduated
- ▶ Demographics and trends of students obtaining a Study visa and subsequently accessing the UK labor market through the Graduate route
- ▶ What individuals do during and after their time on the Graduate route, and whether students who progress to this route are contributing to the economy
- ▶ An analysis of whether the Graduate route is effectively controlling the quality of international students, contributing to economic growth and benefitting British higher education

Key developments

On 14 May 2024, the MAC published their response, which recommends that the route remain in place in its current form. Among other findings, the [MAC review](#) provides insights on the five questions included in the commissioning letter, detailing the paths of foreign nationals who came to study in the UK, with a particular focus on those entering and leaving the Graduate route and including insights on their earnings and employment.

The MAC review states that they have not found evidence of widespread abuse of the Graduate route with the intention of deliberate non-compliance with immigration rules. The review also concludes that the route is not damaging the integrity

and quality of the UK higher education system. The MAC review provides the following recommendations to the Home Secretary:

- ▶ The Graduate route should remain in its current form, as the route is largely meeting its original objectives. The [recent changes](#) to the rules regarding students' dependents will likely have a significant effect on Graduate route usage, and "implementing additional restrictions or closing the route now could risk overcorrection." These recent changes may decrease net migration, and the government should understand the impact of already implemented limitations before making further changes. Additionally, the closing of the Graduate route or implementation of additional restrictions could put many universities at financial risk. If the government were to restrict the route significantly, it should do so only when the full effect of the changes to rules impacting students' dependents has been evaluated in parallel with the financial risk posed to universities and their dependence on international student fees.
- ▶ To ensure that the quality of UK higher education is maintained and students remain safe from exploitation, the government should establish a mandatory registration system for international recruitment agents and subagents.
- ▶ The MAC review provides several recommendations on data and monitoring for the Graduate route and the immigration system in general.

The MAC informed that it is expecting a response from the Home Secretary in due course.

Impact on employers

If the government decides to adopt the MAC's recommendations, employers and students in the UK will continue to benefit from the Graduate visa route.

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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