



Professor Brian Bell
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Dear Professor Bell,

We are writing to you as the Leaders of the 11 major cities of the UK outside of London to express our strong support for retaining the Graduate Visa Route, which you have been asked to review by the Home Secretary. Students coming to study in our cities from across the globe are a huge asset; bringing over £5bn in net benefits to our city economies, contributing to our diverse communities and helping us to build and foster links to cities and communities around the world.

Collectively across our cities we are home to 24 universities that are at the cutting edge of global research and a critical part of our economy and city life. We are concerned that any restrictions to Graduate Visa Route will deter international students from choosing to study in our great cities or to stay beyond their degrees to innovate and help grow our economies. The fact alone that the graduate route is being reviewed, along with changes to dependents' visas, seems to be discouraging international student applications already. Given the UK's anaemic economic growth we should be looking to do more to increase the £60bn that has been generated nationally since the opening of the Graduate Route in 2019 and not put that in jeopardy.

For our cities in particular, this economic contribution is vital. Recent research from Universities UK highlights the scale of the net economic benefits. As a collective the net economic impact for our 11 cities is estimated at over £5.7bn for the 2021/22 cohort, with constituencies in Glasgow, Sheffield and Nottingham featuring in the Top 5 in the country. Looking at this from the perspective of our residents, on average we are welcoming around 5,000 international students to our cities a year with a net benefit of between £680 to £1,600 for our existing citizens. These benefits are not just felt within our cities but also spread across all of our respective city regions, for example in Sheffield where the same research estimates a further £250m of net benefits across the rest of the South Yorkshire region in addition to the half a billion generated within Sheffield itself.

But it is not just the economic benefits that matter. Our cities are international in their outlook, with over 120 city partnerships and bilateral relationships with cities around the world and home to diverse, international populations. International students play a key role in building our soft power and

Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield

fertilising these partnerships as we look to work together across nation boundaries in making our cities competitive, inclusive, and great places to live.

We are deeply proud of our universities. They are jewels in the crown of our cities. Like our own councils, they have been weakened by the sustained period of austerity and for many international students have offered a financial lifeline during this period. Any further restrictions will hit their incomes, which would likely mean universities having to scale back on vital research and cut courses available to UK students and threatening the viability of some institutions. As we look towards the General Election and the opportunity to realise the true potential of our cities, we need to retain the world class reputation of our universities and keep them open for students from across the globe.

We are conscious that the Migration Advisory Committee have been asked to conduct this review to a rapid timeline and you are due to report back to the Home Secretary shortly. We note in your reply to the Home Secretary that this curtailed timeframe restricts your ability to undertake a full Call for Evidence and it is particularly regrettable that this timeframe has coincided with the pre-election period for the recent Local Government elections, which restricted our ability to write to you sooner. However, we hope that our public support for retaining the Graduate Visa Route will be taken into consideration in your report to the Government.

We are copying this letter to the Home Secretary and Shadow Home Secretary.

Yours sincerely,

Core Cities Cabinet



Councillor Bev Craig

Leader, Manchester City Council
Chair of Core Cities UK



Councillor John Cotton

Leader, Birmingham City Council



Councillor Huw Thomas

Leader, Cardiff City Council



Councillor Susan Aitken

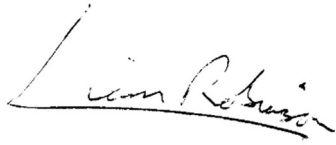
Leader, Glasgow City Council




Councillor James Lewis

Leader, Leeds City Council

Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield



Councillor Liam Robinson
Leader, Liverpool City Council



Councillor Nick Kemp
Leader, Newcastle City Council



Councillor David Mellen
Leader, Nottingham City Council



Councillor Tom Hunt
Leader, Sheffield City Council

*Due to the proximity of local elections, Bristol had no leader at time of writing so could not sign.
Belfast's involvement in Core Cities UK is officer, not member led.*