

## The Immigration White Paper – your questions answered

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On 12 May 2025, the UK Government published an “immigration white paper” titled, ‘[Restoring Control over the Immigration System](#)’. You can see our response to this publication in our [statement here](#). Since its release, there has been a lot of confusion about what the White Paper has outlined, whether anything included in it has taken effect in law, and what a white paper even is. We answer some of the most common questions we have received from our members and international students below.

### ***What is a white paper?***

According to the [UK Parliament website definition](#), a ‘white paper’ is a “policy document(s) produced by the Government that set out their proposals for future legislation”. Crucially, this means that a white paper only represents the Government’s plans and the planned policy direction.

### ***Does a white paper change law?***

No. A white paper only represents Government policy plans and proposals. It does not change anything in law as a document. However, white papers often provide clear messaging about how the Government may seek to change related law to achieve the policy proposals in a white paper.

### ***What was in the Immigration White Paper published in May 2025?***

The Immigration White Paper covered a wide range of immigration policy, not all related to international students or international education, including work routes, settlement, and family migration. We will focus on the parts of the paper that address international students and international education.

The paper proposes:

1. The Graduate route be reduced from two years to 18-months in duration
2. A levy that may be introduced on higher education providers in England to be reinvested into higher education and skills
3. That compliance metrics for Student sponsors be strengthened, and additional requirements be introduced
4. New English language requirements for adult dependants of workers and students

### ***Has the Graduate route changed?***

Not yet. As we have mentioned previously, a white paper does not and cannot change law. For the Graduate route to change, it would require a Statement of Changes to the Immigration Rules. A Statement of Changes will detail how the law will change and what those changes mean. This has not yet happened and we will alert you when it does.

For now, the Graduate route remains unaffected and available for eligible graduates for 2 years of permission (3 years of permission for PhD or other doctoral qualification graduates). For details on the Graduate route, please see our [Graduate route webpage](#). We will update our website, and let you know, if and when a Statement of Changes is released that affects the Graduate route. Stay up to date with any changes by signing up to our newsletters here: [ukcisa.org.uk/newsletter](https://ukcisa.org.uk/newsletter)

### ***When will changes to the Graduate route happen?***

Unfortunately, at the time this FAQ is published, we do not know when these changes will happen. The UK Government have not indicated a timeline for these changes yet. However, UKCISA will let you know as soon as the Statement of Changes is released that will confirm what changes will happen.

### ***Will current students be affected by a reduction in the Graduate route, or will it only affect new students coming to the UK?***

We do not yet know who will be affected by changes to the Graduate route. A Statement of Changes is required to make any changes to the Graduate route, including outlining when any changes take effect and who they apply to. Until a Statement of Changes is released, this information is not certain.

### ***What is a levy?***

A levy is a tax typically paid to a government from a particular source. According to the Immigration White Paper's supplementary [technical annex](#), the policy proposal proposes a 6% levy on tuition fees from international students to be paid to the Government and then reinvested into the higher education and skills system. This levy would be paid to the Government by education institutions. The technical annex also makes clear that this is not a final policy position and that further details are being worked on. We do not yet know how or when this levy will be enacted.

### ***What compliance do Student sponsors need to meet? How are these going to change?***

Any educational institution holding a licence to sponsor Student visas must complete an annual assessment called a Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA) to continue to hold their licence. The BCA consists of 3 main metrics at present:

1. An overall visa refusal rate of less than 10%
2. A course enrolment rate of at least 90% and
3. A course completion rate of at least 85%.

The White Paper proposes that these metrics be strengthened by five percentage points each, therefore reducing the refusal rate to 5%, and increasing the course enrolment rate and course completion rate metrics to 95% and 90% respectively. Finally, it suggests that all Student sponsors using agents sign up to the [Agent Quality Framework \(AQF\)](#).

The paper also proposes a banding system that can inform the authorities and the public which institutions are achieving a high rate of compliance and any that are at risk. You can already view a complete list of institutions holding an active Student sponsor licence on UKVI's [Register of Student sponsors](#). The register outlines an institution's sponsor licence status and the category of students they are licensed to sponsor.

As is the case with the other parts of the white paper, these metrics have not changed yet. However, any changes to these metrics would not require a Statement of Changes to the Immigration Rules as they are not enshrined in law but enacted by Home Office guidance. This means, theoretically, the guidance could be changed at any time.

### ***What are the proposed English language requirements for family members?***

The white paper proposes that dependants of students would need to demonstrate English language ability at level A1 on the [Common European Framework for Reference for Languages \(CEFR\)](#). The paper also suggests that the Government could consider raising this requirement over time, but it does not give any further information on this consideration.

Once again, this change has not occurred and would require a Statement of Changes to the Immigration Rules for it to become law.

### **More from UKCISA on the Immigration White Paper:**

- View our video on the proposed changes to the [Graduate route here](#).
- Take part in and share our student survey on the [Immigration White Paper here](#).
- Members can [log in to the Forum](#) to let us know what you think.

**To stay up to date on all the latest changes that affect international students, [sign up to our newsletters](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#).**