

8 April 2020

Priti Patel, MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DF

Dear Ms Patel

I am writing on behalf of the University and College Union (UCU) in relation to the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on international staff and students working in further and higher education across the UK.

The current health crisis is causing significant uncertainty for post-16 education students, staff and providers. As we outlined in our recent [letter to Gavin Williamson](#), we believe that the level of upheaval caused by the virus demands a swift and wide-ranging response from the government in order to safeguard the future health of our colleges and universities. A key part of this must be to protect the rights and status of international staff and students who make a vital contribution to these sectors and our society more broadly.

Migrant staff and students are facing a number of logistical and financial concerns as a result of the crisis and the government's response. The updated Home Office guidance confirming that leave can be extended until 31 May and that absences related to coronavirus do not need to be reported by sponsoring institutions is therefore welcome.

However, we would urge the government to go further in providing assurances to international staff and students by making commitments in the following areas:

Applying the automatic one-year extension of visas, currently being applied to NHS workers, to all visa-holders. This would not only be simpler than dealing with each individual's concerns on a case-by-case basis, it would provide much needed reassurance to all migrants living in the UK.

1. Asking all institutions sponsoring Tier 2, Tier 4 and Tier 5 visa holders to cease their normal visa monitoring activity, reflecting the updated Home Office guidance which confirms that absences related to coronavirus are non-reportable.

2. For international staff and students who have left the county, suspend the 180-days rule of absence, and provide reassurances that any period of absence linked to the coronavirus outbreak will not affect those who are on a track to acquire indefinite leave to remain.

It is imperative that as we seek to recover from the current crisis, we ensure that the UK remains an attractive prospect for international staff and students to work and study. Taken together, these measures would send an important signal that the UK values the contribution of migrants, many of whom are currently playing such a vital role during this crisis.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Grady'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Dr Jo Grady
General Secretary