

22 May 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) to ask for your urgent intervention to provide security for migrants across the UK in light of the Covid-19 crisis. Migrant staff and students play an integral role within our further and higher education sectors and it is crucial that we ensure they can continue to do so throughout and beyond the current health crisis.

The current visa extension arrangement for those unable to return home due to the pandemic is due to expire on 31 May. However, it is increasingly clear that many of the issues which prompted the original extension will extend well beyond this deadline, and a significant further extension will be required to provide security to those affected. These issues include but are not limited to the need for those in vulnerable categories to continue shielding for health reasons, limits on the availability of normal UKVI services and continuing restrictions on international travel.

I would therefore repeat the request outlined in my letter of 8 April 2020 that the one-year visa extension granted to NHS workers be automatically extended to all current visa holders. This simple move would provide much-needed security to all migrants in the UK who are facing significant uncertainty as a result of the health crisis.

The government's move to exempt all health and care workers from the Immigration Health Surcharge is also a welcome move that should be further extended. The surcharge is a punitive double taxation, and is symptomatic of the hostile environment policy that has sent a damaging message to the rest of the world about how migrants are valued within our society. At a time when full and equal access to healthcare is vital, and when the role of migrant workers across the UK economy has never been more important, scrapping this surcharge for all migrants would send a positive signal.

During Monday's debate on the Immigration and Social Security Bill you set out a desire to create a 'confident, outward-facing, global Britain'. Removing unnecessary practical and financial barriers facing migrants who wish to work and study in the UK is a crucial factor in achieving that ambition, and I urge the government to be guided by this principle as it takes forward its immigration reforms.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Grady". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Dr Jo Grady  
General Secretary