

## UK work visa to steal students from Australia

September 18, 2019 | Australian, The/Weekend Australian/Australian Magazine, The (Australia)

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Britain's decision to reintroduce a two-year work visa for international students after graduation is a popular move likely to attract students away from Australia, according to industry leaders.

In a move little noticed amid Brexit uncertainty, Boris Johnson's government said it would bring back the two-year post-study work visa that David Cameron's Conservative government walked away from in 2012 amid rising concern about immigration levels.

Last week's announcement said the visa would be open to all international students in Britain who completed a course at undergraduate level or above from 2020-21 onwards. It will allow them to work in any job for two years after completing their studies and no restrictions will be placed on the number of graduates holding the visa.

The visa will be particularly attractive to Indian students, who deserted Britain and flocked to Australia after 2012 when then home secretary Theresa May abolished the previous post-study work visa.

To add to the UK's attractiveness the pound has been substantially lower since the 2016 Brexit referendum.

Indian students are now the most important driver of growth for Australia's \$38bn education export industry. The latest figures show that, in the year to June, the number of Indian students starting higher education courses in Australia grew by 51 per cent compared with last year, while the equivalent figure for Chinese students was 2 per cent growth.

Australia has long offered a post-study work visa to international students, allowing them to stay for between two and four years, depending on the level of their degree.

Phil Honeywood, chief executive of the International Education Association of Australia, said Britain's reintroduction of a two-year post-study work visa "could be a game changer for a number of markets we have taken for granted".

"It sends a message that the UK is more welcoming of fee-paying overseas students than it was previously," he said.

International education expert Rahul Choudaha said the timing of the announcement was also important because it came at a time of the year when students were considering their options.

"Students will be very likely to switch over to the UK," said Mr Choudaha, executive vice-president of Studyportals, an online education course listing platform. He said the British visa would be particularly attractive to students because it offered a pathway to permanent residency.

Federal Education Minister Dan Tehan said the British move needed to be monitored but it appeared to be a response to Australia's success. "We were forecast to surpass them as the second most popular destination for international students," he said.

