

Impact of New UK international student visa Dependent Policy

Introduction:

The UK governments recently conducted a tough policy on student visa change to restrict the entry of international student visa dependents.

Starting from Monday, January 1st, 2024, international students will no longer be permitted to bring their dependents with them to the UK on a student visa, except for those who are research postgraduate students.

This policy was originally announced in May 2023. In a written statement, Home Secretary Suella Braverman stated that the UK government "will remove the right for international students to bring dependents, unless they are enrolled in postgraduate courses specifically designed as research programmes."

According to statistics from The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated that net migration reached 672,000 from June 2022 to June 2023. By September 2023, there were 152980 students' dependents granted a dependent visa to come to the UK. This statistic shows a more than 930% rise from the 14839 in September 2019 (GOV.UK)

UK visa regulations for international students have been in place for decades, there have seen some changes over time, this time the purpose of this policy change is to reduce the net migration number and to make sure that dependents do not become a burden on the UK taxpayer

Background

Following globalization, international education is growing increasingly. Education is no longer restricted in one country. The international higher education market is expanding and more and more higher education institutes are providing international education. Following globalization, education is becoming increasingly more international.

The UK has been one of the most popular countries for international students and has the largest number of international students after the US. Especially the one – year period length of postgraduate program to be found one of the greatest tractions to for international market (BBC. 2011).

Every year, over 750,000 international students come to the UK to pursue higher education. Some of them arrive for short English language courses. but most of them come for at least one-year courses from bachelor's degree to PhDs. The UK has a significant comparative advantage in offering education to international students. as it has some of the world's top global ranking universities are providing unique style of teaching and improving students' critical thinking skills and also provide them with opportunity to use new technologies,

theories and allow them to express their opinions during their lessons.

The international students bring positive economic benefits for UK universities in many aspects including cross-subsidizing the education of domestic students and research. In the UK universities play a very important role for many local economies.

The UK governments' international student policy and VISA applying process has been very comparative with other English educational countries for example USA, Canada, Australia.

However, in recent years, The UK government has made several changes to restrict the student visa application. The stricter visas regulation is the result of the fear from some student visa rules were abused and resulting in thousands of illegal immigrants.

In this essay we are going to analyze one of the UK visa new policy - The UK's dependents policy change on international student. We will compare UK international student policy with other countries as competition on attracting international students.

We will explore the impacts of the policy on international students, the UK economy, educational institutions, domestic students and other communities where international students studying in the Local areas.

We will examine the new policy change from a balanced perspective, providing an objective analysis on the policy by considering both its potential benefits and drawbacks.

We will also analyze the impacts of the new UK's Dependent Policy on international students' emotional and psychological effects, financial implications and possible effect in student demographics.

What Is the UK international Student Dependent Policy?

Prior to the changes in the UK's immigration policy, international students were permitted to bring their spouses and civil partners to the UK. They could also bring their children, provided they were under 18 and financially dependent on the student. There were no restrictions on the types of study programs they could enroll in. Additionally, dependents were allowed to work and study in the UK during their stay.

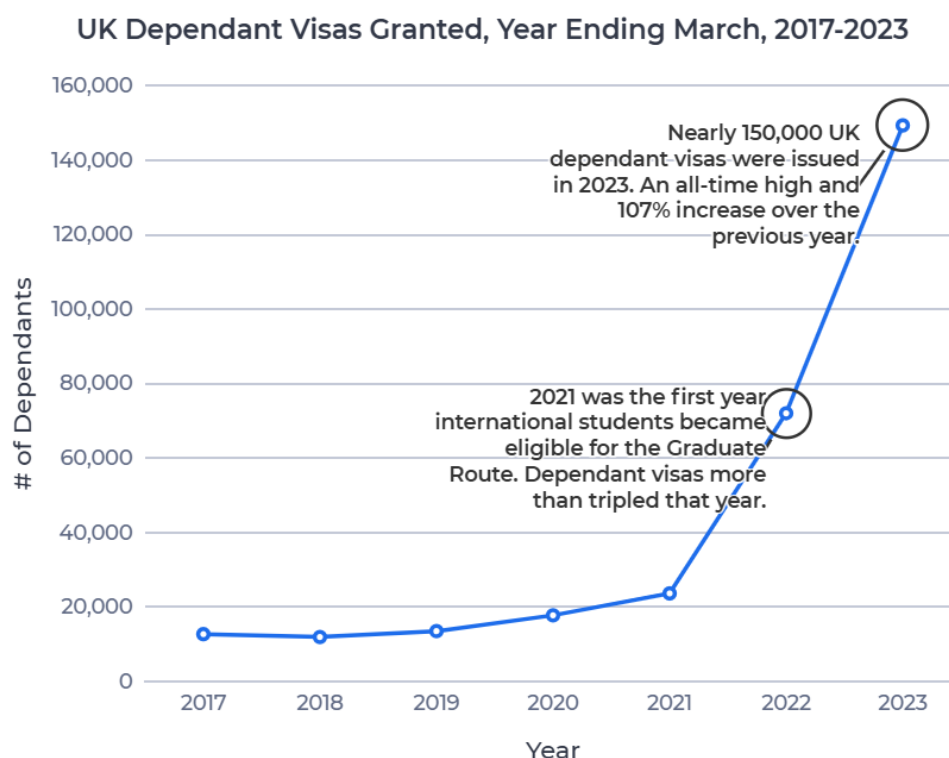
Under the new policy, the only types of students are permitted to bring dependents to the UK are:↵

1. *"Under the new policy A government-sponsored student studying a course that lasts more than 6 months; or,"↵*
2. *"A full-time student on a postgraduate level course (RQF level 7 or above) that lasts 9 months or longer. The sponsoring institution must have a 'track record of compliance', which is shown on the register of sponsors." ↵*

Some Key insights of the Dependent Visa

1. From 2021 to 2023, the number of primary applicants granted UK study visas rose by 112%.¹
2. During the same time frame, dependents on study visas in the UK increased by over 530%.²
3. Nigeria was the largest source of dependents in the UK in 2022/23, with a ratio of 1.16 dependents per main applicant.⁴
4. China had a less than a 0.01 dependent to main applicant ratio, the lowest of any nation.³

We can see from the chart below the number of dependent visas increased rapidly from 2017 below 20,000 to over 150,000 in 2023, it is definitely drawing UK Government attention to this issue.



Most UK Dependant Visas Granted, 2022–2023

Rank	Source Market	2022	2023	Change 22-23	Dependant to Main Applicant Ratio
1	Nigeria	27,137	66,796	+146.1%	1.16
2	India	22,598	42,381	+87.5%	0.31
3	Pakistan	4,024	10,370	+157.7%	0.37
4	Bangladesh	3,047	6,849	+124.8%	0.52
5	Sri Lanka	2,215	5,835	+163.4%	1.01
6	Ghana	946	2,657	+180.9%	0.62
7	Saudi Arabia	2,999	2,378	-20.7%	0.45
8	Nepal	953	1,620	+70.0%	0.30
9	Iran	636	1,546	+143.1%	0.54
10	United States	869	917	+5.5%	0.06

Source: UK Home Office - Year ending in March

The table above indicates the number of dependents demographically and the dependent Ratio to the main applicant. Nigeria and India are the top nations where dependents from and followed by Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Policy International Context and Comparisons

Comparisons of UK's dependents Policy with other English-speaking countries – Canada, Australia, and the US.

- **Canada:** In Canada, international students study programs at all levels are allowed to bring their spouses or partners and dependent children under age 22 and unmarried. All the dependents on student visas are able to work and study during their stay in Canada.(CanGov.Ref,6.7.8.9)
- **US:** in the USA, international students at all levels of study with F-2 visa are allowed to bring their family members as their dependents. However, their dependents can not work in the US, only study are permitted.(USGov.Ref,10)
- **Australia:** in Australia, international students also are allowed to bring their spouses, partners, parents and children who must be under age 18 and unmarried to Australia during their studies. (Australia Gov.Ref,5)

From the international student dependent policy comparison with other English-speaking countries, we can see the UK's new Dependent Policy could position UK at a competitive disadvantage for international students choosing their destination for studying. We will investigate deeper to identify if the UK Government changed the policy will bring more benefits to UK.

Policy Objective Analysis

There are some reasons explain why The UK government's objective of prohibit most international students from applicate their dependents to the UK:

1. to control population and alleviate pressure on social welfare systems by limiting the number of dependents the international students can bring in the country, aiming to make sure that resources are allocated more efficiently and sustainably.
2. Cut number of immigrations to protect UK public services while supporting the students who contribute the most to keep coming here.
3. Take action against those who exploit the flexibility of the UK's immigration system.
4. Preserve the appeal of the UK's world-leading higher education sector, while eliminating the ability of institutions to tarnish the UK's reputation by prioritizing immigration over education.
- 5, Continue to attract the brightest and best to the UK, allowing them to bring dependents to the country's world-leading universities, while also working to reduce net migration.

Policy Impacts on Stakeholders

The UK's Dependents policy change affects stakeholders which are international students, educational institutions, The economy and Local communities. We are going to outline the impacts from different aspects in the following paragraph.

● Impacts on International Students

The UK government's new policy change, which restricts international students from bringing their dependents unless they are enrolled in specific postgraduate research programs, has a range of multifaceted impacts on international students. These impacts can be examined from several perspectives, including emotional, psychological, financial, and social.

● Emotional and Psychological Effects

International students who are unable to bring their dependents with them may experience significant emotional hardships. Studying abroad is already a challenging experience due to the adjustment required in adapting to a new culture. These students often face issues such as racial discrimination, language barriers, accommodation difficulties, dietary restrictions, financial stress, and loneliness. The inability to have family

members with them can amplify these struggles, leading to heightened feelings of isolation.

According to Furnham (1997), international students must also navigate the complex stage of late adolescence or young adulthood, where they assert their emotional and intellectual independence. The combination of cultural shock and these developmental challenges may lead some international students to experience feelings of "powerlessness," "meaninglessness," "normlessness," and "self and social estrangement." These experiences of social isolation can be intensified when students are separated from their families, further impacting their mental well-being. The emotional strain of being away from loved ones can have serious long-term effects on their academic performance and overall adjustment to life in the UK.

Appendix A

Figure A1 depicts the layers of Bronfenbrenner's theory which was the theory used to analyse our data.

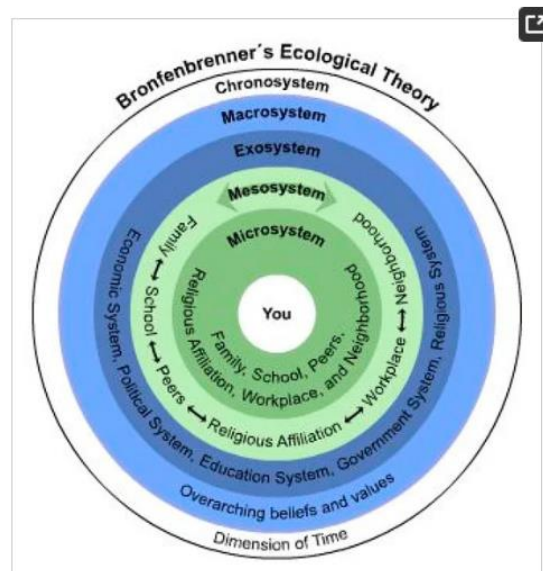


Figure A1. A diagram to show the different systems in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

All the theories above supported that there can be emotional and psychological effects if UK Dependent policy change on international students who are unable to bring their dependents with them during their studying journey. They can feel isolated, homesick and lonely without the company of their family, which could hurt the well-being of those international students, even causing mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

● Financial implications

The UK Dependent policy change will have an impact on international student's financial situation. Those international students may need to pay for child care

or eldercare in their home country or need to travel more frequently to visit their families which will increase their expenditure.

Additionally, under the new policy the dependent is not come to UK will reduce the international student's family income and cause more pressure for some international students need to have income to cover their tuition fees and living costs.

- **Possible changes in student Demographics**

The international students who will get effected by the new Dependent policy may show a significant demographic change from UK to other English-speaking countries to pursued their higher education. Countries are most affected by UK new policy, which affects countries such as India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Bangladesh—where there are the largest numbers of student dependents in the UK—has sparked significant concerns within the education sector.

- **Impact on Educational Institutions**

Statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reveal that UK universities heavily rely on business school tuition revenue. In 2022, 28% of business schools anticipated significant increases in income, and 49% expected moderate increases. However, these expectations have significantly decreased in 2023. Only 9% of respondents now expect significant increases, and 36% expect moderate increases. Additionally, 30% of business schools now expect a decrease in income, compared to just 2% in the previous year's survey.

In a statement, Universities UK, the representative body for UK universities, emphasized that the new dependents policy would make it harder to attract and retain international students. They described the decision as "disappointing" and warned that it could undermine the government's goal of growing education exports. The policy's potential negative impact on the ability of universities to recruit international students is a significant concern for higher education institutions across the UK.

- **Impact on the Economy**

International students are a significant source of income for the UK economy. In the 2021-2022 financial year alone, they spent £42 billion in the UK (Source: The Guardian). The new dependent policy is expected to reduce international student spending in the UK, as students who are unable to bring their families may be inclined to spend less money.

They would cut their spending to restaurants or other activities in the UK to save money use traveling back to their countries.

- **Impact on the Local communities**

UK local business and immigrations have a positive relationship, immigrations including international students booming the Local business, because in some areas they are the major source of customers for many local restaurants, cafes and shops.

International students also have a significant impact on local housing markets, those international students with depends are living outside the universitas's accommodation they need to rent flat or houses, or even buy property in the UK. Clearly the new Dependents Policy will have negative impact on local housing markets.

Policy Presented in the Media

BBC Report: "Many Foreign Students to Lose Right to Bring Family to UK" (May 24, 2023, by Paul Seddon, Politics Reporter)

According to a report by the BBC, under new immigration curbs, foreign postgraduate students on non-research courses will no longer be allowed to bring family members to the UK. Former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak explained that this policy change is part of an effort to reduce migration, though he did not specify an acceptable level for migration. The reporter also noted that the Conservatives had previously promised to reduce net migration to below 100,000 per year but abandoned this target before the 2019 election after consistently failing to meet it.(BBC New.13)

The announcement of the new dependent policy changes has led to divisions within the government about the extent of the policy. Some have raised the possibility of extending the ban to dependents of all postgraduate programs, including research programs. However, proponents of the current policy argue that research students stay in the UK longer and contribute more to the economy.

The new policy has also affected international students, such as two postgraduate students from Nigeria who are pursuing a degree in mental health nursing. They expressed disappointment over the policy and even considered leaving the country.

The Director of Universities UK's (UUK) international arm called for the government to work with universities to monitor the effects of the change. While he acknowledged the need for change, noting that the high number of dependents has created local challenges like accommodation costs and schooling, he also expressed concerns about the impact on women and students from certain countries.

The University and College Union (UCU), which represents university staff, and Adam Habib, the Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, criticized the policy change. They argued that it unfairly affects international students in three ways: financially, in terms of coherence in government policy, and from a human rights perspective. They also highlighted concerns that many UK universities

rely heavily on the income from international student tuition fees, and this policy change could lead to a financial crisis for these institutions.

The BBC article concluded by noting the amount of money the government could generate from dependent application fees and NHS fees.

Sky News Report: "Home Office to Stop Overseas Students Bringing Family to UK in Bid to Reduce Migration"

They also quoted the view of a university director regarding the impact on women and students from certain countries. Additionally, the chief executive of the Russell Group of universities expressed concern that the new rules will negatively affect universities' plans to diversify their student intake and harm the "global competition for international students," as reported by Sky News. The perspectives presented were from the government's standpoint and the higher education institutions, without any viewpoint from the international students themselves. (Sky News.14)

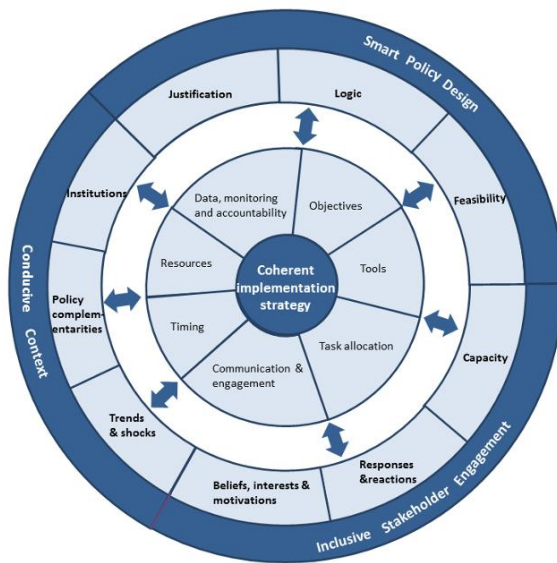
Policy Implementation

Since the new policy was launched in January 2024, it is clear that international student visa applications have dropped, with dependent visa applications plummeting. According to data published by the UK Home Office, there has been a significant decline in student dependent visa applications since the new dependent policy was introduced. The application data released this week shows that student dependent visa applications decreased by 79.5% in the first quarter of 2024 (6,700 applications), compared to the same period in 2023 (32,900 applications). In the first quarter of 2024, there were 34,000 main student visa applications, which represents a 14.8% decrease compared to Q1 2023, and a 27.5% decrease compared to Q1 2022. (Gov.UK.4)

This decline in applications suggests that the UK government is implementing the policy cautiously. The Home Office has indicated that the international education strategy will recognize the important benefits that international students bring to the UK, including their economic contributions. As stated, "This means balancing the commitment to lower overall levels of migration with ensuring those coming to the UK are highly skilled and provide the most benefit to our economy."(Gov.UK.4)

The government also mentioned that it will work with universities to design an alternative approach to continue attracting the brightest and best to the UK. This approach will allow them to bring dependents to the UK's world-leading universities, while also continuing to reduce net migration.

Education policy implementation: A visual framework



According to the Education policy implementation framework there are lots of aspects to be concerned when to implement an policy, the coherent implementation strategy combine a compensative of elements to transform into a smart policy design.

The UK Government has to options to Consider for implementation option1- Do Nothing this does not meet the Government's objectives. Option2-Implement Changes (UK.Gov,4)

From the Home office published the reasons of this policy change in August 2024 which named : *"Impact assessment 2023 changes to the student route and consequential changes to work routes "* in this document we can see

Low	Central	High	
COSTS (£m)			
Public Sector – Reduction in visa fee revenue	614	1,004	1,607
Public Sector – Reduction in premium service revenue	88	160	289
Public Sector – Reduction in IHS revenue	1,066	1,759	2,842
Business – Reduction in tuition fee income	1,108	4,945	13,792
Societal – Net reduction in tax revenue	6,997	14,770	31,068
TOTAL COSTS	9,872	22,638	49,598
BENEFITS (£m)			
Public Sector – Reduction in visa, PV and SPV processing costs	257	420	669
Public Sector – Reduction in CoS and CAS processing costs	3	21	70
Public Sector – Reduction in IHS and ISC processing costs	21	36	61
Societal – Reduction in fiscal expenditure	13,419	21,606	33,929
TOTAL BENEFITS	13,700	22,083	34,730
NPSV (£m)	3,828	-554	-14,869

Sours: UK.Gov. Home office

	Low	Central	High
COSTS (indirect)			
Business – Reduction in tuition fee income	1,108	4,945	13,792
TOTAL COSTS	1,108	4,945	13,792
BENEFITS (indirect)			
Business – Reduction in CAS, CoS and ISC fee transfers to public sector	14	125	435
TOTAL BENEFITS	14	125	435
BNPV	-1,094	-4,820	-13,357

Source: Home Office analysis.

The NPSV(Net Present student Value)and BNPV(Baseline Net preset Value) for the Dependent Policy shows that the policy to cut the net immigration is the right decision to make for the UK government. As the home office summaries below:

“ The scale and direction of the net impact reflects the balance between dependents deterred against the associated main applicants. The greater the scale of students and skilled workers deterred, the greater the net cost, as the cost from reduced fees, tuition fees and fiscal revenue is set against the fiscal savings from fewer dependents. This balance of impact is very uncertain, as it stems from an uncertain behavioral response, which is reflected in the NSPV range. (Home office website 1,2,3)

Recommendations:

We explained the Dependent policy change and We compared UK policy toward international students with other countries, we explored the impacts of the Dependents policy change on international students, on the economy, educational institutions, and local communities. Finally, we make a series of policy recommendations.

For international students

- The UK's postgraduates' programs are normally a one-year course, it might be good for the international student to concentrate on studying without bring dependents with them. Maybe rise the efficiency of study and result in a good academic performs

- In order to overcome the feeling of loneliness, the international students can try to make friend with the local students and integrate with the local community and adapt the UK culture actually benefit the international students, the studying and living experience in the UK would be better than just social with family members.

(Source: GOV.UK, 2,11)

UK universities need to adapt the Dependents Policy Change:

UK universities should adjust recruiting strategies, focusing on markets less likely to bring dependents. Countries like China and the US, where students typically prioritize solo study experiences, are expected to remain strong sources of international students in the UK.(Gov.UK.12)

In response the new policy, UK universities can also offer some beneficial strategies to attract international students, such as:

- ✧ Offering more scholarship to international students
- ✧ Bringing new cutting age programs that are specifically designed for international students
- ✧ Working with the UK government to make some reasonable changes to the Dependents Policy

UK Government- Balanced Consideration

The UK government's decision on the Dependents Policy has complex implications, they should consider carefully from multiple perspectives.

Encouraging stakeholder's have access to a dialogue where they can have access to have a better understanding of each other. (Gov.UK. 11)

In Conclusion

The UK's international student Dependents Policy change created lots of impacts and challenge for international students, the educational institutes, and other relevant stakeholder, despite the challenge, I believe that the UK will still remain a popular high - educational study destination for international students. The UK government should work towards developing policies that balance the need for immigration control with the support and inclusivity of international students.

Refences

1. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/709285/entry-visas1_mar-2018-tables.ods
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-october-to-december-2017/why-do-people-come-to-the-uk-3-to-study>;
3. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/migrationstatisticsquarterlyreport/august2018#trends-in-non-eu-immigration-for-study>
4. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-03-26/HL6637/>
5. <https://www.studyaustralia.gov.au/en/plan-your-move/bringing-your-family>
6. [Spouse and Family of International Students in Canada | Canadim](#)
7. [Help your spouse or common-law partner work in Canada - Canada.ca](#)
8. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/work/help-your-spouse-common-law-partner-work-canada.html>
9. Gov of Canada [Spouses, Children & Partners - U.S. Embassy & Consulates in the United Kingdom ICE.gov/SEVIS](#).
10. <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/get-started/bringing-dependents-to-the-united-states>
11. [Tough government action on student visas comes into effect - GOV.UK](#)
12. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tough-government-action-on-student-visas-comes-into-effect>
13. www.bbc.news.co.uk/immigration-student-dependents-UK
14. www.skynews/oversearstudentpolicy/UK