

British B-schools brace for immigration clampdown

Vidya Ram

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Britain's business schools are warning of the severe impact that proposed changes to student visa regulations could have.

Many countries are tightening up, but there is a real danger that if we are seen to be the most demanding there will be a big decline in foreign student numbers, Mr Jonathan Slack, chief executive of the Association of Business Schools, told *Business Line*.

At the start of February, the coalition Government completed a two-month long public consultation on student visas, which attracted some 30,000 responses, and is expected to announce its plans shortly.

Last year, the Government pledged to make the student route into the country harder, after Home Office research found high levels of abuse, and concluded that net migration into the country could not be brought down without changes in this area.

Among the changes being proposed are tougher entry criteria, including tougher English language requirements, limiting a

student's ability to work and bring dependents, and requiring the student to return home after the initial course had been completed.

UNACCEPTABLE

This last requirement could make it harder for business schools, said Mr Slack. "Its unacceptable," he told *Business Line*. "We see no reason why a student who completes an MBA and wants to do a specialist degree in finance should have to leave the country. All it does is add a significant bureaucratic element."

Britain has been a very popular destination for business students. 20 per cent of all non-EU students enrolled in post-graduate studies in the UK are doing a business degree.

Students from Asia account for a large proportion of these numbers, with Indian students forming the second largest foreign group, with 9,841 studying business and management in 2009. China sends the largest numbers, with 20,876 students in 2009. Nigeria, Germany, France, Pakistan, Poland, Malaysia, Greece, Taiwan, Russia and the US are some of the countries that send over 1,000 students a year.

SCHOOLS FEARFUL

Business schools are fearful that growth from these markets, which has soared during the last 10 years, could be severely weakened.

According to a survey carried out by the Association of MBAs last month, 97 per cent believed the restrictions would impact enrolment numbers. Visa restrictions had already hit revenues, with one institution estimating that the loss of revenue in the last twelve months totalled 680,000 pounds, according to the study.

"The risk of dwindling numbers will have a devastating impact on U.K. universities and the industries they support," warned the association in a recent report.

The organisations say they recognise the Government's concerns about preventing abuse within the system, but argue that little of the abuse comes from the business school sector. "Most of the problems are lower down the education chain," says Slack. "We may not be the target but we are fearful that it will create the perception that the UK isn't open to international students."