

World's largest genetics research project to fight deadly diseases and offer new offer for international students

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has unveiled plans to transform how talented international students are able build successful careers in the UK through a new immigration route, as a new ground-breaking project in the fight against life-threatening illnesses launches.

International students make up half of all full-time post-graduate students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects. The new immigration route announced today (11 September 2019) will mean international graduates in any subject, including STEM, will be able to stay in the UK for two years to find work.

Students will need to have successfully completed a degree from a trusted UK university or higher education provider which has a proven track record in upholding immigration checks and other rules on studying in the UK.

This will build on government action to help recruit and retain the best and brightest global talent, but also open up opportunities for future breakthroughs in science, technology and research and other world-leading work that international talent brings to the UK.

One example of pioneering research and international collaboration in the UK is the world's largest genetics project, the £200 million whole genome sequencing project of all volunteers in the UK Biobank, launching today.

The new project aims to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of a wide range of serious and life-threatening illnesses including cancer, heart diseases, diabetes, arthritis and dementia, through genetic research that can explain why some people develop these conditions and others do not. The partnership of pharmaceutical firms and health experts from the UK and abroad will examine and sequence the genetic code of 500,000 volunteers at the UK Biobank.

This sits alongside the work by Genomics England in partnership with NHS England on the 100,000 Genomes Project, which has seen around 25% of patients with rare diseases receive a diagnosis for the first time, and for some conditions a diagnosis rate as high as 60%.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Britain has a proud history of putting itself at the heart of international collaboration and discovery. Over sixty years ago, we saw the discovery of DNA in Cambridge by a team of international

researchers and today we are going even further. Now we are bringing together experts from around the globe to work in the UK on the world's largest genetics research project, set to help us better treat life-threatening illnesses and ultimately save lives.

Breakthroughs of this kind wouldn't be possible without being open to the brightest and the best from across the globe to study and work in the UK. That's why we're unveiling a new route for international students to unlock their potential and start their careers in the UK.

Business Secretary Andrea Leadsom said:

Today's funding will support one of the world's most ambitious gene sequencing programmes ever undertaken, reflecting the UK's determination to remain at the forefront of scientific endeavour and progress.

Its results could transform the field of genetic research – unlocking the causes of some of the most terrible diseases and how we can best tackle them. It will be a major step forward for individually tailored treatment plans, and will help us better understand why some people get certain diseases while others don't.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

The new Graduate Route will mean talented international students, whether in science and maths or technology and engineering, can study in the UK and then gain valuable work experience as they go on to build successful careers.

It demonstrates our global outlook and will ensure that we continue to attract the best and brightest.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

It is a testament to our world-leading universities that so many students from abroad want to study here. The important contribution international students make to our country and universities is both cultural and economic. Their presence benefits Britain, which is why we've increased the period of time these students can remain in the UK after their studies.

Our universities thrive on being open global institutions. Introducing the graduate route ensures our prestigious higher education sector will continue to attract the best talent from around the world to global Britain.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I am incredibly excited by the potential of genomics to change the way we think about disease and healthcare. In an ageing society with an increasing burden of chronic diseases, it is vital that we diagnose earlier, personalise treatment and where possible prevent diseases from occurring altogether.

This project will help unlock new treatments and grow our understanding of how genetics affects our risk of disease. It is one part of our world leading set of genomics programmes, including the NHS' Genomics Medicine Service and the Accelerated Detection of Disease challenge, and shows that the UK is the go-to destination for genomics research and development.

Alistair Jarvis, Chief Executive of Universities UK:

This is very positive news. Evidence shows that international students bring significant positive social outcomes to the UK as well as £26 billion in economic contributions, but for too long the lack of post-study work opportunities in the UK has put us at a competitive disadvantage in attracting those students.

The introduction of a two-year post-study work visa is something Universities UK has long campaigned for and we strongly welcome this policy change, which will put us back where we belong as a first choice study destination. Not only will a wide range of employers now have access to talented graduates from around the world, these students hold lifelong links in the UK.

Prof Sir John Bell, HMG's Life Sciences Champion, said:

This genome sequencing project will provide exciting new insights into the causes of many major diseases. It builds on 70 years of pioneering work in genetics research and exemplifies the creation of a whole new sector in Life Sciences that the UK Life Sciences Industrial Strategy has been developing. We do not know what the project will uncover but it is certain to be both novel and informative.

Sir Mark Walport, Chief Executive of UK Research and Innovation said:

As one of the half million participants in UK BioBank, I'm very excited by the potential of the Whole Genome Sequencing Project, which will sequence the genetic code of everyone in UK BioBank to help develop novel and personalised forms of healthcare.

UK BioBank is globally unique in the depth and quality of the information that it contains about so many people in health and disease. Adding whole genome sequencing data to this will provide major opportunities to improve how we prevent, diagnose and treat the chronic conditions that afflict so many of us as we live longer lives.

John Lepore, Senior Vice President, Research at GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) said:

This historic whole genome sequencing effort is a welcome asset for researchers and testament to the volunteers who believe in the power of data to advance science.

Genetically validated drug candidates are twice as likely to become registered novel medicines, and efforts like this bring us closer to developing transformational medicines that can significantly improve patient health and change lives.

Mene Pangalos, Executive Vice President, BioPharmaceuticals R&D, AstraZeneca, commented:

Whole genome sequencing on this scale is unprecedented, and through this collaboration we hope to unlock the potential of genomics to evolve our understanding of complex diseases such as cancer, heart disease and chronic kidney disease.

These new insights will guide our drug discovery programme and will help us bring innovative new precision medicines to patients who need them most urgently.

Richard Tillyer, PhD, Global Head, Janssen Discovery, Johnson & Johnson, commented:

We are proud to participate in this ground-breaking initiative to generate genomics data from samples obtained through the generosity of citizens/people in the United Kingdom.

The insights gained from the analysis of this rich data set will guide our efforts to develop safe and effective therapies so that diseases aren't just being treated, they are predicted, pre-empted and stopped in their tracks to help generations of people live their healthiest lives.

David M. Reese, M.D., Executive Vice-President of Research and Development at Amgen said:

We are pleased to partner on a project with immense potential to advance public health. This collaboration reflects our belief in the power of human genetics to transform medicine and the need for continued growth in the size and diversity of the data that can be mined for new discoveries for patients with serious life-threatening diseases.

Preparing for elections in Guinea Bissau

Mr President, let me start by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Keita and Ambassador Vieira for their briefings today, which set out a broadly optimistic assessment of Guinea Bissau's political trajectory.

The United Kingdom shares this cautious optimism. The successful conduct of legislative elections in March and the subsequent appointment of a prime minister and formation of a government are significant steps forward, and we commend the Bissau Guinean authorities – and people – on this progress. Turnout of 85% in the legislative elections was an impressive signal of the commitment of the people of Guinea Bissau to a democratic future for their country.

The next step in Guinea Bissau's political transition is the presidential election in November. We hope to see the country build on the positive momentum generated by the legislative elections earlier this year. The United Kingdom notes the challenges set out by ASG Keita today, and calls upon all Bissau Guinean political stakeholders to put the national interest first and play their part in delivering a free, fair, timely, inclusive and credible election.

Like other Council members, we were encouraged to see the enactment of the new gender parity law in government, requiring a minimum representation of women in elections of 36%. We urge Bissau Guinean political parties to adhere to this law; a more diverse government will be a stronger and more stable government. We also commend Prime Minister Gomes for splitting his cabinet posts equally between men and women, and we would be encouraged to see this law transferred to other national institutions in Guinea Bissau.

We note in the Secretary-General's report the commendable behaviour of the Guinea Bissau military in the years following the 2012 coup. Should the presidential elections take place as scheduled in November in a free and fair manner, and pending implementation of the priority reforms as outlined in the Conakry Agreement and the ECOWAS Roadmap, the United Kingdom would be open to a review of the sanctions measures currently imposed under Resolution 2048.

Mr President, the United Kingdom appreciates the supporting role played in Guinea Bissau by UNIOGBIS, the Peacebuilding Commission, the UN Country Team and other UN bodies and offices, which have helped build a more robust and inclusive political environment. We welcome the appointment of the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms Sori-Coulibaly and offer her our full support in carrying out her mandate.

The United Kingdom also recognises the key role played by ECOWAS in holding political stakeholders in Guinea Bissau to account. We trust ECOWAS will remain as engaged and vigilant as Guinea Bissau prepares to hold its presidential elections in November and throughout the full implementation of the Conakry Agreement.

We also welcome the steps taken so far by UNIOGBIS in preparation for transition, and note that these steps are a positive reflection of the political progress made in Guinea Bissau. The United Kingdom continues to believe that December 2020 is a realistic deadline for UNIOGBIS's withdrawal from Guinea Bissau. However, we would be ready to review this position should there arise a serious threat to peace and stability. It is our sincere hope, however, that such a threat does not arise, and that the shared sense of optimism we've heard today continues to be well justified.

As UNIOGBIS prepares to withdraw from Guinea Bissau and hands over key responsibilities to the UN Country Team and UNOWAS, it is imperative that political stakeholders continue to engage positively with UN good offices and sustain their commitment to the Conakry Agreement until it has been fully implemented. In that context, we welcome UNOWAS efforts to increase their engagement on Guinea Bissau ahead of the departure of UNIOGBIS.

We hope that the political progress that Guinea Bissau has achieved in recent years can be maintained to carry the country out of its past and into a stronger, more stable, more democratic future. The primary responsibility for delivering this lies with the Bissau Guinean government. The United Kingdom, along with the international community, will continue to monitor the situation closely and work with the government in support of this objective.

Thank you, Mr President.

Government advisors discuss future independent trade policy

This is the second meeting of the representatives from business and interest groups who regularly convene to advise the government on the UK's new independent trade policy as we leave the EU.

Minister Burns said:

I am delighted to have chaired my first meeting of the Strategic Advisory Group today.

As we take back control of our trade policy, we must make sure it works for households and businesses across the whole of the UK.

This group of experts from across business, civil society and beyond will ensure we're ready to trade as we seize the opportunities of Brexit.

Today they were informed about the department's priorities in addition to preparing for Brexit on 31st October – to negotiate new and ambitious free trade agreements, prepare business to trade and focus on attracting investment, specifically through free ports.

The group was also introduced to the work of DIT US trade policy team, the World Trade Organisation and work being done to reduce barriers to trading for businesses.

The group is comprised of 16 representatives from business, trade union and civil society organisations that cover a wide range of interests from all parts of the UK. It will meet at least 4 times a year and membership will be reviewed on a yearly basis.

This is part of the government's commitment to an inclusive and transparent trade policy that works for all regions and nations of the UK.

They previously met in 6 June and are expected to meet again in the New Year.

The [Strategic Trade Advisory Group](#) was established in April 2019 following a [public expression of interest by government in July 2018](#). The expression of interest set out the selection procedure and selection criteria against which applications would be assessed including, evidence of relevant experience and expertise.

The group will meet as required but approximately quarterly. DIT will make available the dates and times of the meetings.

Members have been selected to provide a breadth of knowledge and experience across trade policy. Members will serve in a personal capacity to advance the interests of the United Kingdom and will not represent the interests of any specific organisation.

Membership for the period 2019 to 2020 are:

- Professor Holger Breinlich, University of Surrey, (academia)
- Carolyn Fairbairn, Confederation of British Industry, (business representative organisation)

- Gary Campkin, City UK, (services, business representative organisation)
- Dr Scott Steedman CBE, British Standards Institution, (standards)
- Caroline Normand, Which?, (consumer)
- Dr Dirk Willem te Velde, Overseas Development Institute, (developmental)
- Mark Abrams, Trade Finance Global, (new entrant)
- Michael Gidney, Fair Trade Foundation, (non-government organisations)
- Nick Coburn CBE, Ulster Carpets, (Northern Ireland business)
- Denise Valin Alvarez, Burberry, (regional business)
- Liz Cameron OBE, Scottish Chamber of Commerce, (Scottish business)
- Sean Ramsden, Ramsden International, (small and medium enterprise)
- Mike Cherry OBE, Federation of Small Business, (small and medium enterprise, business representative organisation)
- Sam Lowe, Centre for European Reform, (think tanks)
- Paul Nowak, Trade Union Congress, (trade unions)
- Prys Morgan, Kepak Group Limited, (Welsh business)

The group's purpose is to:

- advise on the adequacy and effectiveness of government mechanisms for stakeholder engagement
- advise on the practical implementation of trade agreements and measures
- perspectives on the government's discharge of its commitment to transparency and inclusivity in trade policy

- suggestions to inform the government's trade priorities
 - suggestions to assist the development and delivery of UK trade policy including market access measures.
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UN Human Rights Council 42 – UK delivers statement under Item 2: General Debate

The United Kingdom welcomes the High Commissioner's report.

Continued human rights violations and abuses in Cameroon's North-West and South-West regions and the lack of protection of human rights through judicial process are deeply concerning. Cameroon's openness to engage with the UN on human rights must be matched by action to establish a credible political dialogue.

In Zimbabwe, we are concerned by the heavy-handed police response to protests in Harare on 16 August and the recent arrests and abductions of opposition activists; those responsible must be held accountable. We urge Zimbabwe to respect constitutional rights to protest peacefully, and to translate commitments on economic and political reform into actions.

In Bangladesh, we are concerned about action that undermines freedom of expression, and the narrowing of political space following the 2018 election. Bangladesh's stated commitment to engage on human rights and uphold democratic principles now needs to be matched by action, reflecting the values enshrined in its constitution.

We continue to be concerned about the limitations on freedom of expression in Vietnam. We welcome Vietnamese engagement with the UPR process and acceptance of our recommendations. We look forward to seeing swift progress on implementation. We welcome Vietnam's commitment addressing the legacies of conflict, as well women, peace and security issues during its UN Security Council tenure.

We urge the Philippines to thoroughly investigate killings associated with the war on drugs; to take meaningful steps to ensure the safety of human rights defenders, labour rights activists and media professionals; and not to reinstate the death penalty.

We remain concerned about Hong Kong but welcome the Chief Executive's recent announcements as important steps. Meaningful political dialogue, under Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy, is essential. We re-iterate our support for

and call for all to respect 'One Country, Two Systems' including the rights and freedoms in the Joint Declaration.

Finally, we are concerned by the recent use of the death penalty in Bahrain, and urge Bahrain to introduce a moratorium on its use.

Peace, fair elections and equal representation in Afghanistan

Thank you very much, Mr President. And as it's the first time I'm taking the floor in the Russians' presidency, let me congratulate you. You have our full support. And also thank our Polish colleagues for their stewardship of the month of August. And I'd like to thank our briefers, the SRSB and Mr Fedotov and also our colleague from Afghanistan.

Like other speakers, Mr President, I'd like to particularly highlight four issues: peace, the presidential elections, UNAMA itself and the issue of women, peace and security. And along with other speakers this morning, I want to set out the United Kingdom's strong condemnation of the Taliban for the recent attacks. Taliban representatives at the intra-Afghan peace conference in Doha in July this year committed to reducing civilian casualties to zero. But the Taliban's actions are not matching their words. And indeed, on the eve of a historic meeting with United States representatives, the Taliban chose to carry out yet more attacks in Kabul. And the Afghan ambassador set these out. But the list I have before me, Mr President, lists at least five attacks since the month of August. These are not the actions of a group that is searching for peace. At a minimum, the leaders of the Taliban need to condemn violence when it occurs and undertake to do everything in their power to stop the rest of their groups from carrying out violence.

But they also need, Mr President, to get a united view that peace is in their interests as much as it is in the interests of the people of Afghanistan. And as I'm talking about the Taliban, I'll take the opportunity now to reiterate what the SRSB said about him fighting them to retract the threats against the election.

President Ghani, we note, remains committed to direct peace talks and we share the speaker's wish that the intra-Afghan negotiations can proceed apace. President Ghani has appointed a 15 strong negotiating team and he said only this Monday: "We are ready for peace talks. But if the Taliban think they can scare us, look at these warriors. But peace without a ceasefire is impossible." And if there is to be lasting peace in Afghanistan, Mr President, the Taliban must enter into meaningful negotiations with an inclusive and representative Afghan negotiating team.

My second point concerns the elections. We are encouraged by what the special

representative said about the elections remaining scheduled for 28 September. I know from experience in Kabul there are often many stories around the elections and many fears that they will be cancelled. So what I saw SRSY Yamamoto was able to say about these elections and the arrangements for them has been very important. They represent an important opportunity for the Afghan people to make decisions about their future at a critical time. And our ambassador in Kabul has in recent weeks met with Hawa Nuristani, the chair of the Afghanistan Independent Election Commission, and with Zohra Shinwari, the chair of the Electoral Complaints Commission. I think it's important, Mr President, that the Council offer its full support to the Afghan authorities to help ensure the elections are credible, transparent, participatory and free as possible from violence, and that we encourage all the leaders to engage faithfully in the democratic process and to take a stand against electoral fraud.

Turning to my third point, Mr President, about UNAMA, we very much welcome the work UNAMA has done, especially in coordinating international support for the elections. And we hope that UNAMA will be able to continue this work at the same pace up to Election Day and beyond. Other speakers have referred to the UNAMA mandate that is due for renewal by 17 September. We hope all Security Council members will be able to support a text that gives UNAMA the clear and strong mandate it needs to support Afghanistan at this critical time.

And then turning to the issue of women, which the Afghan ambassador set out so eloquently. In all cases, the United Kingdom remains committed to a peaceful and democratic future for Afghanistan. And we will continue to work with partners and the Afghan authorities to ensure Afghanistan has the support it needs. And it is particularly important that she maintains the gains she's made on human rights over recent years. Women play an essential role in Afghan society. This was underscored by the Deputy Secretary-General's visit in July. And for the United Kingdom, we will continue to support the full implementation of Afghanistan's National Action Plan on women, peace and security.

And I want to end, Mr President, by stressing the vital importance of women's participation in the elections, but also in an inclusive peace process.

Thank you.