
UK: Tories to close visa loophole

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A British Conservative government would demand a £2,000 (US\$3,250) bond from overseas students in a bid to tackle bogus colleges and abuses of the visa system. Shadow Home Secretary Chris Grayling said the present student visa system represented "a huge loophole in our border controls and, despite years of promises, the government has completely failed to deal with the problem".

Grayling said the loophole had not only allowed large numbers of people to enter the country who would not have been able to do so otherwise, but was now a genuine security risk for Britain.

The new system would allow only colleges registered at Companies House to sponsor foreign students and force them to return to their home country before applying to switch to a work visa. The bond would be repaid after the student left the country at the end of his or her studies.

Grayling said there would be greater scrutiny of visa applications from particularly sensitive countries such as Yemen and Pakistan.

The Conservative Party has already launched its election campaign although a date for the general election has not yet been announced. It is widely anticipated it will be held in May. Under the law, it must be held no later than 3 June.

The party has pledged to create an extra 10,000 university places this year. It will introduce an early repayment bonus on student loans, offer a fairer deal for part-time and mature students and create a clearer pathway from vocational routes into further and higher education.

The Tories say they want to ensure that more students from disadvantaged backgrounds gain access to higher education. They recognise that universities have benefited from charging fees, but want to ensure that students also get a return on their investment.

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