

Baroness Brown of Cambridge,
Chair of the Lords Science and Technology Committee,
House of Lords,
London SW1A 0PW

3 August 2023

Dear Baroness Brown,

Thank you for your letter of 13 June regarding visa policy for STEM talent, particularly in relation to the Global Talent visa route.

The Global Talent route is for talented and promising individuals in the fields of science, digital technology and arts and culture wishing to work in the UK. Successful applicants are leaders, or have the potential to be leaders, in their field as determined by an endorsing body or through demonstrating they have won a prestigious prize. Successful applicants receive permission to live and work in the UK for up to five years in a single grant of leave, are able to bring their families, and the vast majority of STEM applicants are able to qualify for settlement in only three years. Global Talent applicants are able to move employers and or take sabbaticals during the duration of their visa, without making a new application or jeopardising their existing visa.

Since its launch in February 2020 the number of Global Talent applications has continued to grow significantly. The most recent net migration statistics released in May show that in the year ending March 2023 there was a 64% rise (+1,333) in 'Global Talent' visas to 3,404 grants.

The Royal Society's paper on visa costs acknowledges that comparing like-with-like across differing countries' visas systems is extremely complex. While Germany's Scientific Visa for Researchers has a low upfront cost, it provides less freedom for applicants than the Global Talent route, as it ties individuals to a specific post within a specific institution, and requires applicants to reapply if they take up a different research post. The visa is valid for one year in each grant and settlement also takes longer, at five years.

The US's J1- Research Scholar visa also ties applicants to a specific sponsor, requiring successful applicants to obtain permission from their employer to give

lectures or consultations off-campus, limiting their freedom to pursue research more widely. They are also required to demonstrate that they have ties to their home country and that they intend to return once that visa has expired.

These visas, and many others used by STEM applicants throughout the world, apply different, generally stricter, restrictions to the Global Talent route, which offers a hugely beneficial option for those wishing to pursue their STEM careers in the UK.

Turning to the fees charged for the Global Talent route, you will be aware that fees for all immigration and nationality applications are set within the parameters agreed with HM Treasury and Parliament, which balance a number of factors, including the administrative cost of processing an application, the wider costs of the immigration system and the benefits likely to accrue to a successful applicant. These are in line with the charging principles set out in the Immigration Act 2014.

Fee levels for all visa routes are published alongside the estimated cost of processing an application as part of our transparency publications. The tables that set out this information can be viewed through this link [Visa fees transparency data - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visa-fees-transparency-data).

You will note that a number of the fees are set above the cost of processing the application. The Home Office is not profiting from fees and income from fees does not go to fund any other parts of Government. It is only right that the cost of operating the Migration and Borders system is met by those using the system, reducing the burden on the UK taxpayer. This is an approach taken by the Home Office for a number of years and plays a vital role in the Home Office's ability to run a sustainable system.

The Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) ensures that migrants contribute to the NHS and that the cost of providing services does not fall on the UK taxpayer. The level that the IHS is set at is based on Department of Health and Social Care estimates of the average annual cost to the NHS of treating IHS payers. Funds generated from the IHS are provided directly to the NHS for healthcare provision and are allocated to each Devolved Administration based on the formula designed by Lord Barnett.

As the Committee mentions, the IHS is required to be paid upfront and in full in order to ensure healthcare is covered for the duration of a migrant's immigration permission. An instalment approach would place a significant administrative burden on the NHS and the Home Office. The NHS would need to ensure a patient was up to date with their payments and consider applying NHS charges if the IHS had not been paid. It would also require the Home Office to enforce the payment requirement, ensuring instalments were made when due, chasing late or missed payments, and taking enforcement action if necessary. This could involve cancelling immigration permission if an applicant was not up to date with payments, as payment of the IHS is a requirement to be granted a visa.

Many comparator countries require migrants to have private health insurance in place as a condition of a visa being granted, although this is not considered as a visa cost specifically, migrants are required to pay for private health insurance in order to

obtain a visa. Private health insurance requirements operated in comparable countries can have higher costs and may not provide comprehensive access to healthcare. Often maternity services are not covered without additional cost and also treatment for pre-existing conditions may not be covered. Whereas payment of the IHS entitles migrants to access the NHS on broadly the same basis as UK nationals for the duration of their immigration permission.

The cost of the IHS is stipulated upfront for transparency to enable migrant to understand the cost and plan their finances accordingly, whereas private health insurance costs may not be outlined clearly as part of the cost of migrating to comparator countries.

I hope that this is helpful in setting out our position on fees and the Global Talent route. I am copying to Baroness Walmsley and Viscount Camrose, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Suella Braverman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP
Home Secretary