

Considering the ramifications of India's exclusion from the British "Low-Risk" visa list



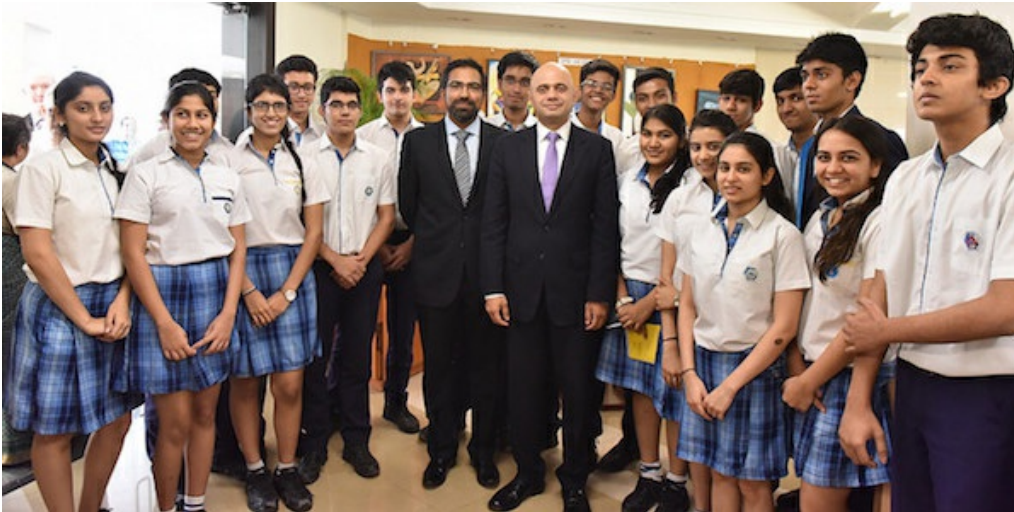
Adrij Chakraborty and Siddharth Sonkar discuss the ramifications of the exclusion of Indian students from the 'low risk' visa list. Not only is academic growth undermined when neutrality towards non-meritorious considerations such as nationality and race is compromised, they conclude, but the UK may also miss out on the contributions of Indian students.

Recently, the government of the United Kingdom decided to [exclude Indian students](#) from a new list of twenty-five countries categorised as posing 'low-risk'. This move, designed to expedite the visa process for students of countries on the list, brings no change to the Indian visa experience – leaving out Indian students entirely. As a result, it has invited flak from the [Indian media](#) and various stakeholders across the globe. Several analysts across the UK have actively spoken against this policy, a British think tank describing the exclusion as '[an act of self-harm](#)' that threatens to push more applicants away. The British Labour Party has also been an active voice in the matter, with London Mayor [Sadiq Khan](#) condemning the stand and calling it "deeply offensive" towards Indian students. Labour Party's [Diane Abbott](#) on Twitter called (the move of exclusion) "discriminatory and counter-productive" while appealing the ministry end the hostility instead of extending it. In this piece, we discuss the economic and academic aftermath of this move.

Perceived as disparaging, this policy seems to characterise all Indian students as potentially unscrupulous 'overstayers'. Since a large number of [top-ranking universities](#) are situated in the UK, it has been one of the most popular destinations for higher studies among Indian students. Excluding India from the list denies these students access to a plethora of prestigious opportunities on the same footing as countries included in the list, placing them at a relative disadvantage.

While the number of students received by the United Kingdom displayed steady growth from the period of 2002 to 2012, there has been a [sharp decline](#) in Indian Tier-4 applications at a rather staggering rate thereafter. This [steep fall](#) is attributed to an existing anti-immigrant sentiment in the United Kingdom; manifested through unwelcoming immigration policies introduced in 2012, through a visa policy which reduced the duration of time that non-EU graduates could utilise in securing a job and a minimum competitive salary to secure eligibility for residence in the UK. This visa exclusion policy in 2018 will further dis-incentivise Indian applicants from enrolling to British Universities.

Since this policy discourages Indian students from applying to the UK, it could potentially [hurt](#) the UK economy. Economically speaking, gaining education is considered synonymous to skill-development. In the wake of international migration, contributions of skilled workers in the job sector attract a threefold benefit scheme for the migrant, the natives and the host market. Some of the key players in justifying the relation have been wage, the rate of immigration, unemployment rate and the national income of the destination country.



Sajid Javid (now Britain's Home Secretary) visiting Mumbai in 2015. Photo credit: British High Commission, [Flickr](#), [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

In essence, variations in immigration have long run negative influences on the unemployment rate. [Literature](#) argues that immigrants create as many jobs as they fill, with a decent competition towards low-skilled natives. This happens because immigrants, after occupying jobs, raise demand for goods and services. This growth of domestic demand causes immigrants to create new jobs. The long run unemployment as a result plummets as the labour market adjusts. Indian students have been active partakers in the movement for change in the British economy. Ranging from [enterprising businesses to suave policymaking, the Indian diaspora](#), including alumni of prestigious British Universities, have flamboyantly emboldened their success stories in front of the world.

Relatively stricter visa norms in the UK would make welcoming destinations (such as Canada, Australia or Germany) more attractive for Indian applicants owing to their lenient immigration regulations. These countries, including the [statistics](#) for the UK, saw Indian enrolments rise by 103%, from around 130,000 to almost 280,000. In addition to this, cross-cultural engagement among students from different socio-political contexts synergises academic output with the help of diversity of opinions and approaches, resulting in a [holistic educational experience](#).

Keeping these in mind, visa norms should have been relaxed for Indian students as well, who, like students from other countries in the "low-risk" visa list, substantially contribute to academic output worldwide. Despite all these benefits, the UK Government seems to have hierarchically accorded more importance to regulating *few instances* of overstaying over *academic growth* resulting from cultivating the best Indian talents. Unfortunately, academic growth is atrociously undermined when neutrality towards non-meritorious considerations such as nationality and race is compromised.

Instead of endeavouring to fix the *real* problem, i.e., overstaying by a few, this exclusionary policy may result in an undesirable compromise on potential academic and economic growth for many. The government must refrain from conflating stray instances of non-compliance by the few with overall academic proliferation for the many, since the former could be addressed through targeted measures without hurting the latter – a crucial development indicator.

This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the South Asia @ LSE blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

About the Authors



Adrij Chakraborty is a Master Graduate in Economics (Finance) from the University of Edinburgh, School of Economics. He is a Sub-Editor (Economics) and a regular author at Delhi Post, and a frequent contributor to South Asia Monitor.



Siddharth Sonkar is a penultimate year student of law at the National University of Juridical Sciences (NUJS) Kolkata with an interest in legal policy. He is an editor at the Journal of Indian Law & Society (JILS) based out of NUJS.