

Mr Damian Green MP
Minister of State for Immigration,
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7 February 2012

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "De Damian".

Thank you for giving us your time at our recent Immigration dinner at Deutsche Bank. I found the discussion useful and I am sure the London First members appreciated your candour.

We covered a great deal of ground across operational issues and the immigration cap and restrictions; of particular importance is the need for more positive messaging in the immigration debate. We were pleased to see this reflected in your Policy Exchange speech last week and hope this clarification of the government's objective on immigration numbers will send the message that Britain is open for business.

We also welcomed your announcement of the new student entrepreneur route and, indeed, would like to see this go further to offer a viable post study work route for legitimate overseas students. Like you, we want to see bogus activity stopped, but we are concerned that, at a time when countries such as the US, Australia, Canada are aggressively stepping up their student recruitment, an over-restrictive approach could undermine a sector that brings more than £2.5bn to the UK economy. I promised to work with universities and BIS to assemble evidence for you of how legitimate Indian students are being put off from coming here, and this I will do.

From our discussion, I hope that we were able to allay your concerns about recruitment practices as the economy recovers. Whilst much of this recruitment will be of UK workers, a small percentage will be non-EU migrants who bring skills essential to London's success as a global talent hub. I hope, then, that you would agree that that this is not the time for lowering the Tier 2 cap, or giving consideration to restricting intra-company transfers any further; business needs the flexibility to move skilled talent between global offices, as it does to be able to start recruiting again at typical levels, when growth returns.

On tourist visas, I was interested to hear your plans to introduce an online system that will translate application forms from the local language into English. This is an important step to doing more to attract the sought after high spending Chinese tourist market; it would be good to understand the timetable for this. Also, you said the Chinese were the most likely to over stay the terms of their visas. I am keen to clarify whether you refer to immigration visa breaches or short term tourist visa breaches - the latter would seem surprising, as Approved Destination Status arrangements already ensure tight controls on Chinese leisure travel to the UK. It would be very helpful if you could advise on where I can find the data on Chinese overstayers.

We discussed the performance of the UKBA at our major airports and the continued frustration felt by business users with both service quality and time spent queuing. While we recognised the constraints posed by funding cuts, we encouraged you to bring renewed focus to this vital part of the passenger and visitor experience in time for the Olympics. We urge you to explore all offers made by private sector operators to fund or support an enhanced service. I anticipate discussing this further at our meeting with Rob Whiteman on 24 February.

I look forward to continuing to work with you and your team at the UKBA to ensure we have an evidence-based immigration policy that supports economic growth. Thinking ahead, would you be happy to agree in principle to another such event in six months time to review progress?

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jo Valentine".

Baroness Jo Valentine
Chief Executive