Response to the Parliamentary inquiry into the closure of the Post Study Work (PSW) route
University of Sheffield Students’ Union, September 2014

1.1 Sheffield Students’ Union exists to provide support, representation, services and activities to the 26,000 students studying at the University of Sheffield. We are run for students by students and have been rated the best Students’ Union in the UK by Times Higher Education for the past 6 years.

1.2 During August and September 2014, 383 overseas students studying at the University of Sheffield took part in our survey to determine what impact the closure of the PSW route has had on their studies, their perception of the UK and their ability to find work. 24% of students at the University are overseas students.

1.3 Summary:
- The majority of respondents felt that the closure of the PSW route had adversely affected their ability to find work in UK. Over half of respondents felt that restrictions on gaining a UK work experience had also affected their job prospects in their home countries.
- 75% of overseas students wanted to stay in UK mid-term (6 months – 3 years) after graduation. Only 7% of those students had a job offer from a UK employer.
- Worryingly at the time of application almost half of respondents (47%) believed that they could stay in the UK for up to 2 years to find work. The majority of those students started their studies in 2013, after the closure of the PSW route. This shows that PSW changes have not been adequately communicated.
- For the majority of overseas students ‘work opportunities’ was the most important factor in choosing where in the world to study.
- Whilst the Tier 2 route is a good option for students with job offers after the completion of their degrees, the lack of flexibility and tight timescales mean that many talented students with much to offer are unable to remain in the UK to work.
- Tier 5 as a route has some potential but as currently structured does not assist students looking to move into graduate employment within the UK rather than internships/work experience

1.4 Recommendations:
- We recommend the reintroduction of a two year flexible visa permission which allows highly skilled international students to stay in the UK after their studies to look for work, set up in business or start work in jobs which may not meet the requirements of Tier 2
- That consideration is given to giving clear and timely messages to prospective students, current students and employers about their options to remain in the UK to work
- We recommend that the closure of the route and any future changes be clearly advertised to prospective overseas students.
With regards to Tier 2 we recommend reviewing the minimum level of salary for a graduate job to enable students in regions outside of the southeast of the UK more chances to secure graduate level employment.

“now that I know after graduation there is almost no chance to find a job here so basically I need to look for some other countries to find a job so I cannot understand the point of studying in UK”
Iranian student, started at UoS in 2012

“Work experience from the developed countries is priceless in my home country...Not being able to work here in the UK has deprived me of a very valuable opportunity which students all over the world in other countries get.”
Nigerian student, started at UoS in 2013

2.0 How has the closure of the PSW route impacted overseas students’ studies and ability to gain experience in employment both here and abroad?
The majority of respondents felt that the closure of the PSW route had affected their ability to find work in UK. Similarly, over half of respondents stated that this impacted on their job prospects in their home countries and it’s therefore clear that the closure has had widespread implications on overseas students’ opportunities. Many students noted that overseas employers valued UK work experience as much as, if not more than, a degree gained in the UK. As such, many students are now in difficult positions when it comes to finding good graduate jobs and ultimately, paying back their student loans.

“If I would have post work visa I would have gained experience over here and also some amount of money which would help me to repay back at least half of my student loan in my country and also gain a descent [sic] job...in my own country”
Indian student, started at UoS in 2013

2.1 For this reason we recommend that overseas students be given the option to stay in the UK for longer than is currently available for them to be able to find suitable UK work experience.

3.0 How has the closure of the PSW route been viewed internationally?
Worryingly at the time of application to the University of Sheffield almost half (47%) of respondents believed that they could stay in the UK for up to 2 years to find work. The majority of those students started their studies in 2013, after the closure of the PSW route. This shows firstly that PSW changes have not been adequately communicated but also that we may not yet have seen the full implications of the changes.

“...my decision of coming to UK was strongly based on this [the PSW Scheme]. I could have gone to Canada and Australia or USA. I even got offers from top schools there as well. If I knew this would happen. I would have never come to UK”
Pakistani student, started at UoS in 2010
4.0 What impact has the closure of the PSW had on the perception of the UK as a place to study and work?
For 36% of overseas students ‘work opportunities’ was the most important factor in choosing where in the world to study – by far the most popular response to this question. The majority of respondents had very positive feelings toward the UK as a place to study. Many students noted that the UK offered one of the best educational experiences in the world and found the UK to be a great place to work, if they could find a job. The few criticisms were aimed at visa restrictions and the UK not being a welcoming place for international students after they have finished at University.

“It's a nice place to study but it is not a friendly place to find work. Students and recent graduates are being targeted to reduce the number of foreigner trying to settle in the uk. I have been studying in the uk for 3 years now and I feel less and less welcome here.”
Canadian student, started at UoS in 2011

“The UK is a brilliant place to study, it has the best educators, freedom of academic thought and the best facilities. However the work conditions, specifically hiring managers who deem International Students to be risky hires make for a very demotivational experience.”
Indian student, started at UoS in 2013

4.1 85% of Pakistani, 65% of Nigerian and 52% of Indian and 52% of Chinese respondents felt that the restrictions on gaining a UK work experience had affected their chances of getting good jobs in their home countries, stating that home employers believed that not gaining a UK work experience implied incompetence. Indian students in particular were concerned about loan repayments if they struggled to find good graduate jobs in India due to a lack of UK work experience.

“People back at home consider students without work experience as incompetent”
Indian student, started at UoS in 2013

4.2 Along with other countries beginning to offer education more cheaply and in English, the impact of these changes is that the UK is becoming a less attractive place to study. If we want international students to continue to come to the UK we must support them by ensuring the education we offer, and the work experience which is seen as part of this, represents value-for-money. We recommend the reintroduction of a two year flexible visa permission which allows highly skilled international students to stay in the UK after their studies to look for work, set up in business or start work in jobs which may not meet the requirements of Tier 2.

5.0 Are the current visa rules for Tier 2 (general) visa too restrictive?
79% of overseas students felt that the length of time they were allowed to stay in the UK had adversely affected their ability to find work. Some students stated that even when they were offered a job, as soon as the employers realised that they needed sponsorship, they withdrew the offer.
“I got accepted into several jobs but when they find out I need sponsorship they deny the job offer.”
Egyptian student, started at UoS in 2012

“My choices for work application has greatly been restricted and limited due to the short period of time before my visa expires. Also, because of the requirement of earnings above £20500 to be able to be sponsored, the list of licensed companies for me to choose from is also hugely restrictive.”
Malaysian student, started at UoS in 2012

5.1 With regards to Tier 2 we recommend reviewing the minimum level of salary for a graduate job to enable students in regions outside of the southeast of the UK more chances to secure graduate level employment.

6.0 Conclusion
We have found that the changes to the PSW scheme have had a deep effect on international students’ ability to find jobs. However, we also believe that since the changes have not been adequately communicated, that they have most likely not yet been reflected in the number of international students coming to the UK to study. We believe that they will have a negative effect and recommend that the UK government takes action to minimize the impact of these changes and welcome international students to the UK to study and work.