

UK Visa Rules May Not Hit UAE Students

Allan Jacob (With inputs from Agencies)

8 February 2010

DUBAI — The United Kingdom's plans to introduce tougher rules to prevent abuse of student visas is unlikely to affect the flow of visitors from the UAE, according to a British Embassy official here on Sunday.

The official said students from the Emirates had nothing to fear from the new rules, which British Home Secretary Alan Johnson had said was part of a wider crackdown on immigrants entering the country on student visas even though they intended to work there.

"Genuine students (from the UAE) will have nothing to fear from any changes to the visa procedures," said British Embassy spokesman Simon Goldsmith.

Last year, 2,400 students from the UAE joined British universities to pursue their higher education.

Goldsmith sought to put to rest any confusion among students, and said, "The UK will always be a great place to further your education."

He said the United Kingdom valued its relationship with the UAE and was looking forward to building on those ties. "We welcome visitors from the Emirates to the UK, be they visitors, businessmen or students."

Going further, he said, "The exchange of people is in all our interest and I hope they have a memorable stay."

Earlier, speaking on the BBC's *Andrew Marr Show*, Home Secretary Johnson denied the system had been soft on immigrants. "By 2011, we will have the most sophisticated system in the world to check people not just coming into the country but to check they have left as well," he said.

The Home Secretary said his country was still open to those students who came for legitimate study.

The tighter controls could also help to tackle security concerns over militants who enter Britain ostensibly to study. Analysts have warned for years of a threat from militants based at British universities, including foreigners on student visas.

The issue climbed back up the political agenda last month when it emerged that the Nigerian man accused of plotting to blow up a passenger plane over Detroit tried to re-enter Britain last April to study at a bogus college.

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