



21.09.16

PRESS RELEASE: Over 50 leaders from business and politics call for UK visa reform for Indian visitors

Over fifty leaders from business and politics have signed [a letter](#), published today by The Daily Telegraph, supporting calls for the UK to extend its new £87 two-year visitor visa to Indian nationals.

The Royal Commonwealth Society's (RCS) letter was signed by the CEOs of Heathrow, Birmingham and Manchester airports, Virgin Atlantic, the President of the Tourism Alliance, the CEO of UKinbound and the Executive Director of Tata Group for Europe. The Chairs of the Indo-British, Commonwealth and Tourism All Party Parliamentary Groups are among a number of parliamentarians who added their names.

The letter comes after the RCS released [a report](#) in July in partnership with leading aviation, tourism, and industry groups outlining the sound case for visa reform. A pilot visa scheme lasting two years for £87 was offered to China in January 2016, yet Indian visitors continue to pay £330 for a two-year visa, or £87 for six months.

The report's author, Tim Hewish, Director of Policy and Research at The Royal Commonwealth Society said: *"This letter demonstrates the broad support for reform of the UK-India visitor visa scheme across tourism, aviation, business and politics. We urge the government to listen to these individuals as leaders in their field and proactively discuss this proposal with the Indian government without delay."*

The reform would help reverse the UK's falling market share of global Indian tourists, which has halved over the last decade. The estimated cost to the UK economy is almost £500m per year and over 8,000 jobs. France has now leapfrogged the UK as India's most visited European nation, attracting 500,000 visitors from the subcontinent in 2015.

With 2017 designated the UK-India Year of Culture the time for change is now. Throughout 2017 both nations will see a strong collaboration in business, art, music, design and more. Having a cheaper and extended UK visitor visa will help make the most of these endeavours.

Furthermore, in light of the EU referendum, it is now more vital than ever that the UK strengthens Commonwealth ties and sends a strong message to the world that it welcomes these visitors and is open for business.

Bob Blackman MP, Vice-Chair of the Indo-British APPG said: *"I fully support the call for India to be added to the UK's visitor visa pilot scheme. The Indian diaspora of 1.4 million people is the largest in the UK and this change would undoubtedly enhance the deep and longstanding cultural and economies ties shared by India and the UK."*



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

--ENDS--

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Download the letter with the names and titles of the 56 signatories:

<https://www.thercs.org/assets/Research-/VisaLetterFINAL.pdf>

Download the full report 'A Passage from India – Improving UK visitor visas for India nationals' published in July 2016: <https://www.thercs.org/assets/Research-/India-Visa-Report-online-copy.pdf>

Download the two-page infographic: <https://www.thercs.org/assets/Research-/RCS-IndianVisaInfographic-2pp-web.pdf>

The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), founded in 1868, is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world. Through youth empowerment, education and advocacy, the RCS promotes the value and values of the Commonwealth. www.thercs.org

Media enquiries:

Rachel Ilett, Media and Communications Officer, The Royal Commonwealth Society
E: Rachel.ilett@thercs.org | T: +44 (0)20 3727 4311 | M: +44 (0)7718 476 234