



Rt Hon Yvette Cooper
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

11 June 2025

Dear Yvette,

Re: Visa Insecurity for Ukrainian Refugee Children and Their Access to Education

I am writing to raise serious concerns that have been brought to my attention regarding the visa status of Ukrainian children and families currently residing in the UK under the Ukraine Sponsorship and Family Schemes. These concerns centre around the detrimental impact of short-term visas on children's education, mental wellbeing, and the ability of families to plan for their future in Britain.

I attach a letter from Phil Priestley, the Founder of Cambs Youth Panel and a children's mental health practitioner, who recently met with Ukrainian children in my constituency. He shares troubling accounts of children such as Sofiia, a Year 9 student living in Sawston, who is currently living under an 18-month visa. The limited duration of her visa creates profound uncertainty over whether she will be permitted to remain in the UK long enough to complete her secondary education and sit her GCSE exams, something she has been working so hard towards taking.

This uncertainty is not limited to one child. I am currently supporting several constituents who are due to apply for extensions under the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme. However, the fact that this extension also only provides a further 18 months of leave means many families remain in limbo. This has significant implications for children applying to start GCSEs, A-levels, and particularly higher education courses, all of which extend beyond the current visa length.

In particular, constituents have expressed deep concern about how this affects applications for university places and funding. Many are unsure whether they will even be eligible to apply for student finance, given that their current visa expires before or during the course of study. I'm pleased to say that The Student Loans Company has been helpful in engaging with queries, but there remains a clear need for greater clarity from the Government on these matters.

Furthermore, these limitations are not only impeding access to education but are also preventing highly qualified Ukrainian adults—such as teaching assistants, academics, and medical professionals (such as dentists)—from undertaking professional conversion or accreditation programmes in the UK. The short duration of visas and the current rules around when extensions can be applied for (only within 28 days of expiry) mean that investing time and resources in training appears futile to them.

As Mr Priestley rightly points out, this situation also risks breaching our statutory obligations under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including their mental and emotional health. The level of stress and uncertainty these children are experiencing is simply incompatible with this duty.

I appreciate that the Ukraine schemes were designed at pace to address an urgent humanitarian crisis. However, I believe there is now a pressing need to review the implications of short-term leave for children and families who are trying to build some stability in the UK after fleeing war. At minimum, there needs to be:

- Reassurance that children can remain in the UK to complete secondary education and sit their exams;
- Clarification of eligibility for student finance and access to further and higher education for Ukrainian students;
- Consideration of a longer or more flexible visa extension process that allows families to commit to education, employment, and integration without constant fear of disruption.

I would be grateful if your department could confirm what plans, if any, are in place to address these issues, and whether consideration is being given to extending the length or terms of leave granted under the Ukraine schemes.

I look forward to your response and would be happy to discuss further with your team.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pippa', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pippa Heylings MP
Member of Parliament for South Cambridgeshire