

24 November 2008

Dear Editor

You may be aware that from this month the government begins issuing what it calls, with an obvious nasty spin, 'ID cards for foreigners'. You may not be aware what this means for Birmingham. First affected will be students and those marrying Britons. The plan is that gradually residents from outside Europe will be fingerprinted and have to account for their movements. (Later, so would we all.)

Successful foreigners such as Randy Learner or Brad Friedel and the overseas students at Birmingham's universities have a lot of choice where they study or exercise their talents. Some will decide Britain has become too unfriendly. When the US introduced more hostile visa conditions three or four years ago, the numbers applying to study there fell by 15% and Bill Gates complained that Microsoft could no longer hire some of the best software engineers.

If this scheme is continued it will lead to less fee-income and lower international status for Birmingham. British students will have to pay higher tuition to make up, and will have less money to spend with local businesses. Fewer of the world's star performers in every field will choose to make their homes here than do now.

We, the undersigned, value the contribution that these gifted people currently make to our institutions and our society. We think our country should treat them as guests, not criminal suspects. 'ID cards for foreigners' is not just a small-minded slogan – Birmingham will suffer culturally and economically.

Yours faithfully

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