

Pandering to Reform is no way to run a country

Published: January 13, 2026, 10:00 am

In Australia, [Labor won the general election](#) this weekend by opposing anything that looked vaguely aligned with the thinking of Trump.

Mark Carney did the same in naming the Canadian general election.

Neither of these winning parties is remotely left of centre. Both are neoliberal to their core. I am under no illusion about that.

Starmer, meanwhile, continues to pander to Trump, still hanging on to the idea of a 'special relationship'. And simultaneously, he is aping Farage. As the [Guardian has reported](#):

Ministers will crack down on international students applying for asylum in the UK in a move designed to tackle migration figures, after a series of bruising losses to Reform in the local elections.

An immigration white paper setting out the proposed reforms in mid-May will include measures to bring down the numbers of UK student visa holders who make asylum claims, the Guardian understands.

Unpacking that, what ministers want to do is:

- * Deny people who realise that they believe in our way of life whilst studying in this country, in a way that then makes it dangerous for them to return to their country of origin, the right to remain here in the UK. As a result, the message being sent out to foreign students is that they should not be persuaded of the merits of our country.
- * Deny us the opportunity to access what we know to be a well-trained group of people who have paid considerably over the odds to get that training here in the UK.
- * Undermine the financial viability of the UK university sector, because the message is being sent that foreign students should not learn about the merits of life in the UK or seek to integrate in this country whilst studying here.

- * Make unattractive a massively valuable source of what is, in effect, foreign export earnings for the UK, which is what overseas student education represents.
- * Destroy our soft power in the world.
- * Create unemployment in academia by reducing student numbers.
- * Make undergraduate education for UK students more expensive by removing the subsidy foreign students now receive.

And why do all that? To pander to the far-right extremists in Reform.

I am not saying that studying in the UK should give you the right to stay here. I am saying that the assumption that all asylum applications from those who make them after studying here are inappropriate is profoundly wrong and deeply detrimental to the interests of this country. It is also racist.

When will we learn to respect people as individuals and to treat them as such, which is a basic necessity for a civilised society, instead of treating them like objects as racists do? I wish I knew the answer to that question.