

Calls for London to become its own state

By [Paul Blower](#)

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Credit: Dave Catchpole

London Mayor Boris Johnson has called for the introduction of a 'London visa' aimed at attracting talented workers to the city.

The plan, which has been passed on to the Home Office, would allow the best applicants to bypass the currently lengthy process of applying for a British visa.

Mr Johnson said the proposal would help attract the "best and brightest" to London.

Jimmy Wales, founder of Wikipedia, has also called on the government to work harder to attract the best working talent from China and India, by overhauling and simplifying the UK visa system.

He is convinced that with some amendments to the visa system focused on strengthening London's position, the city can become a global capital for technology.

The proposed plans would bring 100 of the government's existing 1,000 yearly "exceptional talent" visas to London, which are aimed at world-leading scientists, artists and performers. City Hall would then work with representatives from Silicon Roundabout, the Fashion Council and London Design Festival to determine the best applicants and give them an official endorsement.

Entrepreneurs have complained in the past they cannot employ the staff they need from outside Europe because they cannot afford to contend with the current costly visa system. Kit Malthouse, deputy mayor for business and enterprise said "We only need to find one Steve Jobs and we have an Apple on our hands." Others have called for even stronger measures to enhance London's position as a global centre for commerce.

The city currently has little fiscal autonomy, and whereas Tokyo and New York set their own property, sales and income taxes, London can only levy council tax.

Even former mayor and past rival to Mr Johnson Ken Livingstone agrees that "anything short of a fully independent state for London is a lost opportunity".

The city undoubtedly dominates this country's economy, batting off the worst recession in decades to find

economic growth of 12.5 per cent over that period.

Relative to the rest of the country, house prices have doubled since 2007.

Political change is also fueling the idea of 'Londonism': devolution in Edinburgh and Cardiff has strengthened the idea that London should have greater independence.

"If the Scottish parliament can levy its own taxes, why not London, whose economy is almost three times bigger?" asks Tony Travers of the London School of Economics. Measured in terms of GDP, a London city state would find itself as the ninth largest 'country' in Europe, on a par with Sweden and bigger than Denmark and Belgium.

As an independent state, from day one London would find its government £20bn better off, and have powers to allocate spending in ways better suited to the city's aims; Crossrail 2 and further improvements to the Underground.

It could even decide to leave the EU in order to escape any aggressive new financial market regulations. And whilst government income would initially fall for the rest of Britain, it could go about shaping the often forgotten cities of Birmingham and Manchester into country-leading economic centres.



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