



1. The Science Council

- 1.1. The Science Council is an umbrella organisation of learned societies and professional bodies, and is the leading UK voice on the skills and professionalism of scientists. Its strength comes from its ability to be multi and inter-disciplinary in its approach to identify the changing nature of science skills needs and challenges facing society.
- 1.2. The Science Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Commission's inquiry. In preparing this submission we have consulted member bodies to identify areas of common interest and the issues they raised form the content of this submission. For clarity this submission will focus on workers and students.

2. Summary

- 2.1. The UK's economic success has been underpinned by its ability to attract highly skilled and talented individuals from around the world. Science is increasingly a global activity, and it is imperative that the UK remains open and welcoming to international scientists, researchers, entrepreneurs and businesses to generate wealth, jobs and societal benefits.
- 2.2. The Science Council is concerned that current immigration policies and announcements from Government have destabilised the UK's existing competitive advantage as a world-leader in science and innovation activities.
- 2.3. The UK needs a measured and balanced approach to immigration. Governments need to work as hard to attract highly skilled people as they do to tackling illegal immigration.

3. The current UK workforce

- 3.1. Science is increasingly an international pursuit, and leading nations are competing to attract the best talent from around the world. To maintain competitive advantage in its research and development, and commercial translation activities the UK will need to attract the most talented researchers, scientists and entrepreneurs from around the world. International companies seeking to establish a base in the UK will need assurances that, as well as a highly skilled home-grown workforce, they are able to draw upon the necessary skills and knowledge from an international pool of talent. UK immigration policy must value and encourage the contribution made by highly-skilled workers from overseas to generate economic growth in the UK.
- 3.2. The Science Council supports the drive to eliminate illegal immigration; however it is important that Government understands the unintended consequences that a hastily thought-through immigration policy will have on UK science and the economy as a whole. Currently there is a feeling among the wider science community that the UK is not welcoming to those from overseas who wish to learn, train and develop their skills in the UK. Establishing the UK as a great place to do science means encouraging and facilitating the world's brightest and best to come to the UK, which will create lifelong links with UK science that will form the basis of future interactions.

4. Welcoming international students to the UK

- 4.1. The UK's global reach and reputation for excellent science is underpinned by its

increasing ability to attract the best international STEM students to its universities, and at all levels of study. The Science Council is concerned that the messages emanating from Government have not been consistently applied across all departments. The message that there is no cap on the number of genuine students eligible to study in the UK has not been sufficiently articulated. Conflicting policy announcements have sent a confusing message that they are indeed not welcome in the UK. To help communicate a clear message that the UK is open and welcoming to international students wishing to study in the UK, international student numbers should be exempt from net migration figures.

- 4.2. One of the unintended consequences of the current immigration policy is on the supply of postgraduate courses, particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects. Many are populated and funded by international students' tuition fees. The decline in take-up of these courses by international students has a negative effect on the resident student population.
- 4.3. There is widespread confusion about the various visa routes into the UK, with many employers either unaware of, or reluctant and confused about the current visa system. Many do not understand the possibilities of recruiting international graduates in the uncapped Tier 2 route. The frequency of change to the Tier 4 immigration rules, the contradiction between the immigration rules and Home Office policy guidance, and the reduction of staff within the Home Office has left a confusing, messy and difficult system for employers and students to navigate.
- 4.4. The current immigration application process lacks nuance, and there is a concern that the UK determines international students' visa applications more on the basis of the country they are from than for their personal attributes.
- 4.5. There should be greater collaboration between UK Visa and Immigration services and the UK's higher education sector in the dissemination of user-friendly, consistent and accurate information and requirements for international students.

5. Concluding remarks

- 5.1. The UK is seen as a welcoming and outward-looking country and an excellent location for talented scientists to work and study, and for international businesses to operate from. However, an immigration policy that is considered punitive by international businesses and talented individuals, irrespective of technical detail regarding particular groups such as international students, will have a deleterious long-term effect on the success of the UK economy.
- 5.2. Given the potential impact of immigration policies on the UK economy, it is important that long-term skills planning policy is more closely joined-up across government and decisions on immigration quota policy are discussed with key stakeholders and are totally transparent.

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