



What Can Be Done?

1 The central aim must be to stabilise the population of the UK as closely as possible to the present level.

2 This requires a reduction in net immigration from the present level of 196,000 (2009) to 50,000 or less. In other words immigration must be brought back to the levels of the early 1990s.

3 The first step is to set a target range for net immigration and build policy round it, as the House of Lords Economic Committee recommended. At present the scale of immigration is simply the outcome of a complex set of regulations. We suggest that the range should be 10-20,000 a year.

4 This leads to the question of whether such an approach is feasible, given free movement within the EU. In fact, immigration from the other members of the EU 15 is almost in balance (the average of the last five years is only about 20,000 a year). We expect the same to happen to the new East European members (the A8) in the next few years; they will continue to arrive, albeit in smaller numbers, but will be counterbalanced by departures. The provisional 2009 immigration statistics show that net immigration from these countries was already down to 5,000 in that year.

5 The next step is to examine the main components of immigration:

Work Permits

These have trebled from 40,000 to about 120,000 a year since 1997. They could be capped but a low cap would hinder the competitiveness of industry and commerce when the recovery comes. A high cap would have no useful effect on population. The solution is to split economic migration from settlement. Work permits would be valid for only a maximum of four years. Those who wished to settle would be selected by a further points system, subject to an annual limit. The Labour government accepted this suggestion and went out to consultation on it.

Marriage

There can be no question of interfering with genuine marriages but arranged marriages with overseas partners primarily intended for immigration should not be permitted. Existing measures to prevent sham marriages should also be tightened.

Asylum

The numbers are nowadays small relative to immigration as a whole - applications of 24,000 in 2009 are running at about 10% of net foreign immigration and grants of protection are less than half that number. The main requirement here is to improve the removal of failed asylum seekers. The coalition policy of not detaining children will make this considerably more difficult.

Students

The number of non-EU students given leave to enter the UK in 2009 was 274,000 This is a huge number but it is important to realise that genuine students are not an immigration problem; most return at the end of their courses (to be replaced by others). Unfortunately, there is growing evidence that the new Points based System is being abused on a considerable scale ([Briefing Paper 2.3](#)). This needs serious attention with full interviews being restored in countries of concern.

6 In addition to these categories there are significant numbers of illegal immigrants in Britain. The most recent estimate is 725,000. The best way to tackle this problem is to impose heavy fines on the employers of illegal immigrants. The government are starting to do this believing, correctly, that if the opportunities for illegal work are closed off, people will not stay on illegally. An amnesty would be disastrous. ([Briefing Papers 11.7, 11.17, 11.22 and 11.23](#)).

7 It will be apparent that there is a way forward provided that the political system can be persuaded to respond to public opinion on the subject. The formation in September 2008 of a Cross Party Group on Balanced Migration was a major step forward. Their website can be found at www.balancedmigration.org where a fuller account of their policy proposals can be found.

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