



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 239,000 (2010) to 50,000 or less. In other words immigration must be brought back to the levels of the 1980s and early 1990s, a pledge made by David Cameron in a speech in April 2011 and again in October 2011.
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 in April 2008. In the past the scale of immigration has been simply the outcome of a complex set of regulations.
4. Is such an approach realistic? The net migration figure of 239,000 for 2010 consisted of 575,000 people immigrating and 336,000 people emigrating. Migration is a good and natural part of an open society and economy. There are already substantial movements in both directions. The issue is the difference between the inflows and outflows. It should be possible to achieve a low net migration figure while still allowing for substantial flows into and out of the country.
5. Another question is 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 30,000 a year). We expect the same to happen eventually to the new East European members (the A8); they will continue to arrive, albeit in smaller numbers, but will be counterbalanced by departures. In the last five years net migration from the whole of the EU has made up about 29% of the total net migration. The largest component of net migration is from outside the EU and can be controlled by government.
6. The next step is to examine the main components of non-EU immigration:

(a) Work Permits

These have trebled from 40,000 to about 120,000 a year since 1997. The government has introduced a cap on work permits of 21,700 a year. At present only about half these permits are being taken up. However, the impact of this cap will be reduced as Intra-Company Transfers (ICTs) have been excluded from it. The Home Secretary has announced her intention to bring forward proposals to bring an end to the almost automatic right for economic migrants to settle in Britain. Breaking this link should allow industry to employ migrants for a period of years while not adding to our population growth. The proposal would also increase the incentive to train British workers. We suggest that only those work migrants who make a substantial economic contribution should be able to apply for settlement.

(b) Marriage

There can be no question of interfering with genuine marriages but arranged marriages with overseas partners should not be permitted if there is an element of pressure on one of the parties to the marriage. Existing measures to prevent sham marriages should also be tightened. Language requirements should be raised to facilitate better integration.

(c) Asylum

The numbers are nowadays small relative to immigration as a whole - applications of 18,000 in 2010 are running at about 7.5 % of net foreign immigration and grants of asylum or other forms of protection are less than half that number. The main requirement here is to consider applications promptly and remove those whose claim has failed and who no longer have any legal right to remain in the UK.

(d) Students

The number of non-EU students and their dependants given leave to enter the UK in 2010 was nearly 300,000. In addition there were nearly 200,000 student visitors. 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, the Points Based System of which some 60% relates to students is being abused on a considerable scale. (Briefing Paper 2.3). This needs serious attention with full interviews being restored in countries of concern. Bogus students cost the economy considerably - up to £493 million per year - and take jobs that could otherwise be taken by a British worker. (Briefing Paper 2.9). The government has tightened up the system with a view to reducing abuse. With 20% of UK graduates unemployed it should also restrict the right of foreign graduates to stay on and work in the UK. Good educational Institutions should attract students on the quality of their courses not as a passport to the UK.

(e) Illegal Immigration

7. In addition to these categories there are significant numbers of illegal immigrants in Britain. We estimate that there could be up to 1 million in total. (Briefing Paper 11.22). The best way to tackle this problem is to impose heavy fines on the employers of illegal immigrants and remove those caught working illegally. The government has been increasing its enforcement efforts believing, correctly, that if the opportunities for illegal work are closed off, people will not stay on illegally. However, a Parliamentary question recently revealed that only 20% of the fines imposed on companies caught employing illegal workers have actually been collected.¹ It is important that this be significantly improved. (Briefing Papers 11.7, 11.17, 11.22 and 11.23).

Conclusion

8. It will be apparent that there is a practicable way forward provided that the political system can be persuaded to respond to very strong public opinion. 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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1 Parliamentary Written Answer, Rt. Hon. Frank Field, Hansard 7 March 2011, Col 872W. URL: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110307/text/110307w0005.htm#11030812000617>