



UCL response to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee Inquiry: An immigration system that works for science and innovation

Summary

- Immigration rules for researchers and students involved with science and innovation should allow **as open and unhindered access as possible** between the UK and EU, as well as internationally.
- **Clarity on future immigration rules is needed as soon as possible**, to provide certainty in carrying out staff and student recruitment and planning international research collaborations.
- There is an opportunity to **harmonise and simplify the visa regime for all international students and researchers**. We would welcome a clear, streamlined and proportionate visa scheme that gives priority that enables UK universities to employ talented EU/EEA researchers.
- **Immigration policy should support the recruitment of talented students and researchers** and in particular should:
 - support international researchers' rights to bring family/dependants into the UK/EU; carry out short-term international visits without losing residence rights; and access UK and EU research grants.
 - support international students' access to UK funding for study purposes, and not require them to pay international PhD fees.
- We welcome the Government's recent commitment to a review the Tier 2 visa cap and support an exemption for PhD level roles and roles on the shortage occupation list from the Tier 2 visa cap.
- Tier 4 visa compliance monitoring requirements for international students should be reduced and made less burdensome, to create a more welcoming environment.

A. Introduction

1. To ensure the UK's continued success in science and innovation, it is essential that we continue to attract global talent, including from the EU. This is required to ensure the health and vibrancy of the UK higher education sector and research base and to continue to support the existing and the new connections that support international research collaborations – as highlighted for example in a report from the Academy of Medical Sciences.¹ UCL has a high proportion of EU/EEA staff (22% of academics and 33% of researchers) and research and teaching at UCL would be severely affected by any future barriers to recruitment. We note and support the Royal Society's recent statement on Brexit and the future arrangements for funding and collaboration, people, and regulation (issued 5th June).

B. If an early deal for science and innovation could be negotiated, what specifically should it to contain in relation to immigration rules and movement of people involved with science and innovation?

2. Immigration rules for researchers and students involved with science and innovation should allow as open and unhindered access as possible between the UK and EU, as well as internationally. Migration rules should support both long-term and temporary migration, such as short visits, or placements that last a specific number of years. 72% of UK-based scientists spent time at non-UK institutions between 1996 and 2015,² and such movement is associated with researchers' success in terms of impacts.³

3. The changes to immigration rules that will be prompted by the UK's withdrawal from the EU offer an opportunity to harmonise and simplify the visa regime for all international students and researchers. We would welcome a clear, streamlined and proportionate visa scheme. Such a scheme should place as little restriction as possible on UK universities seeking to employ talented EU researchers and give priority to highly skilled researchers and scientists at all career levels. There is strong public support for such immigration: 86% of the British public want to increase or maintain levels of immigration of scientists and engineers.⁴ We would also welcome the extension of such a scheme to all highly-skilled employees, beyond the higher education and research sector.
4. It will be important for migration policies to take a nuanced approach, reflecting variation in salary scales, and not rely solely on crude proxies that may not generally be fit for purpose. Salary is not a proxy for skill, and salaries vary greatly depending on the sector in question. For example, important roles such as research technicians (as highlighted in a Russell Group report⁵) do not exceed the current salary threshold for a 'high-skilled' job.
5. In the meantime, and further to the figures released by the Home Office in response to an FOI request from the Campaign for Science and Engineering showing that more than 6,000 applications for Tier 2 visas from skilled overseas workers holding a job offer, we welcome the Home Secretary's announcement that the Government will review the Tier 2 visa cap. We encourage the Government to exempt PhD level roles and roles on the shortage occupation list from the Tier 2 visa cap. The review could also provide an opportunity to consider the future immigration system for researchers and students more broadly.

C. What are the specific career needs of scientists in relation to movement of people, both in terms of attracting and retaining the people the UK needs and supporting the research that they do?

6. Over half of the current population of researchers resident in the UK were born overseas, and the Prime Minister has recently made a commitment to ensure that this does not change.⁶
7. To support this, it will be crucial for migration policies to support the following for scientists and researchers:
 - rights to bring their family/dependants into the UK/EU (see para. 7)
 - ability to leave the UK for research purposes for a period of time and not lose their residence rights
 - access to both EU and UK research grants, as well as the ability to transfer these grants across borders.

Dependants

8. The status and treatment of the spouses and dependants of applicants will affect research institutions' ability to recruit non-UK staff. There is a considerable risk of either deterring applicants or failure to take up appointments if their families are subject to lengthy and complex immigration processes.
9. Policies for international students should support:
 - access to UK funding for study purposes
 - PhD students from the EU not paying international PhD fees
 - reducing the Tier 4 visa compliance monitoring requirements for international PhD students (see para. 10)

Tier 4 visa compliance monitoring

10. Tier 4 visa compliance requires burdensome monitoring of international undergraduate and postgraduate students, creating a hostile environment and impacting their relationships with

supervisors who carry out checks. Supervisors must monitor students' engagement in their studies (including attendance, submitting coursework and so on) by carrying out engagement monitoring checks at several points throughout the year. This can harm relationships with supervisors and make students feel less valued and welcomed in the UK. In the context of the additional costs faced by international students, this can understandably lead to resentment.

11. Given the Prime Minister's recent speech on science and the industrial strategy, in which she celebrated international students, affirming that they "[contribute] to the success of some of the best universities in the world", we would urge the Government to reduce the number and extent of Tier 4 visa monitoring requirements to reflect this welcoming stance. This is crucial to ensure that students, including PhD students carrying out valuable research, feel welcome in the UK.

D. What aspects of the 'people' element need to be negotiated with the EU-27, as opposed to being simply decided on by the Government?

12. Rights of UK- and EU-based researchers migrating to the EU/UK that will need to be negotiated with the EU-27 include:
 - right to reside in the UK/EU (both for short- and long-term migration); visa policy associated with this
 - access to health services
 - transferable pension rights
 - equivalence of qualifications/standards
 - ability to work in non-research institutions, for instance research clinicians who want to work in the NHS.

E. On what timescale is clarity needed in relation to future immigration rules in order to support science and innovation in the UK?

13. Clarity on future immigration rules is needed as soon as possible to provide certainty for:
 - Undergraduate and postgraduate student recruitment (including advertisement of fees)
 - Research staff recruitment
 - Plans for international collaboration in research projects.
14. We would welcome certainty over future immigration policy as soon as possible in order to encourage talented EU-based researchers and students to continue applying to work or study in the UK. There is a high risk that the current lack of certainty will lead to talented individuals opting to go to other EU-based countries over the UK, with a consequent impact on the social, cultural, and economic prosperity of the UK – research has shown that international students contribute £13.8 billion gross value added (GVA) to UK GDP.⁷
15. The Erasmus scheme provides an example to illustrate how plans for student recruitment begin years in advance. This necessitates certainty on relevant policy years ahead of its implementation. UK and EU undergraduates on the Erasmus scheme study abroad in their third year of study. Students due to study abroad in 2021/22 will be admitted to UCL in September 2019. These students will be recruited throughout 2018 using marketing materials and a prospectus finalised in early 2018. Therefore there is a nearly four year lead time (early 2018 to September 2021) between the start of the recruitment process and honouring any promises made through our marketing materials.

¹ [The Impact of Collaboration: the value of UK medical research to EU science and health](#), Academy of Medical Sciences, 2017

² International Comparative Performance of UK Research Base 2016, Elsevier and BEIS, 2017

³ International Comparative Performance of the UK Research Base 2013, Elsevier and BIS, 2013

⁴ Time to get it right British Future, 2017

⁵ [Impact of Brexit on the technical workforce](#), Russell Group, 2017

⁶ PM speech on science and modern Industrial Strategy: 21 May 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-science-and-modern-industrial-strategy-21-may-2018>

⁷ [The economic impact of international students](#), Universities UK, March 2017