

RSB response to the Science and Technology Committee of the Commons' inquiry on an immigration system that works for science and innovation

June 2018

Background

The Royal Society of Biology (RSB) is a single unified voice, representing a diverse membership of individuals, learned societies and other organisations. We are committed to ensuring that we provide Government and other policymakers, including funders of biological education and research, with a distinct point of access to authoritative, independent, and evidence-based opinion, representative of the widest range of bioscience disciplines.

The Society welcomes the Committee's inquiry on an immigration system that works for science and innovation. We are pleased to offer these comments, which have been informed by specific input from our members and Member Organisations across the biological disciplines. Relevant to this inquiry, we would like to draw the Committee's attention to our response to your previous inquiry (February 2018) on the Brexit: Science and Innovation Summit¹; and to the Migration Advisory Committee's call for evidence (October 2017) on EEA-workers in the UK labour market². Several of our Member Organisations (listed in the Appendix) have also produced responses to these inquiries.

Introduction

For the UK to remain an international beacon of excellence in research, teaching, innovation and training, it is essential that future immigration systems work efficiently and equitably to support movement of the skilled scientists who are vital to our success in academia, business and the science-driven economic and service sectors. A successful immigration system should support movement for those studying and working in science, efficiently, at all levels, and across all disciplines needed; it should support the UK's ability to attract and retain the best staff and students from the full talent pool; and it should afford UK scientists the opportunity to live, work, study and train outside of the UK. There are specific challenges related to immigration and the

¹ RSB response to the Science and Technology Committee of the Commons Brexit: science and innovation Summit inquiry (February 2018); Appendix 3, section 3.2 (page 9); URL: https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/article/policy/RSB_response_to_HoC_STC_Brexit_science_and_innovation_Summit_inquiry_for_submission.pdf

² RSB response to the Migration Advisory Committee call for evidence on EEA-workers in the UK labour market (October 2017); URL:

https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/article/policy/RSB_response_MAC_EEA_workers_UK_labour_market.pdf

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movement of people that affect the bioscience community, and it is essential that these issues are addressed if any future immigration system is to work for the benefit of society through science and innovation.

Executive summary

The following points are a summary of the Royal Society of Biology's response to this inquiry. We provide further detail, in relation to the Committee's questions, in the numbered paragraphs from page 3 onwards.

Relevant to any early deal priorities (Question 1)

- We will not realise the benefit of any policy to support people in gaining science experience, work and study opportunities in the UK without active communication with the relevant communities, including strong, transparent and consistent messaging from Government on the rules, the reasons behind them, and the broader context.
- Existing projects and collaborations-in-planning should be supported so as to enable continuity.
- Temporary student placements, such as ERASMUS, should be exempt from any quota.

Relevant to career needs (Question 2):

- To maintain and expand the UK's skills base there should be ease of movement for skilled individuals, and those with potential, at all qualification and professional levels across the science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM) community.
- Immigration policies must take into account the need for nimble, efficient processes (for example to enable short-term visas).
- Immigration policies must support redress of skills gaps, including across a range of bioscience disciplines, through, for example, revision of the arbitrary Tier 2 Visa cap for skilled workers.

Relevant to negotiations for people (Question 3):

- There is need for extensive clarity and communication on the status of UK citizens who live and work in STEMM across the EU-27, and of EU-27 citizens who live and work in STEMM in the UK.

Relevant to timelines (Question 4):

- Wherever possible, Government should bring forward immediate clarity to the STEMM community on decisions pertaining to relevant immigration rules and regulations in both the short and long term. Immigration policies focused on attracting highly skilled people to the UK should be simple, accessible and consistent. These policies should facilitate and support attracting and retaining skilled individuals, and those with potential, to gain experience of study and work in UK STEMM subjects, such as in the production and support of research across the biosciences. This should include maintaining a welcoming environment, through consideration of relevant starting salaries, continued professional development, well-being, inclusivity, and ease of movement for dependants (family).

These points are discussed further in the following sections, which provide answers to the specific questions put forward by the Committee inquiry.

Question 1: If an early deal for science and innovation could be negotiated, what specifically should it contain in relation to immigration rules and movement of people involved with science and innovation?

1.1 Proactive support and communication from the Government on rules and opportunities, to ensure that UK science remains open for business.

- a) The UK bioscience community requires ongoing, active communication of well-informed and complete information, strong and consistent messaging, and continued clarity on the status of many aspects of the UK's exit from the EU, including changes to immigration rules.
- b) To enable this, there must be active and efficient communication and collaboration between Government Departments and associated bodies. Clear, accessible and comprehensive guidance is needed on the requirements for health insurance for foreign nationals to access the UK healthcare system, which remains a source of anxiety among incoming EU-27 origin PhD students and undergraduates, for example.
- c) The lack of consistency and clarity from Government to date has resulted in uncertainty around immigration rules following Brexit (e.g. uncertainty relating to job security and guarantees for dependents) and our network advises us that some researchers, for example, are dissuaded from moving to or continuing to study or work in the UK, because of this uncertainty³. We suggest that policy decisions are publicised in a broadly accessible manner as soon as possible and are regularly updated, to reduce this uncertainty.
- d) The Government should use careful and positive rhetoric in relation to immigration and be clear and welcoming to non-UK recruits. It is essential that the UK is seen to openly embrace the immigration of talented non-UK scientists and technicians; this can be reflected in process as well as messaging. The RSB is concerned to hear international members describe UK's immigration policies as being perceived as 'hostile'.

1.2 Continuity for current collaborations, and those already in planning (for pre- and post-Brexit), must be maintained. Any early-deal for science and innovation should consider current international collaborative projects (including those spanning the Irish border) and aim not to derail projects by significant lack of continuity of permissions.

1.3 Temporary student placements, such as ERASMUS, should be exempt from any quota. Undergraduate exchanges are important for future career decisions, in broadening skill bases and in providing the basis for future international interactions and collaborations. In addition, these exchanges often involve research projects performed by Masters and PhD students that contribute directly to research outcomes. For further detail on this specific aspect of relevance to immigration rules and movement of people involved with science and innovation, please see the *RSB's response to the Science and Technology Committee of the Commons Brexit: science and innovation Summit inquiry* (appendix 1, pages 4 and 5)⁴.

³ RSB response to the Science and Technology Committee of the Commons Brexit: science and innovation Summit inquiry (February 2018); Appendix 4 (page 11); URL: https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/article/policy/RSB_response_to_HoC_STC_Brexit_science_and_innovation_Summit_inquiry_for_submission.pdf

⁴ RSB response to the Science and Technology Committee of the Commons Brexit: science and innovation Summit inquiry (February 2018); Appendix 3, section 3.2 (page 9); URL: https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/article/policy/RSB_response_to_HoC_STC_Brexit_science_and_innovation_Summit_inquiry_for_submission.pdf

Question 2: 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?

2.1 Ease of movement for skilled individuals, and those with potential, at all qualification and professional levels across the STEMM community.

- a) This is important both in terms of attracting and retaining skilled individuals, and those with potential, into the UK, but also in enabling the sharing of knowledge, expertise and facilities with the international community – which is key to efficient practice in innovation, research and development and to deriving benefit for society as a whole. Bioscientists have specific career needs in relation to the movement in order to advance and develop their skills, expertise and international networks. The RSB wishes to highlight (below) the areas that any future policy on immigration should address in order to support the movement of people in biosciences; many of these are common to needs of the STEMM community in general.
- b) Mutual and bilateral recognition of UK qualifications internationally will be imperative to enable opportunities for those studying and working in the biosciences in the UK to obtain training and work experience outside of the UK. Ease of international movement is essential to promote the professional development of bioscientists, through enabling the development of networks and collaborative opportunities, in addition to the sharing of skills, expertise and facilities. With thorough use of expert advice (via independent professional bodies and through continued access to collaborative international initiatives such as the NARIC and NEC⁵ networks), the UK should also continue to recognise equivalent international qualifications, enabling UK nationals and skilled individuals working and studying within UK STEMM to provide the UK community with the full benefit of international training, skills, experience and expertise. The RSB recommends engagement in the Bologna Process⁶ and clear messaging to potential non-UK students on how UK qualifications align with international comparators, and are relevant to application processes for UK and international visas, etc.
- c) Visa processes should be flexible and allow ease of change for timing and duration. There is substantial need for a more flexible and accessible short-term visa processes to support ease of movement. Visa processes should provide flexibility in terms of the changing duration of visas and timelines at short-term notice. For example, many bioscientists participate in short-term projects or experiments outside of the UK. Research, by nature, is often unpredictable and the facilities to enable maximum benefit from research activities must therefore accommodate change as new opportunities, or new needs, arise. Thus, the visa process should allow for within-visit change due to changing circumstances, such as extending a visa to allow for an extension to a short-term experiment or project, conversion to a work visa for a promising student currently on a study visa, or conversion to residency status for a promising student or researcher.

Multiple entry on long-term visas, and access to consecutive visas, should also be possible to a greater degree. For example, researchers may apply for consecutive short-term visas to come to the UK for a conference, followed by return within a short time for a project placement, laboratory visit or second conference. This is a key issue in relation to

⁵ UK NARIC website, URL: <https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/About%20Us.aspx>

⁶ European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process Website, URL: <http://www.ehea.info/pid34247/how-does-the-bologna-process-work.html>

facilitating attendance for those aiming to gain experience of, studying or working in the biosciences to interact with colleagues at international (or UK) conferences, and is also of importance for ease of movement during short-term research projects.

A proactive approach from Government to enable a nimble visa process designed to support the ease of movement of people over short timescales, would also provide clear and accessible options for long-term residence in the UK, will demonstrate that UK science remains open for business. Additionally, visa lengths should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the wide variety of courses and types of degrees that are available. A fixed length visa therefore would not be suitable for either UK nationals wanting to study abroad or international students wishing to study in the UK.

- d) Many international conferences held in the UK by Learned Societies, provide benefits to the UK science base and wider economy as they provide low cost access to international expertise, which is also of benefit to students, early career researchers, and lecturers, for example. Many of our Member Organisations organise and host large international scientific conferences and have reported difficulties, with both attendees and invited speakers unable to get visa approval to attend. Visa restrictions relating to reason for entry should be adjusted to encompass these important aspects of scientific knowledge exchange.
- e) Many working in the biosciences undertake international fieldwork as a fundamental part of their research. Those working on the impact of climate change, conservation biodiversity, rare diseases, biotic exchange and migration patterns, to name a few examples, require freedom of movement in order to continue their research across national borders. It is essential that any future visa system supports UK based researchers travelling internationally for fieldwork, and also enables internationally-based researchers to undertake fieldwork studies in the UK. This flexibility is especially important in supporting the ease of movement of researchers during emergency responses such as disease outbreaks - a recent example would be the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team's deployment to the Republic of Congo to help support and control the Ebola epidemic⁷.

2.2 Immigration policies must support specific skills gaps across UK STEMM sectors, including the wide range of biosciences disciplines.

- a) The UK suffers from a number of skills gaps in the biosciences workforce. More information about skills gaps in STEMM and our recommendations to address them can be found in the *RSB's response to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry into closing the STEMM skills gap*^{8,9}. It is essential that future immigration policies both support and promote the movement of international scientists to live and work in the UK, if the UK bioscience sector is to remain competitive in a global market. The RSB is concerned that, if provision to redress these skills gaps is not provided, the UK will lose vital capacity in research, teaching, training, and knowledge base. Additionally, provisions should be considered in the broadest sense to include principal investigators, early career

⁷ Government Press Release, Ebola Outbreak: UK Public Health Rapid Support Team deploys to DRC, published 18 May 2018; URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ebola-outbreak-uk-public-health-rapid-support-team-deploys-to-drc>

⁸ RSB response to an inquiry into closing the STEM skills gap. <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/science-and-technology-committee/closing-the-stem-skills-gap/written/45123.pdf>

⁹ RSB response to the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology inquiry into Life Sciences and the Industrial Strategy; https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSB_response_Life_Sciences_Industrial_Strategy_inquiry_submitted.pdf

researchers, laboratory technicians and those working in industry and healthcare, for example.

- b) The UK holds world-class status in bioscience innovation, research and development, for example in the field of synthetic biology, among others. Immigration policies that are effective at bridging skills gaps in the biosciences are essential to support the Government's vision for science and innovation, and thereby the wider economy. The life science sector is expected to grow substantially through initiatives such as the Industrial Strategy, the Life Sciences Sector Deal, and the new Skills Investment Plan for Life and Chemical Sciences in Scotland. However, this will not be possible without freedom of movement to enable growth in the relevant skilled workforce and to maintain an attractive environment for investment.
- c) The UK bioscience sector needs to recruit people with technical skills and it is essential that future immigration policies support technicians. The UK currently has a shortage of technical skills but the Tier 2 Visa requires a minimal annual salary of £30,000¹⁰. This salary requirement, in addition to the financial costs, bureaucracy and inconsistency in requirements associated with obtaining a visa, is likely to be an obstacle for many international early career and post-doctoral researchers, technicians and other research and support staff wanting to remain working in, or move to work in, the UK. Many of the skilled individuals applying for these roles fall into a lower salary bracket than this minimum requirement. Annual salary setting will be influenced by skill shortage and in-line with relevant average starting salaries. In policy development consideration should be given to the status of partners and dependants of those working and living in the UK. Without such consideration in immigration policy, there will be financial and familial disincentives to the recruitment of skilled and promising individuals into the UK, together with their expertise and experience, to the cost of scientific research and innovation.
- d) In relation to the above, visas should be affordable to enable scientists and their families to live, work and study in the UK. The cost of obtaining a visa to work in the UK from a non-EEA country can be up-to approximately £2k per person¹¹, with increased costs for scientists if they have a family, dependants or have to apply multiple times. This may also preclude applications from people with the skills we need, who may be living in low-income countries. .

2.3 Revision of the arbitrary Tier 2 Visa cap for skilled workers. The RSB supports the position of the Campaign for Science and Engineering in relation to the Tier 2 Visa cap for skilled workers¹². Further to this, skills gaps in the biosciences and wider STEMM subjects, across all professional levels and themes, should be considered for addition to the shortage occupation list, which should be reviewed more frequently - and provisions should be made to enable ease of movement for individuals possessing these skills in future immigration rules.

¹⁰ Tier 2 (General) visa information page, GOV.UK website, URL: <https://www.gov.uk/tier-2-general/eligibility>

¹¹ Tier 2 (General) visa information page, GOV.UK website, URL: <https://www.gov.uk/tier-2-general>

¹² CaSE Press Release, 08 March 2018, CaSE calls on Prime Minister to revise current visa restrictions, URL: <http://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/news-media/press-releases/case-calls-on-pm-to-revise-visa-restrictions.html>

Question 3: What aspects of the 'people' element need to be negotiated with the EU-27, as opposed to being simply decided on by Government?

- 3. Continued clarity on the status of UK citizens who live and work in STEMM across the EU-27, and of EU-27 citizens who live and work in STEMM in the UK.** We welcome the agreement and related guidance¹³ offered by Government in relation to citizens' rights in negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Government should continue to provide clarity and guidance following negotiations and agreements in relation to this issue, for the reasons described previously in this response. In particular, the UK Government should consider, negotiate and provide further clarity and accessible, detailed guidance to the affected communities on:
- a) How the residency of scientists, and their families, currently living and working under the above auspices, will be assessed by UK and EU governments.
 - b) How scientists and their family members, with fewer than five years residency in the UK, will be assessed under this scheme.

Question 4: On what timescale is clarity needed in relation to future immigration rules in order to support science and innovation in the UK?

- 4.** To succeed we must ensure and promote circulation of scientific skills, expertise and knowledge, so that the UK remains an attractive place for innovation, teaching and learning, research and development in the interim and post-Brexit - including through avoiding further damage to UK bioscience, and the wider STEMM sector, from a declining ability to attract skilled scientists to work here. **Government should provide immediate clarity on decisions pertaining to relevant immigration rules and regulations**, as discussed elsewhere in this response and others provided by the RSB and our Member Organisations.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on this important matter. The RSB is pleased for this response to be made publicly available.

For any queries, please contact the Science Policy Team at Royal Society of Biology, Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London, WC1N 2JU. Email: policy@rsb.org.uk

¹³ Guidance: Status of EU citizens in the UK information page, GOV.UK website, URL: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/status-of-eu-nationals-in-the-uk-what-you-need-to-know>

Appendix: Member Organisations of the Royal Society of Biology

Full Organisational Members

Academy for Healthcare Science
 Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board
 Amateur Entomologists' Society
 Anatomical Society
 Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour
 Association of Applied Biologists
 Bat Conservation Trust
 Biochemical Society
 British Andrology Society
 British Association for Lung Research
 British Association for Psychopharmacology
 British Biophysical Society
 British Ecological Society
 British Lichen Society
 British Microcirculation Society
 British Mycological Society
 British Neuroscience Association
 British Pharmacological Society
 British Phycological Society
 British Society for Cell Biology
 British Society for Developmental Biology
 British Society for Gene and Cell Therapy
 British Society for Immunology
 British Society for Matrix Biology
 British Society for Medical Mycology
 British Society for Nanomedicine
 British Society for Neuroendocrinology
 British Society for Parasitology
 British Society of Plant Breeders
 British Society for Plant Pathology
 British Society for Proteome Research
 British Society for Research on Ageing
 British Society of Animal Science
 British Society of Soil Science
 British Society of Toxicological Pathology
 British Toxicology Society
 Daphne Jackson Trust
 Drug Metabolism Discussion Group
 Fisheries Society of the British Isles
 Fondazione Guido Bernardini
 GARNet
 Gatsby Plant Science Education Programme (incl. Science and Plants for Schools)
 Genetics Society
 Heads of University Centres of Biomedical Science
 Institute of Animal Technology
 Laboratory Animal Science Association
 Linnean Society of London
 Marine Biological Association
 Microbiology Society
 MONOGRAM – Cereal and Grasses Research Community
 Network of Researchers on Horizontal Gene Transfer & Last Universal Cellular Ancestor

Nutrition Society
 Quekett Microscopical Club
 Royal Microscopical Society
 SCI Horticulture Group
 Society for Applied Microbiology
 Society for Experimental Biology
 Society for Reproduction and Fertility
 Society for the Study of Human Biology
 Systematics Association
 The Field Studies Council
 The Physiological Society
 The Rosaceae Network
 Tropical Agriculture Association
 UK Environmental Mutagen Society
 UK-BRC – Brassica Research Community
 University Bioscience Managers' Association
 Zoological Society of London

Supporting Organisational Members

Affinity Water
 Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI)
 AstraZeneca
 BioIndustry Association
 Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)
 British Science Association
 CamBioScience
 Envigo
 Ethical Medicines Industry Group
 Fera
 Institute of Physics
 Ipsen
 Medical Research Council (MRC)
 MedImmune
 Pfizer UK
 Porton Biopharma
 Procter & Gamble
 Royal Society for Public Health
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 Understanding Animal Research
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