THE ROYAL SOCIETY

7 June 2018

Submission to the Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry into an immigration system that works for science and innovation

Key points

- **Science is a fundamentally collaborative and global enterprise and therefore the UK should seek arrangements that:**
  - **enable scientists based in the UK to continue to be part of the shared European research endeavour and have the best possible access to international funds and the collaborations they support;**
  - **create the lowest possible barriers to practising scientists seeking to move across borders;**
  - **provide clarity and certainty, including through regulation and governance, consistently signalling that the UK remains a great place to practice great science.**
- **The Society recommends the implementation of an immigration system for people with skills relevant to research and innovation that is fair, transparent and efficient, as outlined in this submission.**
- **We recognise that this system may not be ready for when we leave the EU and an implementation period may be necessary. There must however be no discontinuity in the immigration system that would significantly disrupt the mobility of researchers as the UK passes through the final stages of exiting the EU.**

Introduction

1. The Royal Society welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Committee's inquiry into an immigration system that works for science and innovation. The Society is the National Academy of Science for the UK and the Commonwealth. It is a self-governing Fellowship of many of the world's most distinguished scientists working across a broad range of disciplines in academia and industry. The Society draws on the expertise of its Fellows and Foreign Members to provide independent and authoritative scientific advice to UK, European and international decision makers.

2. The Society also funds researchers in the UK and around the world, and therefore has direct experience of researchers seeking to move across borders in pursuit of their work – both into the UK and moving overseas. Schemes that the Society offers include:

   - Fellowship programmes for early career scientists and senior research leaders attracting and retaining talent to the UK, such as the University Research Fellowships, Newton International Fellowships, Wolfson Fellowships and Research Professorships.

   - Research collaboration programmes connecting UK and overseas scientists around the world to undertake joint research involving regular travel both ways between countries, such as the International Exchanges scheme and Global Challenges Research Fund International Collaboration awards.

   - A list highlighting opportunities for researchers from around the world that are working in the UK or intending on working in the UK, that the Society offers is available here: https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/projects/brexit-uk-science/access-to-research-funding/#continue-support.

3. This submission seeks to highlight relevant Society publications that may support the Committee's inquiry and provide some further information in response to its specific questions. It also summarises the Society's recommendations for an immigration system that works for science and innovation. The Society has also supported the development of an overview of different types of researcher mobility that informs the UK Research and Innovation submission to the Committee.

The process from here

4. Once the UK has left the EU, mobility of non-UK researchers into the UK will be determined by the UK government's future immigration policy. Similarly, the process by which UK nationals move overseas will be determined by the rules in place in their destination country. However it is not clear how mobility may form part of the final deal that the UK reaches with the EU.

5. The draft agreement reached with the EU in March 2018[1] has confirmed that the rights of EEA nationals to live and work in the UK without applying for visas will remain unchanged until the end of a transition period running from 29 March 2019 to 31st December 2020. This is a draft agreement in principle that will form part of the final withdrawal agreement.

6. On 23 May the UK government published its framework for the future UK-EU partnership in science, research and innovation[2]. This includes an ambition to reach a science and innovation pact that will include agreements and arrangements on research mobility. The development of such a pact will be subject to negotiations with the EU. Our recommendations, outlined below, highlight the types of mobility that such a pact should consider.

7. Change to the UK's immigration policy offer an opportunity to review and streamline its current operation. For example, data recently obtained by the Campaign for Science and Engineering[3] highlighted that more than one and a half thousand IT specialists and engineers from outside the EEA who were offered jobs in the UK were denied visas between last December and March 2018. This was due to the numbers applying exceeding the monthly limit of skilled workers allowed to enter the UK through the Tier 2 route. Our President, Sir Venki Ramakrishnan, has criticised the imposition of such a cap:

   "Computing underpins the modern world but for the foreseeable future we are going to need to recruit IT professionals from overseas. Employers know and accept that there is a need for highly skilled immigrants, as do the majority of the general public. The people standing in the way are those who set random immigration limits that seem to be plucked out of the air for political purposes."

Timescales in which clarity is needed in relation to future immigration rules in order to support science and innovation in the UK

8. Research is largely funded through competitive grants, which frequently last a number of years. Therefore there are researchers who are currently in receipt of funding that will continue beyond the

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[1] European Commission, March 2018, *Draft Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community highlighting the progress made (coloured version) in the negotiation round with the UK of 16-19 March 2018*. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/draft_agreement_coloured.pdf [accessed 1 June]

[2] HM Government, May 2018, *Framework for the UK---EU partnership Science, research and innovation* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/710268/SCIENCE_-_FINAL.pdf [accessed 1 June 2018]

[3] Campaign for Science and Engineering, May 2018, *Home Office FOI reveals scale of skilled worker refusals due to visa cap* http://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/news-media/press-releases/home-office-foi-reveals-scale-of-skilled-worker.html [accessed 1 June 2018]

end of the planned transition phase and their numbers will continue to grow. Researchers may move to take up their research grants – for example in 2016 the European Research Council awarded 117 grants to researchers who would work in the UK. 72 of these grantees were from outside the UK[4] – or move throughout the course of their research to access infrastructure, meet and work with collaborators or attend conferences. In addition these researchers, in particular at senior levels, may seek to bring expert team members with them to the UK. Therefore any change to the rules that will govern their mobility, or that of their teams, throughout the course of their grant will be important, and may already play a role in individual researchers' decisions about where they choose to live and work.

9. Clarity is also important for funders, such as the Society, who need to make business decisions about the funding that we offer and the financial support that we may need to provide to applicants. The Society does currently provide some relocation expenses for researchers coming to work in the UK from around the world.[5]

10. The following case study of one of the grants schemes that the Society offers illustrates the importance of both greater clarity in the short term, and a future system that supports research and innovation:

    The Society's flagship University Research Fellowship (URF) scheme supports outstanding early career scientists to build an independent research career in the UK. We also fund equivalent Sir Henry Dale Fellowships in the biomedical sciences in partnership with The Wellcome Trust. Individuals of any nationality are eligible to apply, ensuring the UK builds a strong base of next generation research leaders. For example in 2017-18, 49% of newly appointed URFs were non-UK nationals. The Society invests c.£32 million a year and currently supports 317 individuals with approximately 40 new fellowships awarded each year. The fellowships are for five years with a renewal period of an additional three years, meaning that the Society's commitments already extend beyond the proposed implementation period. These researchers are currently facing uncertainty over the future immigration system. This uncertainty is also a consideration for potential candidates that could be recruited to the UK through this and other fellowship programmes.

11. In addition to the data provided in our submission to the Migration Advisory Committee, the Society has prepared a number of case studies with timelines that illustrate how scientists move throughout their careers[6]. We plan to shortly publish a factsheet providing further detail and visualisations of data on the nationality of UK-based researchers and the ways that they move around the world. A pre-publication draft of this is enclosed.

Royal Society recommendations for an immigration system that works for research and innovation

12. The UK is a leading global scientific nation and is committed to world-class, internationally collaborative research. Our research provides the foundation for new ideas and discoveries, and fuels economic growth and the creation of high-value jobs. Science and research are critical to the UK economy and environment, its place in the world and the wellbeing and flourishing of its citizens.

13. Science is a fundamentally collaborative and global enterprise and therefore the UK should seek arrangements that:

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[4] RAND Europe. 2017 International mobility of researchers: A survey of researchers in the UK.

[5] Further information available here: https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/projects/brexit-uk-science/working-in-the-eu-and-uk/#funding-researchers-coming-uk [accessed 1 June 2018]

[6] Available online here: https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/projects/international-researcher-mobility/international-mobility-case-studies/

- enable scientists based in the UK to continue to be part of the shared European research endeavour and have the best possible access to international funds and the collaborations they support;
- create the lowest possible barriers to practising scientists seeking to move across borders;
- provide clarity and certainty, including through regulation and governance, consistently signalling that the UK remains a great place to practice great science.

14. The Society believes that the UK must commit to a migration system that maintains the steady exchange of people and ideas on which the generation of new scientific knowledge critically depends, and that signals the UK's openness to scientists and researchers from across the globe. The system should meet the needs of researchers seeking to move to the UK, and UK researchers seeking to relocate, as well as those travelling to and from the UK for both short and long-term visits including short term paid engagements. It should allow access to scientific infrastructures across the EU and internationally and apply to the specialist technologists and technicians who support research.

15. The Society recommends the implementation of an immigration system for people with skills relevant to research and innovation that is fair, transparent and efficient. Specifically:
    - any researcher who is given an academic appointment or project funding as part of a research programme which is publically funded (including those provided by the Commission, UKRI, and the UK or other national academies), or who is offered a long-term post in a UK university or research institute, should automatically be guaranteed entry for themselves and for their families;
    - such posts should also confer guaranteed entry to essential members of a researcher's wider team;
    - the costs of any necessary visas should be commensurate with typical academic salaries and with the length of stay being requested – from a day visit to long term appointments;
    - where an automatic visa does not apply, the detail required from applicants and the time taken to make a decision should be proportionate to the purpose of travel. For example, it should be possible for a scientist to be invited at short notice to a conference in the UK, and be able to satisfy entry requirements sufficiently speedily to allow attendance;
    - researchers in academia and industry moving to the UK on a long-term basis should be offered attractive conditions, including routes to residency and citizenship, freedom to travel and the right to bring dependants;
    - the government should negotiate reciprocal arrangements to ensure that UK researchers can travel and work overseas in support of their work with ease;
    - a researcher who establishes a company built on the results of research they have carried out in the UK, and which has attracted substantial initial investment, should be given automatic right to residence, so that the UK can benefit from the translation of research and the impacts of innovation.

    Comparable arrangements should apply to researchers funded by or working in charities and businesses.

16. We recognise that this system may not be ready for when we leave the EU and an implementation period may be necessary. There must however be no discontinuity in the immigration system that would significantly disrupt the mobility of researchers as the UK passes through the final stages of exiting the EU.

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