



Can We Limit Immigration?

Summary

1 A broad immigration policy objective of net immigration at 40,000 a year is feasible provided that the number of economic migrants permitted to settle is of the order of 30,000 a year.

Introduction

2 An IPPR (Institute for Public Policy Research) paper issued in March 2010 questioned both the feasibility and desirability of limiting immigration.[1] This note examines their arguments and their numbers.

A Cap or an Objective?

3 IPPR briefing tilts at a straw man in attacking the idea of a cap on immigration. We do not believe that net immigration can be capped but we have long advocated a broad policy objective around which individual decisions might be taken. This is also the view of the Economic Affairs Committee of the House of Lords who concluded that "the government should have an explicit and reasoned indicative target range for net immigration and adjust its immigration policies in line with that broad objective." [2] That, however, does not exclude the possibility of limits to individual categories of immigration.

A Cap on Settlement?

4 Both the Labour and Conservative parties have now agreed that there should be a second Points Based System to select which economic migrants should be permitted to settle indefinitely in Britain. The criteria would be largely based on salary but would also take account of special scientific or artistic merit. The IPPR suggest that uncertainty about settlement might deter the very high quality economic migrants that we most need. On the contrary, migrants of that quality could be confident of qualifying for settlement if they so chose. A second objection suggested that a second hurdle would impede integration. However economic migrants admitted temporarily would not be expected to integrate. They would be expected to return to their countries of origin and use their savings and experience to the benefit of those countries.

5 The introduction of a cap on settlement, which the IPPR recognise is both legal and feasible, would allow more leeway for the admission of migrants on work permits. However, it is the government's stated purpose that skills shortages shown up by the immigration system should be remedied by targeted efforts to train British workers. If these policies are successful, it should be expected that the demand for foreign workers would decline over time.

A Political Own Goal?

6 The IPPR briefing suggests that those who wish to see immigration controlled do not necessarily wish to see a sharp reduction. This flies in the face of the government's own opinion

poll which showed that 77% wanted to see a reduction and 50% wanted to see immigration reduced "by a lot"[3]. The fact that many respondents can also see benefits in immigration does not affect this.

Population Growth?

7 It is also wrong for the IPPR to suggest that there is no point in limiting immigration unless there is a wider population policy which also includes fertility rates and regional population distribution. Over the next 25 years, immigration will account for 68% of the projected population growth. This is reason enough to curb it.

8 As regards regional immigration policies, they cannot be effective in the medium term since, after about five years, such migrants will acquire citizenship and be entirely free to move. The IPPR paper, incidentally, also repeats the false cliché that Scotland's population is declining. In fact, it has been stable at about 5 million for the past 50 years and is projected to increase by 7% in the next 25 years[4].

Conclusion

9 The numbers and the reasons for our differences are set out in Annex A below. These can be no more than rough estimates but they demonstrate that, provided the cap on long term settlement is set at about 30,000 a year, a broad target range for net immigration of 40,000 is clearly achievable.

ANNEX A

Comparison of IPPR and Balanced Migration estimates of net immigration

	IPPR	BM
British net emigration	- 70,000[5]	- 80,000[6]
EU 15 net immigration	30,000	20,000[7]
New EU net immigration	20,000	10,000[8]
Asylum net immigration	15,000	15,000
Family net immigration	30,000	30,000
Work/study net immigration	60,000	30,000[9]
Other long term routes	10,000	10,000
Remaining room within the broad objective of 40,000 annual net immigration	- 55,000	+5,000

29 March, 2010

NOTES

- 1 IPPR. The Limit to Limits. March 2010. <http://www.ippr.org.uk/publicationsandreports/>
- 2 The Economic Impact of Immigration Volume 1 HL Paper 82-1
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldselect/ldconaf/82/82.pdf>
- 3 '2008-09 Citizenship Survey: Community Cohesion Topic Report' was published today by the Department for Communities and Local Government and is available at
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1473353.pdf>
- 4 <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/publications-and-data/popproj/projected-population-of-scotland-2008-based/index.html>
- 5 Taken from Table 1 of IPPR paper "The Limits to Limits" March 2010.
<http://www.ippr.org.uk/publicationsandreports/>
- 6 Net British emigration has averaged 82,000 pa over the past 10 years. There is no particular reason why this should change.
- 7 The average of net EU 15 immigration over the past 10 years has been 22,000.
- 8 Net immigration from the A10 is already falling. Some of their economies are improving, the £ sterling has fallen, other EU 15 countries will have to open their labour markets in May 2011 and the numbers reaching the age of 18 in Poland (the major source) falls by 30% in the next 10 years. The ONS expects net migration to fall to zero by 2016.
- 9 This is the major difference. Students are not allowed to settle except as spouses or economic migrants. The latter will be subject to a further Points Based System to qualify for settlement. Those very high quality migrants who we really need will know that salary will be a major factor so they can be confident of settlement if they so wish. (Grants of settlement for employment with a work permit fluctuated between 23,000 and 53,000 (including dependants) between 2004 and 2008).