

23 January 2017

Joint submission from the Academy of Medical Sciences, the British Academy, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Society to the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee inquiry on immigration

The UK National Academies welcome the opportunity to feed into your inquiry on immigration. The remits of our four Academies cover medicine, the humanities and social sciences, the natural sciences and engineering. Each organisation is a self-governing Fellowship, and together our Fellows include over 5,000 of the world's most distinguished researchers across a broad range of disciplines in academia, industry, charities and the public sector. We are working together to support researchers, industry and policy makers to make the UK the location of choice for world class research, development and innovation, and write to you to highlight our shared interest in the role of the UK's immigration policy in achieving this.

The UK's outstanding research and innovation system delivers significant global advantage and creates the knowledge capital we rely on to generate economic return and social goods. This underpins a broad range of sectors in the UK economy, such as our large service sector. Our research base also has a key role in training skilled people in the UK; academic qualifications are a gateway to employment in a broad range of sectors, including financial services, heritage and culture, creative industries and information technology. It is in our national interest to preserve and strengthen the conditions that enable this success.

Research excellence and innovation flourish when researchers collaborate and work across borders. The UK excels at this. Our focus is the need to attract and retain highly-skilled people to UK academia to underpin business, industry and research, which are key components of a modern industrial strategy. However, strategically valuable individuals include not just successful leaders in research fields, but the early-stage researchers, technologists and technicians with specialist expertise that support them, as well as the students that learn from them.

It is imperative that any new immigration arrangements enable the UK to recruit the world's brightest and best, and we welcome the Prime Minister taking the opportunity in her speech on Brexit last week to underline that Britain will always welcome highly-skilled individuals from across the world. This will be crucial to support her objective for the UK to be one of the best places in the world for research and innovation as the UK exits the European Union.

In devising new immigration arrangements for EU nationals, the opportunity should be taken to streamline the wider, global system to improve speed and efficiency. This would decrease the administrative burden, enhance cutting edge research and make us more competitive in the global market for talent. Any new system should be fair, transparent and efficient. It must enable us to attract talented people to study or take up permanent or limited-tenure positions in the UK. It must also facilitate the short-term visits for conferences, collaborations or exchanges that are fundamental to the practice of research.

The National Academies are ready to help you or to provide any further advice you may need.

For further information, please contact Becky Purvis, Head of Public Affairs at the Royal Society, rebecca.purvis@royalsociety.org