

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP  
Secretary of State for the Home Department Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

3 June 2019

Dear Home Secretary,

We are writing to share a short document outlining why a £30,000 salary threshold for a skilled worker visa, as recommended by the Migration Advisory Committee, would be detrimental to research and innovation in the UK, including in the short term with immediate shortages in essential roles likely. It was reported last week that you have asked the MAC to review this recommendation. If reports are accurate, this is very welcome.

As you rightly noted in your letter of 21 January, the research and innovation sector is crucial to the prosperity of the UK, and mobility is linked to the UK's ability to remain at the forefront of science and research.

Many important roles within the research and innovation workforce come with salaries which would not meet the proposed threshold, including research technicians who have specialist skills to operate equipment and maintain ongoing experiments, and language assistants who provide expert teaching support. Some of these roles are also found outside academia in industry and charities, but the data are clearest in showing the scale of this issue for our world class universities and research institutes. For example, all employees at the internationally renowned Wellcome Sanger Institute who are employed in RQ5 3-5 technical specialist roles earn less than £30,000 per year. The median basic pay of higher education language assistants in 2016/17 was £26,000 of whom many will work part time and therefore earn less.

A £30,000 threshold could significantly hamper the UK's ability to fill roles like this across the country, many of which are occupied by staff from the EEA, who are currently able to work in the UK with no salary or visa restrictions. A number of these roles will face immediate shortages if overseas nationals can no longer fill them. Whilst the UK must take steps to develop home-grown talent who can occupy these roles, this will take time. This has been recognised by the Migration Advisory Committee who, in the last week, have identified science and technology technicians as an occupation where shortages may be emerging. It is vital that our immigration system provides avenues for skilled individuals from overseas to fill these roles where appropriate in the future. In the case of language assistants, native speakers will remain essential for high quality provision.

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation in his speech on 7th May spoke of the need to substantially increase the number of people working in R&D by as much as 50%. This scaling up will be required for all jobs within the system including essential technical staff and specialists. This can only be delivered by both upskilling UK citizens, as


well as attracting overseas citizens with desired skills. This is about more than just filling vacancies. Research and innovation thrives when people from different backgrounds and cultures are able to exchange and challenge ideas freely. Such movement is essential if we are to unlock its full potential and to maintain it we need to ensure that our offer to highly skilled individuals from around the world is competitive and attractive.

We welcome your commitment to keep an open dialogue and consult widely as we shape our future immigration system, and hope that the attached document is of use to you and your staff within the Home Office. We would be happy to meet with you or members of your team to discuss these concerns in more detail, as well as how the wider immigration system can support research and innovation.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Sir Venki Ramakrishnan PRS  
President, Royal Society



Professor Sir Robert Lechler PMedSci  
President, Academy of Medical Sciences



Professor Dame Ann Dowling OM DBE FEng FRS  
President, Royal Academy of Engineering



Professor Sir David Cannadine FBA  
President, British Academy

Cc The Rt Hon Theresa May MP, Prime Minister, The Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP - Chancellor of the Exchequer, The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP - Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, The Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP - Minister of State for Immigration, Chris Skidmore MP - Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, Professor Alan Manning – Chair of the Migration Advisory Committee, Sir Philip Rutnam - Permanent Secretary, Home Office, Alex Chisholm - Permanent Secretary, The Department for Business, Energy and the Industrial Strategy.