

Consultation by the Migration Advisory Committee on the level of an annual limit on economic migration to the UK

NIACE response to the MAC consultation

The Government aims to reduce levels of net migration to “tens of thousands”. The MAC paper asks for advice on the social and economic impact of this limit and the likely impact on public services. Only some of the consultation questions relate to adult learning.

Question 1

What factors should the MAC take into account, in order to inform its recommendations?

Wider society

In looking at the social impact of migration, NIACE believes a significant factor is the public perception of migration and its impact on cohesive communities. Some misunderstandings arise when public perception relates to gross migration rather than net migration. Government has a responsibility to give a balanced picture of EU and non-EU migration, asylum, family reunion and other types of migration.

It is not the number of new migrants that causes tension in neighbourhoods, but rather a failure to manage integration properly, new Runnymede research suggests. Drawing on global examples of best practice, this report explores what meaningful integration might look like and reviews a cross section of international labour market, political, social and cultural strategies. Key findings of the report show that the two key drivers of integration are employment and fluency in the host language. Minor provisions in these areas would benefit the integration of new migrants across all aspects of life. (*Haque Z., What works with integrating new migrants? Runnymede Trust, March 2010*)

Adult learning also has a role to play in informing the host society. We know that whilst adult education does not appear to change the attitudes of those with extreme racist-authoritarian views, it does seem to prevent individuals from adopting such extremist attitudes. Studies find that taking three to ten leisure courses raises racial tolerance by almost 75 per cent more than the predicted change in this attitude for similar adults.

(Wider Benefits of Learning)

<http://www.learningbenefits.net/Publications/ResRepIntros/ResRep11intro.htm>

Provision and use of public services

Each group of migrants is likely to have distinct and different impact on public services. Adult learning is one of these services, and especially English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) where demand already exceeds supply.

Question 4

To what extent and how quickly can alternatives to employing Tier 1 and Tier 2 migrants, including training and up-skilling of UK resident workers, reduce reliance on such migration?

The importance of up-skilling British workers is evident. NIACE agrees this is crucial but would want MAC to be clear that “UK resident workers” means all the UK domestic labour force, including migrants, spouses, refugees and those from settled communities already here.

The Migration Advisory Committee’s own paper *Skilled, shortage, sensible*, (2008) identifies a comprehensive range of skilled occupations that currently experience shortages in the UK: from medical practitioners, engineers and science related occupations through to teachers, chefs and care workers. The paper states that the list provides evidence of skilled occupations where shortages would sensibly be filled by immigrants. The skills identified match many of the skills brought to the UK by asylum seekers, ESOL skills and appropriate Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) would therefore increase their opportunity to contribute to the UK economy.

Employers’ contributions

Some employers have been persuaded to contribute to the cost of language training for their workforce (*Dalziel and Sofres, 2005*). However, more research is required to investigate how bringing about greater employers’ investment in ESOL could best be managed (*Ward, J. 2007. ESOL: the context for the UK today. NIACE*)

Conclusion

In conclusion, NIACE stresses the value of adult learning in promoting and sustaining social inclusion and community cohesion for new migrants and the host community. One of the recommendations in ‘Learning through Life’ Communities and Migration paper proposes a welcome entitlement for migrants.

The “brightest and best” migrants already come with a high level of skills and knowledge (paid for by another government) and for a small further investment to allow these migrants to apply their knowledge, the UK economy could benefit from these skills for years to come.

As stated in the MAC document, current data sources are very poor and we rely heavily on separate initiatives and projects. For example, the BMA

database of refugee doctors, RCN database of refugee nurses, Refugee Council data of refugee teachers.

Government and adult learning providers need intelligence on the knowledge, skills and learning needs of migrants to plan effectively. At present, spouses and newly arrived dependants fall under the radar (spouses and dependants of Gurkha service men being a good example of this).

NIACE would be happy to answer any further queries about this response. In the first instance please contact chris.taylor@niace.org.uk.