

Immigration Bill 2015–16 Second Reading: Immigration skills charge

12 October 2015

Summary

- Section 46 of the Immigration Bill allows for the introduction of an ‘immigration skills charge’ for employers recruiting from overseas, proceeds of which will support education and training within the UK.
- Universities UK is calling for recruitment to posts which involve teaching and training as significant elements of the responsibilities of the job to be exempt from any charge.
- Imposing a charge on recruiting to these posts risks undermining efforts to address skills shortages, which often co-exist with (or are caused by) shortages of people able to provide education and training in that area.
- Universities UK therefore requests that members of parliament ask the minister what plans there are for exemptions to the immigration skills charge, and particularly if any exemption will be given to recruitment for education posts.

1. Section 46 of the Immigration Bill (as introduced) allows for the introduction of a charge associated with acting as a sponsor in an application of a non-EU citizen for a work visa: the ‘immigration skills charge’. The proceeds of this charge will be used to fund apprenticeships.
2. The stated aim of the policy is to encourage employers to develop the UK workforce as opposed to recruiting from outside the EU where there are skills gaps in the resident workforce.
3. The details of the charge will be made through regulation, subject to the affirmative procedure. The Migration Advisory Committee has been asked to provide advice to the government by the end of the year on its implementation. However, the legislation allows in particular for these regulations to allow for exemptions to the charge.

4. Universities recruit significantly from outside of the EU. 11% of the academic workforce in UK universities is from non-EU countries. It is a sign of the strength of our university sector that it can attract talent from across the world, and it is beneficial to students and to our research base that it is able to do so.
5. However, universities are also providers of apprenticeships both as employers and (most significantly) as educational providers. Over 40 universities are involved in delivering higher-level apprenticeships as an education, including the degree apprenticeships currently being piloted at over 20 institutions.
6. Where a skills shortage exists in the UK, this is very often accompanied by a shortage of those who are able to teach and train in that area. Making it harder for education institutions to recruit internationally to positions which allow them to provide education and training to fill those skills gaps would be counter-productive to the aims of the skills charge.
7. Unless an exemption were made, a college or university recruiting from overseas to find staff to teach on a degree apprenticeship programme (for example) would have to pay the skills charge, in spite of the charge seeking to address the very skills gap which the institution was seeking to fill through hiring that member of staff.
8. Given that many education institutions are, to a significant extent, publicly funded, not exempting those employed for the purposes of education risks the recycling of government money: to the institution; back to government in the form of the skills charge; then back to many of the same institutions that will be providing training for apprentices.
9. Universities UK therefore thinks that it would support the aims of the immigration skills charge for the government to make use of the exemptions and waivers allows by the Bill to create an exemption to cover posts which are significantly concerned with education and training.
10. We therefore ask members of parliament to ask the Minister for further details on the exemptions planned on the skills charge – and in particular whether those recruiting explicitly for the purpose of education or skills training are likely to be included within any exemption.

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