

IMMIGRATION – PUBLIC OPINION & POLICY: CHANGING THE WAY BRITAIN MANAGES IMMIGRATION AND BORDER CONTROL

Mo Metcalf-Fisher, Masters Graduate in Public Opinion and Polling and Director of Strategy at Parliament Street, and James Downes MSc, a PhD student in Comparative European Politics and former market researcher for YouGov, analyse the importance of immigration as a policy area at the 2015 General Election.

Immigration is one of the most important issues facing Britain today. Despite some significant changes by the Government to address the issue, it still continues to be of growing concern to vast numbers of the UK electorate. This chapter provides a brief overview of current immigration policy in the United Kingdom. The chapter then outlines the salience of immigration as an issue in public opinion and the influential role that immigration is likely to play in the 2015 British General Election. Policy recommendations on immigration are outlined which the Conservative Party could adopt going forward to the 2015 British General Election and if re-elected to government. Above all else, this chapter finds that the UK's current relationship with the European Union in relation to border control and migration from EU member states, has become untenable. The UK must gain full control over these issues, if the matter is to be sufficiently addressed. It is the job of the Conservative Party to lead the narrative on this very important issue in a sensible and constructive manner, so that it benefits not just the Conservative Party, but the country as a whole.

IMMIGRATION POLICY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Before analysing the importance of immigration for both parties and voters in the United Kingdom, it is first necessary to briefly explore immigration policy in the United Kingdom and how it has evolved. Since World War II, migration policy in the United Kingdom has focused primarily on two core areas that comprise limitation and integration. Limitation policy in the United Kingdom has traditionally involved immigration controls alongside a general increase in the number of workers from commonwealth countries in the 1950's and 1960's. The second area involved integration and took the form of anti-discrimination laws. Under the Conservative led government from 1979-1997, migration policy continued on a similar path. However, increased migration in the form of asylum seekers after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 led to changes by policy makers and the Conservative government. Various legislation and acts of Parliament sought to reduce asylum seeker and benefit entitlements. This legislation took the form of two major acts which comprised the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act alongside the 1996 Immigration and Asylum Act.⁵⁵ When New Labour took office in 1997, a shift in migration policy occurred. The New Labour government sought to focus on a policy of "selective openness" towards immigration. On the one hand, a commitment to economic migration was espoused, whilst on the other hand immigration policy was characterised by a tough security and control framework.⁵⁶ The reality however, saw immigration increase dramatically during their 13 year rule. Under

⁵⁵ Somerville W, Dhananjayan, S, and Maria, L, '*United Kingdom: A Reluctant Country of Immigration*' Migration Policy Institute, 21 July 2009

⁵⁶ Ibid

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Labour's watch, net migration to the UK was almost at four million, by 2010.

PUBLIC OPINION: PERCEPTIONS

Immigration as a policy issue has increased significantly since the 2005 British General Election. Traditionally in British General Elections, immigration has not been salient. For example, the 2001 Election was largely dominated by domestic issues such as healthcare, law and order, education, alongside pensions and taxation. The Immigration policy area, alongside Europe was considerably lower amongst public concerns.⁵⁷

Nonetheless, there has been a general shift since the 2005 British General Election. Public opinion polls conducted by the British Election Study and Ipsos MORI in the 2005 British General Election highlighted the importance of immigration as the most important issue facing the country and the 2010 British Election embodied a similar trend.⁵⁸ The graph in Figure 1.1 below shows how immigration has gradually caught up with the economy as a core topic, and how the economy is no longer seen as the most important issue facing the country. Moreover, current YouGov polls put the NHS as the third most important issue on 33%, with both immigration and the economy on 49%.⁵⁹ The salience of immigration amongst the public is clear.

⁵⁷ Cowling D, 'Opinion Polls: Movement on the issues?' BBC, 3 May 2005

⁵⁸ Ipsos MORI, Issues Index: 1997-2006.

⁵⁹ YouGov/The Sun Survey Results, 5th- 6th January 2015

IMMIGRATION: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY

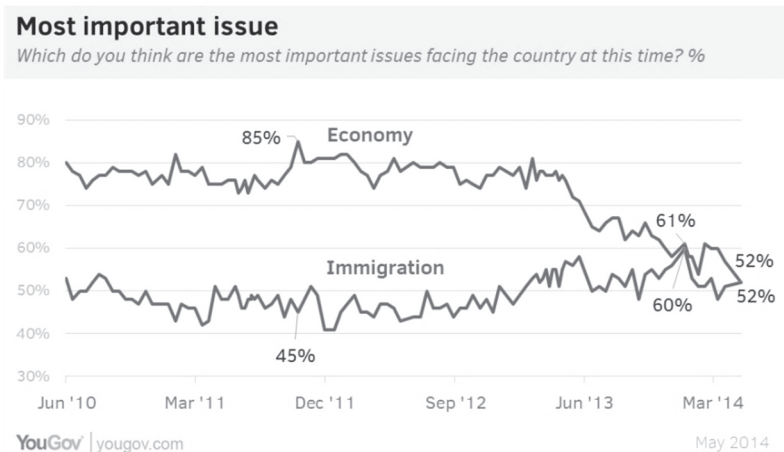


FIGURE 1.1 - THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING THE COUNTRY. SOURCE: YUO GOV

SALIENCE OF IMMIGRATION

A number of opinion polls have shown large differences in the public's perceptions of which political party is best able to handle immigration and is most trusted on this issue. Evidently, immigration has formed a large proportion of UKIP strategy to win support from Labour and the Conservative Party.⁶⁰

UKIP's anti-immigration stance combined with their 'hard' euro-sceptic strategy has appeared to have worked electorally in the 2014 European Parliament elections. Furthermore, public opinion data alongside academic research suggests that UKIP are perceived to 'own' the immigration issue and have tapped into this large scale discontent

⁶⁰ Ford R, and Goodwin M, *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Support for the Radical Right in Britain*. Routledge, 2014

SMART GOVERNMENT: A PARLIAMENT STREET GUIDE

towards mainstream political parties that is currently prevalent in British Politics.⁶¹

Immigration is complex. Sensible debate has been made difficult by two key agitators: the hard-left, who have for many years, attempted to poison debate on immigration by portraying it as racist and participants of such debate as being responsible for stoking unrest – purely for their own ideological amusement. On the other hand, some extremist groups have hijacked the issue of immigration making association with the debate somewhat ugly at times. Arguably, a form of ‘cordon sanitaire’ has therefore transpired, with mainstream political parties largely ignoring immigration in public discourse. Inevitably this has no doubt exacerbated not only rising concerns amongst the British public, but enabled single-issue parties such as UKIP to gain political capital as a result. It is therefore imperative that David Cameron and the Conservatives devise a coherent immigration policy which can wrestle control of the immigration issue from UKIP in the run up to the 2015 General Election.

CHANGING THE WAY BRITAIN DOES IMMIGRATION FOR THE BETTER

As a nation, the UK is currently unable to decide how to fully govern its borders. This is largely a result of European Union policy which leaves the UK to effectively operate two contrasting immigration systems. These two systems are different and understanding these differences is key in understanding the complexity of current immigration policy in the United Kingdom. The first type of immigration comprises non-EU immigration and the second, EU immigration. The first can be seen as more robustly controlled

⁶¹ Ibid

IMMIGRATION: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY

(certainly since the Conservatives took office in 2010), whereas the second, is largely uncontrolled.

The first type of immigration deals with migration from outside of the EU. This is immigration from countries that are not in the EU or European Economic Area (EEA). Since taking office in 2010, the Conservative led government has pledged to reduce immigration to the tens of thousands.⁶² With an increasingly sceptical public and an ever more vocal media, the Conservatives have had to approach the issue of immigration in a cautious manner. To a large extent, they have been successful, but there is still a long way to go. A joint report by both the Home Office and James Brokenshire MP, Minister of State for Immigration and Security, published in February 2014 found that figures on net immigration from outside the EU had fallen as low as those seen in 1998, one year after Labour had taken power. The report outlined that “where the Government can control immigration”⁶³ this had been done successfully through a series of reforms designed to tackle abuses to student, family and employment channels into the UK. These have included the implementation of an annual cap on skilled non-EU migrants by freezing the numbers granted entry to 21,700 up until April 2014. The threshold for minimum skills has also been raised; meaning a higher grasp of the English language is required before taking up a job offer. Skilled migrants are also required to enter the UK with a confirmed job offer in order to prevent long periods of unemployment as was the case before the introduction of the ‘Exceptional Talent Route’ in 2011.⁶⁴ Non-EU student immigration, the largest group within non-EU net migration has also seen reform through the introduction of additional accreditation requirements, higher English language efficiency and restrictions to employment,

⁶² The work of the Immigration Directorates (January - June 2014) - Home Affairs Committee

⁶³ Non EU migration continues to fall, 27 February 2014

⁶⁴ The Exceptional Talent Route is limited to 1,000 per year

SMART GOVERNMENT: A PARLIAMENT STREET GUIDE

whilst increasing the amount of accessible money needed for general maintenance during a student's time living in the UK.⁶⁵ Despite there being a long way to go in terms of reducing further numbers of non-EU migration, the record and measures implemented thus far, have proven to be very positive.

However, despite the reported decrease in numbers to almost 70,000 migrants since coming to office in 2010, the same report outlined our restricted power in relation to immigration from within the EU, with figures continuing to rise year on year. The level to which EU immigration was increasing was made clear in the same Migration Statistics Quarterly report, issued a year later in November 2014. This report stated that net migration which is the difference between the numbers of people emigrating from the UK compared to the number of people immigrating to the UK had "statistically significantly increased" from 182,000 in 2013 to 260,000 in the year ending June 2014.⁶⁶

Although immigration had not reached the highest peak figure of 320,000 in the year ending June 2005 under Labour, immigration had increased significantly from the September 2012 figure of 154,000 according to the Office for National Statistics.⁶⁷ Overall, 583,000 people immigrated to the UK in the year ending June 2014, an increase of 81,000 additional people. The report links an increase in EU immigration as the main driving force behind the higher figures. Of these figures, Bulgarian and Romanian citizens (EU2) were up by 11,000 and EU15⁶⁸ up to 10,000 respectively. The figures for Romanian

⁶⁵Migration of non- EU nationals from *The Migration Observatory*

⁶⁶ 'Migration Statistics Quarterly Report' *Office for National Statistics*, Nov 2014

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ EU15 refer to citizens of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden with the UK making it fifteen.

IMMIGRATION: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY

and Bulgarian citizens had subsequently reached 32,000 from the previous 12 months.⁶⁹ Moreover, as of January 1st 2014, previous restrictions on Romanian and Bulgarian citizens immigrating to the UK were lifted despite widespread public opposition⁷⁰ The Government admitted that whilst they were implementing measures to curb the number of EU citizens moving to the UK by means of barriers to benefit access, they were otherwise powerless to prevent the new measures from being introduced.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Cameron's comments in relation to controlling benefits for those coming to the UK from the EU were met with criticism from Brussels. László Andor, the EU's Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, slammed what he saw as Cameron's "knee-jerk xenophobia" towards attacking EU migrants as the cause of the economic crisis. Andor concluded that Cameron was wrong to mislead the public into believing in "so-called benefits tourism".⁷¹ Although the vast majority of EU migrants have taken up work within the UK and contributed to the overall economy, the Conservatives have sought to address the issues surrounding access to benefits by EU migrants. In response to a written question by Conservative MP Andrew Rosindell, the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) declared that it had spent £1,560,245 on translation services for those applying for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) over the period 2011-2014.⁷² In a separate answer, the DWP revealed that 23%

⁶⁹ 'Migration Statistics Quarterly Report' *Office for National Statistics*, Nov 2014

⁷⁰ When asked by YouGov just prior to the lifting of restrictions for Romanian and Bulgarian migrants

⁷¹ Speaking to the Observer as reported by The Guardian on 30 March 2013

⁷² Written Question- 20938 asked by Andrew Rosindell MP

SMART GOVERNMENT: A PARLIAMENT STREET GUIDE

of those claiming JSA were below Level 1⁷³ in English literacy.⁷⁴ Figures released by the House of Commons Library found that 130,990 of DWP claimants (which includes Job Seekers Allowance) were EU nationals with 67,270 claimants coming from the 2004 EU8 intake.⁷⁵ A further break down finds that seven out of the top ten nationalities claiming JSA are from EU member states.⁷⁶ With these figures in mind, it is perverse to accuse Cameron of xenophobia. Consequently, it can be argued that it is likely a result of the EU's rigid free movement of people policy, which has prevented the UK from seriously preventing abuses to Britain's welfare system.

In July 2014, David Cameron announced a string of new measures to crack down on abuses of the immigration system. As well as establishing tougher rules for universities and colleges who sponsor international students to study in the UK, and, in a bid to limit bogus student visas, pledged to stop more than 500,000 British jobs from being advertised throughout the EU,⁷⁷ Cameron also announced plans to halve the period of time in which European migrants are able to claim benefits. As of November this year, EU job seekers will have to wait three months before being able to claim JSA and other benefits. EU migrants are also only allowed to claim benefits for a maximum of three months, thereby limiting the appeal of coming to the UK purely for its welfare system.⁷⁸

⁷³ As defined by the 'Skills for Life' survey, Level 1 is categorised as the lowest level of "functional literacy"

⁷⁴ Written Question- 209739 asked by Andrew Rosindell MP

⁷⁵ The EU8 grouping consists of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

⁷⁶ Statistics on migrants and benefits by McInnes R. last updated 27 November 2014, *House of Commons Library*, p 7

⁷⁷ Dominiczak P, 'David Cameron announces immigration benefits crackdown', *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 July 2014

⁷⁸ Gov.uk 'New measures to tighten up the immigration system' 29 July 2014

IMMIGRATION: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY

Although these new changes are positive and likely to curb the wrong type of immigration and help to promote jobs for British workers, they still fail to tackle the string of other problems that result from Britain's existing arrangement with the EU; namely Britain's lack of sovereignty over deciding what's best for its own border and immigration policy. The current system means that Britain effectively has uncontrolled EU immigration, with EU citizens also being entitled to automatically reside in Britain without any of the regulations seen by citizens of the Commonwealth and the rest of the world.

Uncontrolled migration carries a number of problems. Britain's population has increased from 59.1 million in 2001 to 63.1 million in just ten years. Official population projections claim that if migration continues at the current trajectory, the UK population will likely reach 70 million by 2027 and possibly higher if annual migration increases. The effects of population growth on essential public services like housing indicate that up to 36% of all new households built within the next twenty years will be built primarily to cope with predicted rises in migration.⁷⁹ Furthermore, as David Campbell Bannerman MEP recently pointed out "we are essentially having to build for people who aren't even here yet".⁸⁰ Primary school places have also been affected by a surge in population numbers. Research conducted by the Department for Education found that at the current rate, the number of primary school children will rise to 4.751 million by 2017-2018 from 4.060 million in 2012-2013, despite there only being 4.4 million school places available.⁸¹

⁷⁹ 'What is the Problem?', *Migration Watch UK*, 10 July 2014

⁸⁰ David Campbell Bannerman MEP *Time to Jump: A positive vision of a Britain Out of the EU and in EEA lite*, Bretwalda, 2013

⁸¹ 'What is the Problem?', *Migration Watch UK*, 10 July 2014

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD IN TERMS OF NEGOTIATION

Arguably the current set up is damaging for the United Kingdom. It is becoming increasingly difficult to manage immigration. As long as Britain is a member of the European Union under the current terms, this current set up is unlikely to change. Therefore, the Conservative Party must be clear about the type of relationship the UK has with the EU. Immigration and the controlling of borders must be put at the forefront of any future discussion. With regards to the prospect of Cameron's plans to renegotiate the UK's position within the EU, Angela Merkel has confirmed that although strongly supporting the UK's continued membership of the European Union, she would not do so at any price.⁸² In November 2014, responding to Cameron's changes to benefit access and proposed talks over capping EU migrant numbers, *Der Spiegel* reported that Merkel would consider discussions with Cameron over proposals to reform migrant access to welfare benefits – another crucial concern of the British people, but that this generosity would not extend so far as to debate the viability of the free movement policy.⁸³ Even if benefits caps are implemented, the issues surrounding the UK's growing population size and the problems that come with it will still not be dealt with.

Alexander Stubb, Finland's Prime Minister and a supposed ally of the Prime Minister, stated that while he wanted to 'help' David Cameron, he was unwilling to consider backing him on reform of the free movement of people. Sweden's left-wing Social Democrat Prime Minister, Stefan Löfven has also recently argued against Cameron's

⁸² 'Merkel warns UK's Cameron over EU immigration' *Aljazeera*, 2 Nov 2014

⁸³ 'Approaching Brexit? Merkel Fears Britain Crossing a Red Line on Immigration' *Spiegel Online*, 3 Nov 2014

IMMIGRATION: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY

proposals stating that, “it’s not so much of an internal market if we develop a market together and then one or two countries say we want to change this.”⁸⁴ Interestingly, both countries have faced internal backlashes from their own public in response to a perceived lack of leadership in relation to controlling immigration. A poll conducted by Reuters in 2013 found that 43% of Swedish voters outlined immigration as the most important issue⁸⁵, whilst support for the anti-immigrant Swedish Democrats party continues to climb.⁸⁶ In Finland, similar polling has found up to two thirds of Finns are against further immigration⁸⁷, with support for the euro-sceptic and populist right-wing True Finns Party⁸⁸ reaching third place in the 2013 European elections.

Looking to the European Commission, the Commission’s President Jean-Claude Juncker has said that although he is prepared to listen to David Cameron’s demands “in a fair and reasonable manner”⁸⁹ and that other EU countries must accept the fact that the UK will not become a member of the Schengen area, he remains committed to strengthening an EU wide immigration policy. Although talks have not taken place and there could be a shift in attitude from the EU and Merkel, all signs are showing that the UK will be unable to fully control its borders prior to a referendum on Britain’s continued membership of the EU in 2017.

⁸⁴ ‘Cameron loses support from European allies’ *Financial Times* Nov 6 2014

⁸⁵ ‘Immigration has to become a political issue’ *The Local Sweden*, 9 Dec 2014

⁸⁶ ‘Swedish anti- immigration party building support before vote’ *Reuters*, 16 Dec 2014

⁸⁷ ‘Poll: Majority of Finns Opposed to More Immigrants’ *Yle Uutiset*, May 2010

⁸⁸ The Finns Party support an immigration policy decided by the Finnish government not the EU. As of June 2014, The Finns Party have sat with the Conservatives in the European Parliament.

⁸⁹ My Priorities, Jean Claude Juncker

STRATEGY: APPROACHING THE GENERAL
ELECTION

Going into the forthcoming general election, the Conservative Party must aim to take the lead on the rhetoric and policy debate around immigration. It is therefore imperative that the party devises a coherent policy strategy, operating around the assumption that a referendum will take place in 2017.

The Conservative Party must stick to a course of definitive action on addressing immigration. As it stands, UKIP have demonstrated a worrying misunderstanding of Britain's own immigration system and a commitment to benefiting electorally on the public's fears rather than offering a realistic and feasible policy programme. In a recent interview with LBC's Duncan Barkes, UKIP's leader Nigel Farage argued that the UKIP manifesto would have an immigration proposal based on the Australian points based system.⁹⁰ Nigel Farage may be surprised to learn that the UK already has a points system in place. Despite being introduced by Labour in 2008 to limit immigration, this system has proven to be inadequate and unsustainable as a result of the free movement of EU migrants whose rights surpass UK immigration law that applies to all those outside of the European Economic area. A report by Migration Watch compared the UK points system to that of the frequently commended Australian system and found that as a result of a number of key political and demographic differences, the Australian system was inappropriate for the United Kingdom. Not only does the Australian political establishment promote a policy of population growth, which the UK does not, but it also requires all non-Australian citizens to obtain a valid visa for both entry, work and

⁹⁰ 'Farage Reveals UKIP's Immigration Policy' *LBC*, 7 July 2014

IMMIGRATION: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY

residency. The UK however, is unable to prevent up to 500 million EU citizens from having free movement both to and from the UK.⁹¹

Going forward with a feasible policy proposal, the Conservatives must ensure that they are not simply contributing to UKIP's war of words. Rather, the Conservative Party must act like a party of government, as opposed to a party of the fringes.

BRITAIN MUST REGAIN CONTROL OF ITS BORDERS

David Cameron must attempt to renegotiate terms with the EU to cap the number of migrants allowed into the United Kingdom. The UK must push for a system that prevents automatic right of residency and access to benefits, whilst being able to implement a stricter visa system to ensure emphasis is placed on sourcing skilled workers. This will therefore mean that the UK will be able to determine who enters the UK to live, work and study. The UK currently operates a new points-based system. However, the points based system has been shown to be inefficient as it does not account for the possibility of 500 million people entering the UK from the EU. As a result, the Conservatives must push for a points based system that serves as a mechanism to source skilled migrant workers, in areas where there are inherent shortages at any given time. It will be the responsibility of future governments to decide what specific skilled worker is needed for Britain at a particular time.

The UK must also be fully aware of not only who is entering the country, but leaving too. Therefore, exit checks must be established to ensure UK Visas and Immigration can accurately record the arrival and departure of migrants. This will also strengthen the UK's national

⁹¹ The Points Based System in Australia- Appropriate for the UK, Point 14.2, 5 Dec 2014

SMART GOVERNMENT: A PARLIAMENT STREET GUIDE

security and must apply to EU migrants too if the policy is to be fully effective.

The issue of border control must be at the forefront of any discussion with the EU, regardless of the early warning signs that efforts may be in vain. David Cameron must make it clear to the British public that he is prepared to consider the UK's withdrawal from the European Union if Britain is unable to establish control and regain sovereignty of its borders. It will be very difficult for the Conservatives to remain committed to EU membership if they are unable to successfully renegotiate on border control. If a Conservative government is unsuccessful in renegotiating border control, yet campaigns to remain a member of a Union that pushes towards a greater EU wide immigration policy, it will signify tremendous weakness. This in turn may have a detrimental effect on electoral prospects for the Conservative Party.

IT'S EITHER CONSERVATIVE OR LABOUR

The Conservatives must continue to make it clear to the electorate that this election will only end up with either Ed Miliband or David Cameron in 10 Downing Street. Given that Labour and Miliband have not pledged to renegotiate with the EU or subsequently carry out an EU referendum in 2017, it is unlikely that they intend to address immigration. Unless renegotiation and a referendum are offered, it is extremely difficult to address immigration seriously. David Cameron has already pledged to reduce immigration to the tens of thousands. Miliband and Labour have offered little in the way of immigration policy. In an infamous speech to the Labour Party conference, Miliband failed to even mention immigration as something Labour would be willing to pursue as policy, gearing up to the election. Similarly, during their time in coalition, the Liberal Democrats have inhibited the Conservatives in their attempts to limit immigration and based on their

IMMIGRATION: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY

previous election campaigns, it appears unlikely that they will offer an attractive immigration policy proposal to the electorate prior to the election. The Conservatives must show that *they* are the party with the most sensible immigration policy, whilst making it clear what steps have already been taken under Conservative management since 2010, to address the issue. Voting UKIP will only serve to aid Ed Miliband and Labour.

CHANGE THE RHETORIC

The Conservative Party must seek to turn fear and uncertainty into positivity and optimism, without losing the attention of voters. UKIP have benefitted electorally from speaking on what it argues to be the 'truth' when addressing immigration. It is therefore the job of the Conservative Party to raise the salience of immigration within its own election campaign, but in a manner that spells out a vision of positive change. Therefore, it is right for the UK to have the same power as it has had previously when immigration to the UK was much lower and perceived to be less of a concern to the public. The Conservatives need to be clear with the message that too much, uncontrolled immigration and a subsequent increase in population have a negative effect on the UK's infrastructure. The free movement policy that the EU currently requires the UK to abide by prevents the British government from having full sovereignty over controlling the number of people immigrating to the UK.

Only when the Conservative party demonstrates that it is serious about regaining border control powers from the EU, will it be able to take on UKIP and seek to win over voters who rank immigration as a major a concern and UKIP as a likely voting intention. Once these powers have been restored, the UK will be able to pursue a policy that can fully control for both numbers and the type of skilled workers required, at any given

SMART GOVERNMENT: A PARLIAMENT STREET GUIDE

period. This will send out a message that whilst the UK will remain eager for skilled talent from abroad to help the nation advance further, it will not accept migration from those that do not meet the requirements necessary to aid economic prosperity. This approach will arguably help the electoral fortunes of the Conservative Party and help to provide a positive result for Britain's own economic future.

BRITAIN MUST ADVERTISE TO CITIZENS OF THE WORLD, NOT JUST THE EU

What appears most apparent is that in order to satisfy a range of forces namely the media and an ever-growing concerned public, the Government has tightened its grip on non-EU immigration so as to free up for uncontrolled EU immigration. In other words, the UK may be putting itself in a position where it will have to sacrifice the rest of the world for the sake of the EU. Whilst it is much easier for a citizen of Europe to travel cheaply to and from the UK than it is for a citizen of say Canada, India or Australia, the UK must take into account the benefits of recruiting talent from further afield. Providing perspective migrants score highly on the points based system and are able to meet all entry requirements, special attention could be given to those citizens of the world within the Commonwealth of Nations, with whom we share both a language and common heritage. This flexibility in scouting global skilled talent, can only take place when Britain is once again in full control of its borders and immigration has been reduced to a figure that is manageable.

KEEP BRITAIN WORKING

Whilst David Cameron was right to say that the Conservatives would limit the number of job vacancies being promoted around the EU, UK

IMMIGRATION: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY

businesses must be able to rely on a sufficient number of British job applicants if they themselves are able to prosper. This can only be done by continuing the campaign to getting more people back into work and off benefits by strengthening welfare reforms, whilst giving young people access to a greater number of skills-based training and apprenticeships. Our youngsters must be given access to skills necessary to excel within the global workplace, so that Britain can continue to compete as a powerful player in the global economy.