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CaSE Briefing on Proposed Cap on Non-EU Economic Migrants

The Government announced that it will “limit the number of non-EU economic migrants entering the UK” to “tens of thousands, not hundreds of thousands”. But the ability of the UK to attract the most talented scientists and engineers from around the world is a huge strength. Such individuals share their excellence and skills with academia and industry, help the UK respond to short- and long-term skills shortages, and contribute to the economy.

A ‘migrant cap’ could have devastating consequences for UK universities and industries, which may in turn hinder or stall the economic recovery.

- Industries invest **£16 billion in research and development (R&D)** in the UK. A key determining factor for where to site R&D infrastructure is access to skilled workers, including being able to employ talent from across the globe. A CBI survey found that larger UK firms look abroad to fill their vacancies in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.¹
- Universities depend on international recruitment to employ the best researchers and lecturers. In 2007/08, **10.5% of all academic staff were non-EU nationals**: 12% in the biological sciences, 11% in the physical sciences and 10% in engineering.²
- If international researchers have difficulty coming to the UK to work or for short visits, then it will be hard for UK-based researchers to build up the relationships underlying many important international collaborations. From 2002-07, nearly **40% of the UK's scientific output involved such international collaborations**.
- Because of the growing financial pressures on UK universities, the **£5 billion income received from international activities**, including over £1.5 billion in fee income, is becoming more and more important. In 2008/09, **97,000 non-EU students took science and related subjects**. A factor attracting them to the UK is the opportunity to stay on and work here after graduating. Restricting this, may both reduce the numbers coming as students and the benefits that the UK can gain from their skills in the workforce.

The proposed cap on non-EU migrants is unlikely to solve the problem that the government wants to address.

- **2008 saw a net migration of 160,000** (70,000 lower than in 2007), from an estimated 590,000 people arriving to live in the UK and 427,000 leaving.³ 58% of migrants were from non-EU countries, but only 24% of these came for work-related reasons and could be affected by the proposed cap.
- **Non-EU economic migration is already restricted** for low-skilled workers or those working in well-supplied sectors. It would be imprudent to prevent skilled and needed workers entering the UK in return for a marginal outcome in reducing immigration numbers.

The government should respond to public pressure with education instead of regulation.

- The public hugely over-estimates the number of immigrants and refugees in the UK. OECD analyses suggest that public fears over the impact of immigration on employment are unfounded.⁴ Immigration barely affects employment in highly-skilled sectors – those that would be affected most by a cap on non-EU migrants.⁵

Contact: Imran Khan, CaSE Director, imran@sciencecampaign.org.uk, 07967 831 333

¹ Education & Skills Survey, Confederation of British Industry/Edexcel 2008.

² Higher Education Statistics Agency

³ Migration Statistics 2008, Annual Report, Office of National Statistics

⁴ The Difference Dividend. Why immigration is vital to innovation. NESTA, January 2008

⁵ The Unemployment Impact of Immigration in OECD Countries, OECD, 2007