



Official estimates show migrant loss – immigration cap threatens brain drain

For immediate release

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The UK had a net outflow of non-EU economic migrants in the last year for which statistics are available, according to the Office for National Statistics, revealed in a response to a Parliamentary Question tabled by the new Lib Dem MP for Cambridge.

In 2008, an estimated 66,000 non-EU migrants entered the UK for work-related reasons, while 74,000 left.

The figures put a question mark over the Government's proposals for an annual cap on the number of non-EU economic migrants entering the UK. The Home Office yesterday launched a consultation on their plans, and announced an emergency interim cap.

They come after the recent publication of data showing that the number of visas issued to highly skilled workers declined by 44% in the first quarter of 2010 compared to the first quarter of 2009.

Dr Julian Huppert MP, who worked with the Campaign for Science and Engineering in tabling the question, said:

"It would be very worrying if Britain risked losing some of the brightest and the best from around the world, when we should be trying to attract them to this country."

"People are sensitive not only to what the rules are, but also to how welcome they are made to feel. We should not short-change the economy."

Imran Khan, the Director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering, said:

"Over one in ten academic appointments in the UK are non-EU citizens, and businesses invest here, generating jobs, because they can also attract global talent. A cap would have a disproportionate impact on economically important research and development, so we have a strategic decision to make on whether we want our universities and industries to be decent, or to be world-class."

"In 2008, there were more non-EU economic migrants leaving than arriving, according to official estimates. Since then, overly restrictive limits on skilled migrants have been phased in. Now a permanent cap is threatened."

"The UK is in danger of seeing a 'brain drain'. The Government should be alarmed, instead of potentially exacerbating the problem."

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Campaign for Science and Engineering is an independent organisation which advocates for science and engineering policy in the UK. It is funded by a diversity of members from academia, industry, charities, and learned societies. For more information see: <http://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/>

2. The ONS data is set out here: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2010-06-28a.4609.h&s=julian+huppert#g4609.q0>
3. The Home Office announcement is available here: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/2010/268071/43-impose-migration-limit1>
4. The highly skilled migrants visa issue data is available here: <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/immig110.pdf>
5. CaSE's briefing on the subject is available here: <http://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/documents/2010/CaSEBriefingQueensSpeechMigrants.pdf>