

Statement to parliament: Home Secretary: Future Border and Immigration System

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the UK's future border and immigration system, after we leave the EU.

We all heard the public's concerns about immigration in the run-up to the EU referendum.

These were concerns held by many voters. On both sides of the debate.

The result of that referendum was clear, and the UK will be leaving the European Union on the 29th March 2019.

This means we can end free movement.

So that, for the first time for more than 40 years, we will be able to say who can, and who cannot come to this country.

This is an historic moment.

But let's be clear.

The United Kingdom has a proud history of being an open and welcoming nation – and this will not change.

As the son of immigrant parents, I know full well the contribution they, like many other migrants, made to the community I grew up in.

We recognise and value the contribution immigration has made to our society, our culture, our economy and communities. And this cannot be over-stressed.

How it has helped to deliver vital public services.

It has brought new perspectives, expertise and knowledge, stimulating growth and making us the tolerant, outward-looking nation we are today.

Britain is going to stay open for business.

We will continue to welcome talented migrants from every corner of the globe.

And we have been clear to the three million EU nationals already here: we value hugely the contribution you have made to this country.

Deal or no deal, we want you to stay, and we will protect your rights.

The future system is about making sure immigration works in the best interests of the UK.

We are absolutely not closing our doors.

We are simply making sure we have control over who comes through them.

Ensuring – as we committed to do in our manifesto – we are able to bring annual net migration down to more sustainable levels.

This morning we published a white paper setting out the government's proposals for doing this through a single, skills-based immigration system that will seize the unique opportunities enabled by the end of free movement.

Copies are available for Honourable and RH members in the Table Office.

I would like to highlight the key proposals and principles within it to the House.

Firstly: free movement will come to an end.

Tomorrow we will introduce the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill to implement this.

It will make EEA and Swiss nationals, and their family members, subject to UK immigration control.

And it will protect the status of Irish nationals.

This means that in future everyone other than British and Irish citizens will need to get UK permission before they can come here.

Secondly: it will be a single immigration system for all nationalities.

The existing automatic preference for EU citizens will end.

This approach will give everyone the same chance, regardless of where they are from.

Levelling the playing field to welcome the most talented workers from anywhere in the world.

And thirdly: it will be a skills-based system, giving priority to those with the skills we need.

We are taking this approach to ensure we can attract the brightest and best migrants to the UK.

Those who will help our economy flourish.

This follows advice commissioned from the independent Migration Advisory Committee on the impact of European migration on the UK economy and society.

We believe this is fair, it will help drive up wages and productivity across our economy.

Following these three principles we are acting to make the future immigration

system work, for people coming to our country, businesses, our public services and the UK as a whole.

Our approach will maintain protections for British workers while cutting bureaucracy.

Fundamental to this will be a new route for skilled workers to ensure that employers can access the talent they need to compete on the world stage.

There will be no cap on numbers and no requirement for the highest skilled workers to undertake a resident labour market test, but there will be a minimum salary threshold.

We are creating a time limited short-term workers route to ensure businesses have the staff they need to fill jobs as they adapt to the new immigration system.

We will ask the MAC to keep this scheme under review, so that it ensures a smooth transition.

This route will be open to seasonal and low-skilled workers, along with high-skilled workers who need to come to the UK for longer than the current business visitor rules allow.

Those who arrive under this scheme will have no rights to access public funds, settle or bring dependents.

The White Paper sets out our initial proposals to allow these short-term workers to come to the UK for 12 months at a time, followed by a year-long cooling-off period to prevent long-term working.

And we will be engaging extensively with business and stakeholders on the length of the stay and cooling-off period to make sure we get this right. These proposals will give protection to British workers, but we have recognised that immigration alone cannot be the solution.

So, we will continue as a government – working in partnership with business – to invest to improve the productivity and skills of the UK workforce.

Mr Speaker, our world class universities will also benefit from the proposed new system.

There will be no limits on the number of international students who we will continue to encourage to come and study here.

And we will make it easier for the most talented graduates to stay and work.

This will widen the talent pool for businesses and boost economic growth.

Our plans are about opening up Britain for business rather than creating new red tape.

The future immigration system will be quick and easy to use.

We will introduce a streamlined application process for those visiting, or coming to work or coming to study, that uses the latest digital technology.

This will improve the experience visitors and travellers have crossing the border.

We will also make it possible for more people to use e-gates.

At the same time, we will improve security at the border by introducing an Electronic Travel Authorisation Scheme and phasing out the use of insecure national identity cards.

We are proposing a single skills-based immigration system that will be fit for the future.

One that is flexible, to accommodate the trade deals we agree with the EU and other countries.

It will operate from 2021, but it will be phased in to give individuals, businesses and the government the time needed to adapt.

This means that individuals do not need to make immediate changes and businesses do not need to rush through plans based on guesswork about the future system. Mr Speaker, the Immigration white paper outlines proposals for the biggest change to our immigration system in a generation.

However, it is important to note it is not the final word.

Rather, it is the starting point for a national conversation on our future immigration system.

And I'm pleased to announce that the government will be launching a year-long programme of engagement across the UK to ensure a wide range of views are heard.

I am confident that all the measures I have outlined today will ensure that the UK continues to flourish outside of the EU.

That the future immigration system is geared towards controlling who can come here and for what purpose, reducing net migration while ensuring the brightest and best can work and study in the UK.

That it will boost our economy and benefit the British people.

We are building a fair and sustainable immigration system that answers the concerns people have rightly had about free movement.

An immigration system that is designed in Britain, made in Britain and that serves our national interest.

I commend this statement to the House.