

The UK's migration proposals

I reproduce below a letter sent by the Home Secretary to all MPs and peers, as I thought it best you read the government's statement and respond to their proposals:

New Plan for Immigration

We have today published the New Plan for Immigration – our landmark programme to deliver the first comprehensive overhaul of the asylum system in decades.

UK asylum claims increased by 21% to almost 36,000 in 2019 – the highest number since the 2015/16 European 'migration crisis'. Small boat arrivals to the UK reached record levels with 8,500 illegal arrivals last year.

At the same time, our ability to remove individuals with no right to remain in the UK is being undermined by repeated legal claims designed to impede removal action, often strung out over a period of many years. The vast majority of last-minute claims designed to prevent removal are subsequently found by the courts to have no merit. Shockingly, there are around 45,000 failed asylum seekers who have not left the UK and over 10,000 Foreign National Offenders – and yet there were just 7,000 enforced returns in 2019.

All of this impacts our ability to help those in genuine need by taking up scarce resources and wasting valuable judicial capacity.

We have already reformed our legal immigration system by ending free movement and introducing a new points-based immigration system. This plan is the next step in taking back control of our borders by tackling illegal immigration.

Our New Plan for Immigration has three main objectives:

1. To increase the fairness and efficiency of our system so that we can better protect and support those in genuine need of asylum;
2. To deter and prevent illegal entry into the UK, thereby breaking the business model of the criminal trafficking networks and protecting the lives of those that they endanger; and
3. To remove more easily from the UK those with no right to be here.

At the heart of this plan is the principle of fairness. Access to the UK's asylum system should be based on need, not on the ability to pay people smugglers.

For the first time, how someone enters the UK will impact on how their claim progresses and on their status in the UK if that claim is successful. As we clamp down on illegal immigration and abuse of the system, we will also streamline the asylum framework to prevent repeat claims which frustrate removal, including of dangerous Foreign National Offenders.

We will increase prison sentences for those illegally entering the UK, introduce life sentences for facilitation of illegal entry, give Border Force

additional powers, strengthen age assessments and introduce a more robust statutory definition of “well-founded fear of persecution” for asylum purposes.

At the same time, we will enhance our reputation as Global Britain, strengthening our safe and legal routes for refugees and fixing historic anomalies in British Nationality law.

The proposals are fully compliant with our international obligations, including the European Convention on Human Rights, the Refugee Convention and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

These reforms are explained in more detail in the policy statement, which we have published today. To inform the proposals set out and ensure we can deliver effective change across the system, we have also launched a public consultation and a wide-reaching engagement process. We will use this opportunity to listen to a wide range of views from stakeholders and sectors as well as members of the public, followed by legislation at the earliest opportunity.

You can find the policy statement and consultation portal at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration>.

I look forward to hearing your views on our New Plan for Immigration, and hope that you will strongly encourage your constituents to take part in the public consultation so that the voice of the public is heard.

My Speech during the Second Reading of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill, 23 March 2021

Of course I welcome the idea that we should do everything we can to promote greater science and better technology. Our country has a fine history and tradition of scientific breakthroughs and scientific excellence in our universities and our scientific societies. We also have a fine tradition in technology, with entrepreneurs developing new industrial processes and new products and making great breakthroughs that have benefited humanity widely, and of course we should do everything we can to support that. There may well also be a gap that this body can fill between all the methods we have of backing science and technology, and I wish it every success.

In his introductory remarks, the Minister pointed to the recent great success of universities, companies, medics, scientists and Government in coming together—here and elsewhere, but particularly here—on the AstraZeneca-Oxford

vaccine. Why did that work? Because there was a very clear, defined task. There was great excellence and expertise already in companies and university science, and the Government helped to bring that together, to pump-prime the process and then to provide very large orders, as did other Governments and health services around the world, to make it worthwhile and to defeat the virus.

Now, we hope that do not have too many of those concentrated needs, but that model worked without ARIA, so this body has to define something a bit different from that. I notice that MPs are already discussing the adequacy or inadequacy of its resources, by which they usually mean money. I do not think it is possible to have any idea of what would be a good and realistic budget for it until talented people have been appointed to run it and have set out what it is trying to do. The first thing the Government need to do, therefore, following the success of this legislation—I am sure it will pass quite easily—is to appoint really great people to lead this organisation who just have that feel, that touch and that intelligence to judge risk, to sense opportunity, to see where the niches are and to define the unique breakthroughs and areas where this body can make a serious contribution. As some have said, a scattergun approach is probably not going to work; trying to do too much across too broad a spread would require a lot of good fortune. This body will need some targeting.

ARIA then has to work out how it commercialises whatever it produces. The UK has had a century or more of plenty of breakthroughs and technical innovations, but in quite a lot of cases we did not go on to commercialise and exploit opportunities, and we allowed others around the world to adapt patents or take the underlying principles and develop their own products, making many more jobs and much more commercial success out of these things than we did. The leaders of this body therefore need to ask how they will commercialise the ideas, how big a role that will play, and at what point they will work with commercial companies that could come in and take advantage.

That leads on to the issue of security. I do not think British taxpayers want to spend more money on blue-sky research and interesting technical ideas only to see them taken away, perhaps resulting in many more products for the Chinese to export back to the United Kingdom. What we want is that integrated approach, where the ideas that the Government have helped to pay for through this body, working with universities and perhaps with companies, can go on to be commercialised and add to the stock of wealth and jobs and make a wider contribution to the human position.

I suggest that the Government link the development of this body to the work that they have started to do, and they need to do much more widely, on national resilience. I am an admirer of what President Biden has set out to do in the United States of America on supply chains. He has a very ambitious programme—a 100-day programme for targeted sectors and a one-year programme for all the sectors of the US economy. It is looking at what America can do better, at where America needs to fill in gaps in her knowledge and understanding of patent, designs and specifications, at where America needs to put in new capacity to avoid shortages or more hostile powers interrupting

her production processes by withholding import, and at where the Government machine can use intelligent procurement, appropriate grants and interventions to work with the private sector to have a much better supply chain, creating more jobs and providing national resilience.

I hope that the agency will look at what we can do to ensure that we make our weapons and defence requirements, as the new policy suggests that we will do more often. It should look at how we can grow more food and make sure that we have more of our own fish so that we have fewer food miles and more national resilience in the food chain. It should look at a series of industrial areas where we have in the past been very successful to see where we can improve the technology and add to the UK capacity to produce.

My suggestion to Ministers is that the first task is to get really excellent people; the second is to work with them on defining realistic and achievable objectives; and the third is to ensure that the agency is properly resourced—£800 million might be the right amount, but if the agency comes up with really worthwhile things that look as though they will work, we will want to back it with more money. If it was not getting very far, I think a number of MPs who say that they do not mind failure would become rather more critical. This will need quite a lot of ministerial and parliamentary supervision. I wish the agency every success, and I look forward to hearing to more detail about what it is trying to do.

[My Question during the Statement on Defence and Security Industrial Strategy, 23 March 2021](#)

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I strongly welcome the emphasis of the statement on making more in Britain, because we cannot be properly defended if we rely on imports for crucial things. Is the UK undertaking a full audit of the designs, intellectual property and rare materials we would need to manufacture all our crucial defence equipment here, were we to face a blockade or other hostile action against our imports? President Biden is currently carrying out such a supply chain analysis for his country.

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Jeremy Quin): As my right hon. Friend will know, the supply chains in defence are vast, but it is an analysis that we are undertaking. We are doing it project by project, making certain that the most crucial are investigated first, but we are doing an analysis of our supply chains, and that is being elevated to the Defence Board, to make certain that we have greater oversight of what goes into our crucial defence kit and equipment.

The virus and the third wave

The European continent remains the centre of the pandemic storm. As Italy, Germany and France extend their lockdowns and discourage movement outside the home at Easter it is time to set out some of the facts and figures on what has happened so far.

Official figures are produced and updated daily for the worldometer site. They are the best we have, though they are of course influenced by how much testing is carried out in each country to identify the disease, and how doctors fill in death certificates for people suffering from a variety of conditions as well as CV 19. These figures show that the five worst countries for numbers of cases and the five worst countries for acknowledged CV 19 deaths are all continental European. The best countries with fewest deaths and case numbers are likely to be in Asia.

Deaths per million

Gibraltar 2791
Czechia (EU) 2336
San Marino 2325
Belgium (EU) 1955
Hungary (EU) 1940

Cases per million

Andorra 149249
Montenegro 139523
Czechia (EU) 137600
San Marino 129123
Gibraltar 126766

The figures reveal a number of divergencies. Amongst these countries with the worst case and death numbers the death rate measured as deaths in proportion to reported cases varies from as high as nearly 3.2% in Hungary to a little under 1% in Andorra. Does this tell us anything about different treatments, or about death certificate definitions or about the ages of the people catching the virus? Most of these badly affected countries did introduce lockdowns and test and trace systems but still suffered greatly.

The Panorama programme on Monday sought to show that Korea got it right with a strong test and trace system, whilst arguing the Sweden got it wrong by being too relaxed in the first wave of the disease. The Swedish numbers are not out of line with other large EU countries that did go in for longer and earlier lockdowns. Korea's performance is good but so is the performance of many other Asian countries. We need to study a range of possibilities before leaping to policy conclusions. Could it be that past Asian flu varieties gave Asians more natural immunity or ability to fight the virus? Is it that those

Asian countries which did go for test, trace and isolate got more compliance from their populations than Europe did? Do diet and vitamins C and D play any part?

There are lots of facts and figures in circulation, but they need careful study to understand them and their defects before rushing to conclusions about what worked. High urban concentrations of people makes virus passage more likely, and elderly populations suffered the more serious versions of the disease in much larger numbers than younger populations. The latest news from the USA showing in their tests that the Astra Zeneca vaccine is highly effective at stopping serious case and deaths means the UK hospital admission and death rates should continue to fall as they have been doing as most of the at risk people have now been vaccinated.

A new framework for our economy

The UK economy has been steered for twenty years by the Maastricht requirements. The UK has sought to keep state debt down to 60% or to get it moving towards that total, and to keep the budget deficit down to below 3% of GDP. The inherited targets are to record state borrowing below 2% of GDP this year and to see net debt declining as a percentage of GDP. Overall borrowing should be at or below zero by 2025-6. These targets of course were blown away by the measures to tackle the pandemic.

The government needs to consider new rules. Of course it needs to control public spending and taxation to affordable levels. Maybe it should go over to a target of not normally allowing borrowing for current spending, but allow borrowing for capital spending. That capital spending should continue to need a value for money and rate of return test, preferably better estimated and policed than prior capital projects have often been.

I dislike the Maastricht rules for a variety of reasons. Now most advanced countries are borrowing around 100% of GDP the idea that anytime soon can see them back to 60% is silly. The usually automatic 3% running deficit control can cause austerity or undesirable tax rises and cuts. I have no wish to advise the EU on what to do about their rules, and understand that they are trying to avoid the free rider problem. When countries share a currency with a common official interest rate a country which had borrowed too much could seek to take advantage of the better credit rating of leading members of the zone and carry on borrowing excessively. The fact that the criteria are recorded in the Treaties makes changing them very problematic.

For the UK we now need rules which keep our finances in good order and take advantage of a good credit rating and low rates to allow productive investment. The Maastricht figures do not adjust the state debt figures for all that debt now owned by the Bank of England as agents of the Treasury which also seems strange.