

Call for evidence by the Migration Advisory Committee on the review of the shortage occupation lists for the UK and Scotland and Creative Occupations

Response by the Wellcome Trust

November 2012

Key Points

- We do not believe that there should be a sunset clause that operates to automatically remove occupations from the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) after two years, or any other time frame.
- Instead, we consider that an occupation should only be removed from the SOL when the analysis of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) shows that it is no longer necessary to have the occupation on the SOL.
- Foreign scientists have a positive impact on the economy and will be essential in delivering the outcomes of key Government strategies, including the Life Sciences Strategy. Some of these individuals will be from shortage occupations and will enter the UK via the SOL.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Wellcome Trust is pleased to respond to this call for evidence on the review of shortage occupation lists in the UK and Scotland. We are a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health, and we do this by supporting the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. We want to ensure that the brightest minds are not impeded from contributing to the world-class research that occurs in the UK through unnecessarily restrictive immigration rules.
2. We consider that increased migration of talented researchers and academics will have a positive impact on employment opportunities for current UK residents. These individuals generate commercially-exploitable ideas, are critical to the success of knowledge-intensive industries such as the life sciences, and play a key role in teaching and training the next generation through the new ideas, knowledge and experience they bring. The Government's Life Sciences Strategy recognises the importance to UK business and the scientific community of recruiting global talent and that "foreign scientists make a vital contribution to the UK economy".
3. We are not aware of any evidence that the presence of a significant migrant workforce in the sciences restricts job opportunities or depresses salaries for UK residents. The science workforce is highly international: many UK-trained scientists choose to spend

part of their careers working overseas, while their international compatriots choose to work in and contribute to the UK.

4. The operation of the Tier 2 category is of particular concern to the Wellcome Trust as it is the key route of entry for research and academic talent. Although the majority of research and academic talent who enter under Tier 2 do so through the resident labour market test route (RMLT), we are concerned about the proposed sunset clause for those entering via the SOL.

IMPACT OF THE SUNSET CLAUSE

5. We support the need to keep the SOL under regular review so that it is responsive to changes in the market and the intention to encourage UK industries to train domestic workers.
6. However, we consider that the introduction of a sunset clause would be detrimental in the case of genuine long-term skill gaps. The detailed analysis conducted by the MAC determines if an occupation should be on the SOL and it should also determine if it is removed from the SOL. An arbitrary time limit does not address whether a particular occupation is still in shortage and will not provide the flexibility required for the UK to support industries which rely on specialist and academic positions.
7. Research and higher education employers already invest substantially in training the UK workforce. For example, the Wellcome Trust and the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute already operate a wide variety of schemes to encourage and support UK nationals to pursue a research career. These include:
 - PhD programmes and studentships to support postgraduate training in biomedical sciences;
 - fellowships for postdoctoral and early career researchers that support the transition to an independent research career;
 - work experience placements at the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, which enable school age students to gain an insight into careers in scientific research;
 - vacation scholarships, which provide promising undergraduates with hands-on experience of research during the summer vacation;
 - industrial placements at the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, for students who are following a degree course with a 'sandwich year';
 - a range of initiatives to improve the quality of UK science education and teaching, including the Science Learning Centres, which offer high-quality professional development for science teachers.
8. But it is important to note that, while research and higher education employers are strongly committed to training, this is seen as a long term investment in the sustainability of the UK research base rather than a solution to short term recruitment issues. Many

research and academic positions are highly specialised and it will often be impractical to train a local worker within a reasonable timeframe.

9. For example, consultants in clinical neurophysiology and old age psychiatry are listed on the SOL and have been for at least two years. These occupations could have a key role in helping research into neurodegenerative diseases, like dementia, where the Government has just invested a further £9.6m for research. If mitigation measures were taken to address this shortage immediately it would take 11 years¹ before a UK citizen just starting training could develop this level of expertise. Given the current burden of dementia it is important that these specialities are not taken off the SOL while a shortage remains.
10. To maintain the UK's global competitiveness, immigration policy needs to remain responsive. The research sector is evolving rapidly and new skills gaps will arise in the future. For example, the Government's Innovation and Research Strategy for Growth and the Life Sciences Strategy identify regenerative medicine, synthetic biology and stratified medicine as areas in which the Government will be focussing resources. As these fields are still developing it is unclear which specialties will be required in order to capitalise on opportunities in these areas.
11. As acknowledged in the Life Sciences Strategy, the "best talent in life sciences tends to be highly mobile. The UK needs to develop, recruit and reward these individuals to make the UK world-leading in healthcare and life sciences". The UK faces global competition in attracting the best and the brightest, particularly in emerging specialist areas where there is a shortage. For this reason, if an occupation has been identified as an area of need, it should only be removed from the SOL once this shortage has been addressed and not as the result of a pre-set sunset clause.

¹ 11 years = 5 years of medical school + 2 years in Foundation training + a minimum of 4 years Specialist training

The Wellcome Trust is a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. We support the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. Our breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health. We are independent of both political and commercial interests.

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