

The Improvement Service

ELECTED MEMBER BRIEFING NOTE No. 15

Migration: Executive Summary



The UK has experienced high levels of immigration since the end of the Second World War and since the mid-1990s in particular. While Scotland has historically been a country of net out-migration, it has experienced net in-migration in recent years and this is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

Migrants from the European Economic Area (EEA) generally have the right to live and work in the UK, while other migrants can come and live and work in the UK if they meet certain criteria under the Points Based Immigration System (PBS). Migration is therefore an inevitable feature of modern Scotland. COSLA Strategic Migration Partnership (CSMP) aims to support local authorities to respond to migration in a positive way and identify the benefits migration can bring such as filling skills gaps and boosting an area's working age population.

It is often argued that migration places undue pressure on public services, and can have a negative impact on employment and wages for the indigenous population. However, recent research highlights the significant contribution migrants make to the economy through taxation and the outputs they produce, while it is also suggested that they are less likely to draw on health and welfare services than the resident population.

While opinion polls tend to show that a majority of the British public favour a reduction in immigration, when questioned in more detail, many express complex and contradictory views on the subject. For instance, many support a reduction in the number of illegal immigrants, but do not support reductions for high-skilled migrants and students. Migration also tends to be viewed more positively in Scotland than in other parts of the UK and its economic, social and cultural benefits are often more readily acknowledged.

Both the UK and Scottish governments are in agreement that the 'brightest and best' should be attracted to migrate to the country. However, while the UK Government acknowledges the economic benefits that migration can bring, its position is that immigration levels are too high and it aims to bring net migration down to the tens of thousands by the end of the current parliament. On the other hand, the Scottish Government views migration as an important driver of economic growth and sees it as a means of tackling Scotland's demographic challenges.

Although local authorities often have little control over who comes to live within their boundaries, there are various ways in which they may seek to promote their areas to migrants. For example, they may wish to market particular local aspects - the natural environment, quality of life or education services for instance - as means of encouraging migrants to settle. If there are particular skills shortages in their area, they can also present evidence to the Migration Advisory Committee, which is responsible for making recommendations to the UK Government on particular skills gaps that can be filled by migrants through the shortage occupation lists within the PBS.

Further information

The full briefing note can be found at www.improvementservice.org.uk/library/download-document/3575-elected-member-briefing-note-no.-14-migration/. It provides:

- contextual information on migration to the UK and Scotland;
- analysis of the impacts of migration;
- details on public perceptions and political responses to migration;
- an outline of issues for elected members to consider; and
- some key messages for elected members.

CSMP has also developed a Migration Policy Toolkit as a means of assisting local authorities and their community planning partners in developing strategic approaches to migration. Further details on the work of CSMP, including a link to the Policy Toolkit and contact details for the Team, can be found at: <http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/>.

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