

SRUK/CERU Statement on the UK Government's 2025 Immigration White Paper

London, May 20, 2025

As a network of European researchers committed to fostering scientific collaboration between the UK and Spain, the Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom (SRUK/CERU) expresses deep concern regarding the [UK Government's White Paper](#) "Restoring Control over the Immigration System". Several of the proposed reforms risk undermining the UK's ability to remain globally competitive in research, science and innovation.

Throughout the White Paper, migrants are often portrayed as a strain on public services rather than as contributors to society. This narrative risks further stigmatising international undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, and skilled professionals—groups that play a vital role not only in the UK's scientific excellence and cultural richness, but also in its economic development and growth.

The White Paper outlines the objective of reducing overseas recruitment in favour of domestic training. We would like to point out that science and research are intrinsically inter- and trans-national endeavours. We are particularly concerned by a number of proposed measures that could directly affect the international mobility, recruitment, and retention of researchers in the UK. Below are some of the areas set out in the White Paper that could significantly impact the ability of the UK research system to attract and support global scientific talent:

- **Salary Thresholds and the Abolition of the Immigration Salary List (Paragraphs 68–70)**

We reiterate the concerns raised in our [press release](#) of 29th January: stricter financial requirements—such as the 2024 increase of the minimum salary threshold to £38,700—have made it significantly harder for researchers to obtain Skilled Worker visas. These changes have already led to the closure of hiring schemes in key academic areas, particularly for early-career roles and disciplines like modern languages, as highlighted, for instance, in our [letter](#) earlier this year concerning the closure of the School of Modern Languages at Cardiff University. A further increase would exacerbate the situation.

In addition, the Government has announced the abolition of the Immigration Salary List, which currently allows for salary threshold discounts in certain occupations. While this list is being removed, the existing salary discounts for roles requiring a relevant PhD—such as postdoctoral research positions—are not part of this list and will in principle remain in place. However, we urge the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), which has been tasked with reviewing salary thresholds and discounts, to take into account the diverse employment conditions within the research sector, particularly for those in non-STEM disciplines, the social sciences, the arts, and the humanities, where salaries may fall below rigid thresholds despite the strategic importance of these roles for UK academia and international competitiveness.

- **Increase in the Immigration Skills Charge (Paragraph 85)**

The White Paper proposes a 32% increase in the Immigration Skills Charge (ISC), a fee currently charged to employers when they sponsor a worker through the Skilled Worker route. Considering that many higher education institutions in the UK are already facing significant [financial distress](#), increasing the cost of sponsorship at this time could further disincentive the hiring of international researchers or lead to further hiring freezes in critical academic areas. Rather than expanding the ISC, SRUK/CERU has consistently advocated for reduced fees and simplified processes for institutions involved in research and higher education—sectors that already contribute substantially to the UK's economic and scientific output at various levels.

- **Lack of Specific Measures to Support Global Talent (Paragraphs 87–91)**

Although the White Paper expresses a commitment to improving the Global Talent visa and introducing faster application pathways, it does not outline any concrete measures to effectively achieve this. Crucially, it fails to address the high upfront costs associated with visas and the Immigration Health



Surcharge (IHS), which rose by 66% in 2024. [Evidence from the Royal Society](#) indicates that the UK now has the highest upfront visa costs among comparable countries, with increases of up to 58% since 2021 and as much as 126% since 2019. These escalating costs place a disproportionate burden on international researchers, particularly early-career scientists and postdoctoral staff. We also highlight the need for more flexible and hybrid visa routes that reflect the mobility patterns of academic careers, aligning with [UKRI's goal](#) of supporting talent through adaptive immigration pathways.

- **Graduate Route and Higher Education Levy (Paragraphs 97 and 131)**

The White Paper announces plans to tighten the requirements of the Graduate Visa route, which currently allows international students to remain in the UK for 24 months (or 36 months for PhD graduates) after completing their studies. Among the announced changes is a reduction of the 24 months period to 18 months, significantly shortening the time available for graduates to seek employment or transition into further academic or research opportunities in the UK. This route has played a critical role in retaining international talent and supporting early-career researchers. In parallel, the Government proposes the introduction of a levy on higher education providers' income from international students. While further details are yet to be disclosed, such a measure could further exacerbate the financial challenges currently faced by UK universities.

- **Family Migration Reform (Paragraphs 146–149)**

The White Paper proposes a reform to simplify and unify different family and dependant visa routes. In parallel, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) has been commissioned to review the financial requirements for sponsoring family members, with a view to potential increases. This follows the recent rise in the income threshold for family visas to £29,000. All together, these measures make it more difficult or more expensive for families to join researchers coming to the UK, and could become a significant deterrent, particularly in comparison to other countries with more inclusive and supportive mobility frameworks.

- **Extension of the Settlement Period (Paragraph 264)**

The Government proposes increasing the standard qualifying period for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), also known as settlement, from five to ten years. Settlement provides migrants with stable legal status, access to public funds, and exemption from further visa renewal costs. Extending the path to settlement would significantly increase both the bureaucratic and financial burden on international researchers and their families—many of whom already go through multiple fixed-term contracts and visa renewals. This measure risks undermining efforts to retain the very talent the UK seeks to attract.

The UK's global leadership in research and innovation depends on its ability to attract, support, and retain international talent. The measures outlined in the White Paper risk creating additional barriers for researchers and academic institutions at a time when global competition for talent is intensifying.

We urge policymakers to ensure that future immigration policies are designed with the realities of the research ecosystem in mind—acknowledging the international, collaborative, and highly mobile nature of academic careers. A fair, inclusive, and flexible migration system is essential not only for sustaining excellence in UK science but also for ensuring the country's long-term economic resilience and international standing.

About SRUK/CERU

The [Society of Spanish Researchers in the UK \(SRUK/CERU\)](#) is a non-profit organisation established in 2012 representing Spanish nationals working in R&D&i in the UK. With over 400 individuals in our network, including around 280 members and 150 affiliated friends across all disciplines and career stages, SRUK/CERU has actively monitored the challenges and opportunities associated with Brexit and their impact on Spanish researchers both in the UK and elsewhere. Through its surveys and other initiatives, SRUK/CERU aims to address the challenges posed by Brexit and advocate for the interests of its members. The Society engages with key stakeholders, including



academic institutions and governmental bodies, to inform policy and drive positive change. SRUK/CERU also leads the EU-funded project CONNECTS-UK, which brings together European research diasporas, and coordinates the Science Policy and Diplomacy Commission within the Network of Spanish Scientists and Researchers Abroad (RAICEX).

This statement was drafted by the Science Policy Department and approved by the Executive Committee of SRUK/CERU. For more information, please contact:

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