

Response to the UK's Points-Based Immigration System

In response to the [Further Details to the UK's Points-Based Immigration System](#), presented by the UK Government in July 2020, the Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom (SRUK/CERU) states:

We appreciate the release of this document as it addresses more specifically some issues related to the situation that EU researchers will face from 2021, should freedom of movement between the UK and the EU come to an end after the transition period. We welcome the inclusion of the Skilled Workers and Global Talent routes, exemplifying the UK's commitment with researchers. We also appreciate that efforts have been made to reduce end-to-end times needed to obtain a visa. However, we would like to comment on a number of points that this new document has brought to our attention, which we suggest should be amended as follows.

- Under the new Skilled Workers route as outlined in this document, a PhD degree in social sciences or humanities will be worth half as many points as a PhD degree in STEM areas when applying for a visa through this scheme. We consider that both are equally valuable and this system would — as it is currently set up — undermine interdisciplinary research. Interdisciplinary groups are, in our view, essential to build and maintain a functional research ecosystem.
- The proposed Immigration Skills Charge, which is similar in price to the charge currently associated with the Tier 2 (ICT) visa, will discourage hiring skilled EU workers, in turn damaging the UK's leading R&D system. British companies, universities, and charities will all be less competitive if they are made to prioritise nationality over skills when hiring. [A Royal Society study published in 2019](#) shows that the current procedures for UK visa applications already are among the most expensive in the world — both for applicants and for sponsors.



- The biggest cost to EU workers under this new immigration system will be the Immigration Health Surcharge. This surcharge does not exist in other countries with similar public health systems such as Spain. Thus, we would argue that this Immigration Health Surcharge is a discriminatory element that should be removed as EU workers — who will be paying their taxes in the UK — will not need NHS services any more than nationals from the UK.
- Under this new system, the time that EU national PhD students spend in the country during their studies will not count towards their settlement status. However, they will be residents of the UK during that time. Therefore, we think that the time they spend in the UK on the student route should count towards the qualifying period for settlement. We also oppose any increase in student fees for EU students, which we believe would further hamper their interest in coming to the UK.
- The presented framework only allows for dependants to come to the UK if they are under 18 years of age. We anticipate this to be a potential barrier for young highly-skilled researchers with children aged between 18 and 21 who still depend on their parents economically. We consider that allowing dependants up to the age of at least 21 years old would be an improvement to the current provision. Some EU countries such as [Spain](#) allow entry to descendants who are not economically independent.

In conclusion, we appreciate the publication of these new guidelines setting out the new system that will regulate immigration in the UK after the end of the transition period following the country's exit from the EU. However, we believe some aspects are harmful and strongly suggest they should be modified. These changes are necessary, in our view, to maintain the UK's capacity of attracting highly skilled researchers and preserve the UK's R&D system role as a leading global player.

London, October 2020

