



MIGRATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Migration Advisory Committee

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Migration Advisory Committee Response to ONS Transformation Consultation.

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the ONS consultation on their migration transformation program. We are very supportive of the direction the ONS is taking in reviewing and updating migration and population statistics. We also support the use of triangulating administrative data sources to try to provide robust figures which can reliably inform public debate and policy creation. Putting administrative data at the core of population and migration statistics, and linking it to other data sources, will be a step forward for migration data.

The Migration Advisory Committee is an evidence-based body comprised of labour-market and migration experts. We are currently commissioned by government to advise on migration and labour-market issues. Being an evidence-based body, it is important that migration statistics and more generally population numbers are reliable as we often use these numbers to guide our recommendations to government.

Whilst we are excited and pleased about future developments within your plan, we do have some suggestions and queries on data which is already available and could be improved to increase knowledge within the area.

Statistical Population Dataset

We encourage the approach to link various data sources together in order to improve the quality of the output. However, currently we are quite concerned with how the Statistical Population Dataset (SPD) records migration numbers. The matching proportion for UK citizens is high but is significantly lower for non-EEA and even lower for EEA. We believe in order for this linking process to be improved, there must be access to more data sources of high quality to better inform the links being made. How confident are you that these new and future proposals are going to be able to increase the matching percentage for these migrant groups and how well will the new numbers be able to distinguish between different types of migrants?

Data sources: what can we use to measure population and migration?

We believe there is scope to use current data sets more to present high-level findings which could provide further evidence on migration and population statistics and fill in gaps. For example, the IPS provides estimates of both immigration and emigration, and the Immigration Statistics provide data on new visas which gives an idea of non-EEA migration inflows to the country (and can be compared to IPS immigration data). But there is no published data on the visas expiring which would be the equivalent of emigration, nor on the stock of currently valid visas (that might be compared to APS data on the stock of migrants). We believe using this with data on the numbers of visas expiring could give a high-level comparison of inflows against outflows which could be compared against current net migration statistics. If these numbers are starkly different to current net migration numbers, then questions should be asked as to why. We are pleased by and encourage more use of Home Office Exit Check data to this end which will give further assessment of long- and short-term migration.

Furthermore, there is currently administrative data on the total number of journeys into and out of the UK, of course including tourists. We believe a high-level overview of the difference of these should be presented and again compared to net migration statistics to analyse the similarities and differences.

Again, with the IPS it would be interesting to see the numbers of people placed into the three categories of short-term, long-term and tourists. The use of the model to determine those who switch between these categories, we believe, is important but complicated to understand. We think especially for EU migrants under free movement it is quite likely that many would switch from tourist to either a short-term or long-term migrant. Providing the numbers of these switchers would be useful for us to analyse. Once more, a high-level overview of these already available figures would provide a joined-up approach and provide more clarity to data users.

We are intrigued with your developments and research into circular migration and we think this could be useful to look at in terms of the labour market. We would be interested to see if there is any difference in circular migration by type of migrants or type of occupation being worked in by the migrants. Similarly, it would be good to look into how circular migration in general compares to those working on seasonal worker schemes, such as SAWs.

Concepts and definitions: what do we need to measure?

As reported in our recent report¹ on the impact of EEA migration in the UK, we think it is important to analyse the impact of migration not just nationally but also at a local level. To this end we are interested to see what proposals you may have to provide evidence for population and migration flows in local areas as well as the national picture.

1

We hope this response will be useful to your consultation and we would be very happy to discuss further our comments and your proposals in more detail. We would like to reiterate we are pleased with the direction the ONS are taking to transform population and migration statistics and are optimistic these changes could provide better evidence on the topic.

Our priorities would be:

- A better understanding of where the different statistics on migration (IPS, Visas, APS/LFS) are consistent and where they are not. Where there is a lack of consistency between the sources, we would like to see research into the reasons for this.
- A better understanding of flows into and out of the UK as a whole, without putting them into the three boxes of visitors, short- and long-term migrants from the start.
- A better understanding of the distribution of migrants throughout the UK.

On behalf of the Migration Advisory Committee.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alan Manning". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name and title.

Professor Alan Manning
Chair Migration Advisory Committee