



MIGRATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Migration Advisory Committee**

1st Floor, Peel Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

2 December 2020

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP  
Secretary of State for DCMS  
100 Parliament Street  
London  
SW1A 2BQ

Dear Secretary of State,

We welcome the proposals set out in the National Data Strategy and are pleased to see the Government taking a proactive approach on data. The Migration Advisory Committee is an independent, non-departmental public body who advise the Government on migration policy. Our objective is to maximise the welfare of the resident population and as an evidence-based body the data we use are critical to achieving this.

In particular, we are pleased that the strategy focuses on transforming the government's use of data to improve the efficiency of public services and modernising how data are shared across government. The MAC have made many recommendations over the years on improving our access to data: this increases the range and quality of advice we can provide the Government. We have made good progress over the past year working with government departments to access specific datasets allowing us to undertake innovative analysis and build the evidence base on migration in the UK. Some of this analysis will be published in our forthcoming annual report later this month.

However, we continue to face challenges in accessing data and it is a lengthy process. It is essential that we are able to access data in a timely way, in order to ensure that our recommendations and the immigration policy based on these are made using the best possible evidence. There is huge untapped potential in linking datasets across government, which would enable us to robustly measure the impact of the new immigration system during a period of huge change. We are continuing to work with the government on this and hope the National Data Strategy enables this type of research to happen in an efficient manner, whilst appreciating the importance of confidentiality and data security. We believe there should be a standardised process for us and other advisory bodies to access data for research, based on an agreed set of principles governing where and how access is granted.

The use of external research and evidence is also critical to the work of the MAC. We frequently draw on analysis undertaken by non-government researchers and academics when making policy recommendations. Given the growing importance of administrative data, there would be significant benefit in having a consistent and transparent processes across government for external experts to access appropriate data for research purposes.

As part of our recent report on the Points-Based System for Immigration, we also made recommendations on ensuring the retention of historical visa data in a usable format for research purposes. This is essential for enabling us to learn lessons from previous policies and to draw insights which could improve the design of future immigration policies.

We are happy to engage with the development of the strategy and provide further input in future.

On behalf of the Migration Advisory Committee,

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'B' followed by a horizontal line and the name 'Bell' written in a cursive-like font.

Professor Brian Bell  
Chair, Migration Advisory Committee