



Snp Immigration Policy – A Back Door To England?

Summary

1. If the SNP were able to acquire a separate regime for immigration to Scotland following the General Election, the result would be very serious for both Scotland and England. The SNP would, if it had the power, liberalise immigration control across each of the four major migration routes - work, family, student and asylum. This could lead to a substantial increase in immigration to Scotland since it was exactly this approach which led to immigration spinning out of control under Labour. 90% of current migrants to the UK currently choose to go to England. Easier access to Scotland would become a back door to England. Regional visas are no solution; they have been tried in Canada and proved unenforceable. Once in the UK, immigrants can go where they wish. Such an outcome would be extremely unpopular in England but also in Scotland, where only 5% want to see an increase in immigration and 64% want a reduction

Introduction

2. The Scottish National Party (SNP) has been boasting about their ability to extract concessions from the UK government if they should hold the balance of power in Westminster after the forthcoming general election.¹ One very important area of disagreement is immigration where the SNP has long advocated a more open policy as being in Scotland's best interests.² This paper examines their proposals and considers the impact on England which, at present, receives about 90% of net foreign migration.

3. The fullest account of SNP policies is contained in a White Paper issued by the SNP-run Scottish Executive in July 2014 in the run-up to the Independence Referendum.³ The main points were as follows:

a. Objective

The objective is to increase Scotland's working age population in order to promote economic growth. It commits the Scottish government to matching "average European (EU15) population growth over the period from 2007 – 2017" and states that an independent Scotland would use immigration as one of the major levers to increase the country's population.⁴

b. Work

An SNP government would pursue a Points Based immigration system that would "better meet Scotland's needs" potentially adding "new categories of skills" and possibly incentivising movement to remote areas to help

1 Nicola Sturgeon, SNP leader and Scottish First Minister in BBC News Interview, 19th March 2015, URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-31966220>.

2 Humza Yousaf, Scottish Executive Minister for Europe and International Development, The Guardian, 24th March 2015, URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/24/immigration-work-visas-foreign-students-scotland>.

3 The Scottish Government, Scotland's Future, November 2013, URL: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2013/11/9348/11>, See Chapter 7 on Justice, Security and Home Affairs.

4 *Ibid.*

“community sustainability”.⁵ (In fact the UK already has a points based system.)

c. Students

The White Paper called for the Post Study Work Visa to be re-established in Scotland⁶ So as to enable students to move seamlessly from study to work More recently, the Scottish Executive’s Europe and International Development Minister, Humza Yousaf, said in March 2015 that there was a “clear indication that business and education in Scotland are equally keen to see the re-introduction of a Post Study Work Visa”.⁷

d. Asylum

The SNP has repeatedly called for a more relaxed approach to asylum.⁸ They have opposed the enforced removal of failed asylum seekers and have pledged to close the Dungavel Detention Centre, the only one in Scotland.⁹

e. Family Reunion

The White Paper called for lower financial maintenance thresholds and lower minimum salary levels for entry.¹⁰

Submission to the Smith Commission

4. In October 2014 the Scottish Executive made a submission to the Smith Commission which was set up after the referendum to examine possibilities for further devolution. They called for “aspects of immigration policy, such as the Post Study Work Visa” to be devolved.¹¹ This is the only specific demand but there was also a demand for a general review of powers.

Findings of the Smith Commission

5. On immigration, the Smith Commission recommended that the following possibilities be explored:

- a Scottish Post Study Work Visa.
- extension of the temporary right to remain in Scotland for human trafficking victims.
- the grant of specific powers to Scotland to allow asylum seekers access to more generous accommodation, financial support and advice – as well as the opportunity to lodge claims in Scotland.¹²

The impact on England

6. These demands look relatively harmless at first glance but, taken together, they would amount to a much looser immigration regime in Scotland as, no doubt, the SNP intend. However, the experience in the UK over the last 15 years suggests that any loosening of controls can lead to a rapid increase in migration. It was exactly apparently minor measures of this kind under the Labour government that caused net migration to the UK to spiral out of control. This is particularly likely to be the case for Scotland when, in the absence of any border controls, migrants would be free to move South to where there are usually more jobs, higher pay, large communities of migrants and a better climate. At present there is a small net outflow from England to Scotland but that would be sharply reversed.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 BBC News, ‘Call for overseas graduate work visa for Scotland’, 22 March 2015, URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-31998769>.

8 The Scottish Government, Press Release: Human Approach to Asylum, 17th June 2014, URL: <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Humane-approach-to-asylum-dd1.aspx>.

9 *Ibid.*

10 The Scottish Government, Scotland’s Future, November 2013, URL: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2013/11/9348/11>, See Chapter 7 on Justice, Security and Home Affairs.

11 The Scottish Government, More Powers for the Scottish Government: Scottish Government Proposals, 2014, URL: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00460563.pdf>, p. 2.

12 The Smith Commission, Report of the Smith Commission for further devolution of powers to the Scottish Executive, 27 November 2014, URL: https://www.smith-commission.scot/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Smith_Commission_Report-1.pdf.

7. As regards their broad objective, Scotland population has been broadly constant at about 5 million for 100 years. Recently it has been increasing at an unusual rate. The latest official projections suggest that Scotland's population will grow by about half a million people or 9% in the next 25 years. It is not clear exactly what the SNP mean by "the average EU 15 population growth over the period 2007 – 2017". The latter appears to be about one half of the recent rate of Scottish population growth, which makes the SNP target rather irrational. Scotland's relatively low birth rate (TFR 1.61 in 2013 compared to 1.85 for England and Wales) combined with relatively high mortality might well imply very large volumes of immigration if immigration were intended to compensate for low levels of reproduction. .

8. The proposed Points Based system for work permits is entirely unconstitutional, as it assumes sovereign powers by a relatively small part of a sovereign country. In operational terms, its effect would depend very much on how the scheme is administered (and by whom). UK experience has shown that the outcome can be a box ticking procedure under which the numbers could be very large indeed.

9. As regards students, there is little doubt that permission to stay on and work, even in low skilled work, is a considerable incentive for students from poorer countries in the third world. The risk, however, is that they never go home. Statistics for the UK suggest that students from outside the EU have arrived at an average of 150,000 a year but have only left at the rate of about 50,000 a year. We could expect the same in Scotland.

10. As for asylum, the SNP has said that they would like to implement a more 'humane' system and specifically have said that they will close Scotland's only detention centre and end enforcement action against failed asylum seekers (even Sweden detains and removed failed asylum seekers). There have also been suggestions that Scotland would grant asylum seekers the right to work while their decision is pending. This system could well attract large numbers of asylum seekers and there would be nothing to stop them travelling South, whether or not their cases were successful.

11. There is clear evidence that countries, like Sweden, that offer relatively soft conditions such as the right to take up work while waiting for a decision, receive very large numbers of asylum seekers. In 2014 Sweden received over 81,000 asylum applicants, almost 13% of the total number that claimed in the whole European Union and 8,500 for every million of the population. This compares to the UK which received almost 32,000 asylum seekers in 2014 or 500 for every million of the population.¹³

12. In 2012-13 1,690 applications for asylum were lodged in Scotland, which is around 320 for every million of the population.¹⁴ Scotland's population is just over half that of Sweden. If Scotland received half the number of asylum seekers that Sweden receives they would receive around 7,500 for every million of the population or about 40,000 per year - a more than a 20 fold increase in numbers.

13. Family reunion is another field in which numbers can rapidly expand when conditions are eased.

The Irish example

14. Ireland, which shares a Common Travel Area (CTA) with the UK, is frequently cited as an example of how two immigration systems could function together. The Irish Republic, as a sovereign state within the Common Travel Area has its own distinct immigration system. However, their system is broadly similar to the UK's and Ireland does not aggressively seek out immigration in the manner the SNP plans for Scotland. They have a land border with Northern Ireland not, of course, with England.

13 Data on Asylum Applicants extracted from EUROSTAT on 30th March 2015.

14 The Scotsman, 'Asylum Seekers Destitute', says Charity, 31st March 2015, URL: <http://www.scotsman.com/news/uk/asylum-seekers-destitute-says-charity-1-3159823>.

Canada

15. Some have cited Canada as an example of a successful regional immigration system. However, that system has been strongly criticised because many migrants who move to Canada on regional visas fail to stay in the Provinces to which their visas commit them. The Quebec Investor Visa has been particularly criticised both in the Canadian national press and by Canadian politicians. Such a system would clearly not be suitable for the United Kingdom, given the well-established tendency of immigrants to prefer London and the South East of England over Scotland. Indeed, the Liberal Democrats recently abandoned their proposal for a regional immigration policy after acknowledging that it was not practicable.

Public opinion in Scotland

16. It is frequently suggested, not least by the SNP, that Scottish public opinion is much more positive about immigration than opinion in England. However, recent BBC polling suggests that the differences are not, in fact, very great.

1. *Generally speaking, do you think the level of immigration into Britain should be...?*

Do you think the level of immigration into Britain should be...?	GB as a whole	Scotland
Increased	4%	5%
Reduced	49%	49%
Kept at the current level	20%	26%
Stopped completely	21%	15%
Total in favour of reduction	70%	64% ¹⁵

2. *On balance, do you think the level of immigration into Britain over the last ten years has been good or bad for the country?*

Do you think the level of immigration into Britain over the last ten years has been good or bad	GB as a whole	Scotland
Mostly good	22%	27%
Mostly bad	36%	38%
Both good and bad	38%	31%
Don't know	4%	3% ¹⁶

15 BBC News, 'No difference' in immigration attitudes, politicians claim', 10 March 2015, URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-31800374>.

16 BBC News, 'Study looks at Scottish views on Immigration', 10th February 2014, URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-26020982>.

3. This attitude has been confirmed time and again by polling; for example, this YouGov poll from late 2013 which shows attitudes between England & Wales on the one hand and Scotland on the other are similar.

Do you want to....	England & Wales	Scotland
Want to see immigration increased:	8%	10%
Want to see immigration remain the same:	13%	23%
Want it reduced:	75%	58% ¹⁷

The economic impact on Scotland

17. The House of Lords Economic Committee, the Migration Advisory Committee and the Office of Budget Responsibility have all found that the impact of immigration on GDP per head is extremely small. Studies in The US, Australia and Holland have come to similar conclusions.

18. As for the impact on the budget, the most recent study by CReAM, attached to UCL found that all immigrants between 1995 and 2011 had cost the UK Exchequer between £114 and £160 billion- or, roughly, £20 million a day.

Conclusion

19. The SNP's proposals have been portrayed as relatively harmless. They are not. First and foremost, control of migration, like defence, must be a matter for the national sovereign power because it affects the whole country. Assumption of immigration powers is a back-door bid for a key element of independence. In terms of effects upon migration, it was exactly these kinds of changes in the UK under Labour that caused the numbers to spiral out of control. While there is an open border with England, it is extremely likely that the most qualified immigrants will leave for England at the first opportunity. The result would be a wide open barn door to England with very little benefit to Scotland.

2 April 2015

17 *Ibid.*

