



Where does migration sit within the debate over the future of the UK and Scotland?

In September 2014 Scotland will hold an historic referendum on its constitutional future. Migration is an important aspect of debates surrounding this ballot: the UK government has emphasised its desire to restrict immigration to Britain, whilst the Scottish Government views net immigration as a valuable contributor to the economic and demographic growth of Scotland.

This Breakfast Briefing will explore these contrasting positions and draws on new research undertaken as part of the ESRC's 'Future of the UK and Scotland' programme. The speakers will consider the challenges and opportunities that Scotland faces in devising an immigration policy attuned to its particular needs, whatever the outcome of the referendum.

Current policy climate

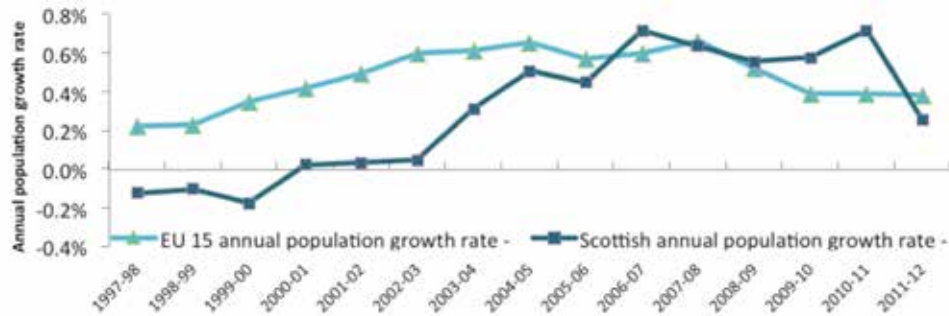
The referendum on the constitutional future of Scotland raises a number of interesting questions in relation to immigration policy at the UK and Scotland scales. The UK government takes a restrictive approach to immigration, with a much publicised aim to 'cap' net migration to the UK at less than 100,000 per annum by 2015. Conversely the Scottish Government has consistently favoured a more expansionist approach to immigration; seeing it as a key contributor to economic and demographic growth. Migration is central to the Scottish Government's Population Target of matching average EU-15 growth over the period 2007-2017. However, immigration policy is currently a policy instrument that remains 'reserved' to Westminster. Much uncertainty exists regarding future immigration policy

in Scotland: for example the UK looks set to hold an in-out referendum on EU membership in 2017 and it is not yet clear how an independent Scotland would fit into existing EU rules and regulations concerning immigration. This research investigates these issues using statistical data from secondary sources such as the UK Census and from information collected by the researchers from employers and migration experts in Scotland.

Migration in Scotland: demographics

As Figure 1 reveals the latest population growth in Scotland is slightly lower than the EU15 average. However for most of the period since 2007 it has exceeded this level. Scotland's population has grown by 3 per cent since 2006/7 whereas the average across the EU15 countries has been 2 per cent. Therefore Scotland seems on track to meet its population target. Migration is largely responsible for this, and in a reversal of historic trends, Scotland has in every year over the last decade gained more people than it has lost through migration. In a European context Scotland still has a relatively small immigrant population, but is more reliant on migration for future demographic stability and growth compared to other constituent parts of the UK.

Figure 1: Population change 1996-2012, Scotland and EU-15 average



Source: Eurostat and NRS (2013)

Migration in Scotland: economics

Migration often drives economic as well as demographic growth. Employers and stakeholders in key sectors of the economy regard migration as serving an important role in addressing skills and labour shortages in Scotland. Current UK immigration legislation, specifically increasingly tight restrictions on non-European migration, is widely seen as obstructive and Scottish employers view these policies as being London/South East-centric. Similar views are most likely held by businesses in many other parts of Britain. However the constitutional change debate uniquely represents an opportunity for Scotland to develop immigration policies better attuned to its needs, whatever the outcome of the referendum.

A Scottish immigration policy? Opportunities and challenges

Part of the research involved combining past time-series data with the views of experts to estimate future migration flows into and out of Scotland under independence and constitutional status quo scenarios. Whilst such exercises inevitably include uncertainty, the results point to an expectation that the volume of inflows will remain relatively stable at least for a few years after the referendum, whatever its outcome. This relates to a wider conjecture: that immigration legislation in an independent Scotland would not be fully independent, whilst remaining in the UK does not automatically mean that Scotland cannot develop a more autonomous immigration policy.

Even a *Yes* vote in the referendum would not enable Scotland to pursue a completely independent immigration policy. The Scottish Government has stated its desire for Scotland to remain in the Common Travel Area (CTA) with the UK and

Ireland and the EU. A relatively liberal immigration policy in an independent Scotland would face considerable opposition from Westminster, which would fear inflows into Scotland as immigration into England 'by the back door'. Remaining in the CTA would therefore necessitate an immigration policy in Scotland that is not radically different to that of Britain. Similarly, being in the EU would mean that an independent Scotland would not have influence over immigration from the rest of Europe.

However, a *No* vote does not automatically imply a continuation of the status quo. The experiences of countries such as Canada and Australia have demonstrated that sub-national immigration policies can be effective in meeting the inevitable spatial variations in the economic and demographic needs for migrants that exist within nation states. A case can be made for the application of such an approach to Scotland, and indeed other parts of Britain, whose experiences of migration and demographic trends are significantly different to South-East England, the tail which arguably wags the dog in terms of UK immigration policy.

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