

# The Conservative Party Manifesto

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Public Opinion & Voting: MW 410



## Summary

1. A commitment to reduce net migration to the tens of thousands. Achieved by ending free movement and reducing EU migration as well as further measures to reform non-EU migration. Not yet a complete package but the direction of travel is very clear.

## Introduction and General Approach

2. The Conservative Party published their manifesto on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2017. The full document can be read [here](#).

3. There are three main immigration elements to the manifesto, first the Conservatives have recommitted to reducing net migration to the tens of thousands although there is no time frame attached. Second, they commit to continuing to bear down on non-EU migration and outline several proposals that will go some way to meeting the target. Finally, the manifesto contains a commitment to end the free movement of people and introduce a system to govern EU migration that will both 'reduce and control' its level. The manifesto also makes references to reform of the asylum system. We have assessed their proposals below.

## Proposals

### **a) Net Migration Target**

4. The Conservative Party recommits itself to reducing immigration to 'sustainable levels', arguing that the present level is 'still too high'. To that end their 'objective' is to reduce annual net migration to the tens of thousands. The Conservatives have not suggested a time frame for when this should or could be achieved. We welcome this as a key strategic objective - we have always argued that a target guides policy and provides clarity and focus for government departments.

## b) Non-EU

5. The Conservative Manifesto commits to continuing to 'bear down on immigration from outside the European Union'. In order to achieve this they make the following commitments:

### i) Family

6. The Conservatives say that they will increase the earnings threshold for people wishing to sponsor migrants for family visas. The current earnings threshold is set at £18,600 for those wishing to sponsor a partner, more if they are sponsoring a partner and children from overseas. The effect on numbers cannot yet be quantified as they do not indicate the level at which the earnings threshold should be set.

### ii) Study

7. The manifesto is clear that students will continue to be counted in the net migration statistics. This is a welcome development. Students who remain add to population growth and therefore must be counted in the statistics. We also believe that to remove students from the net migration statistics could be seen as 'fiddling the figures'.

8. The manifesto also states that the visa requirements for students wishing to come to Britain from outside the EU will be toughened to ensure the maintenance of 'high standards'. This is important to protect the reputation of Britain's world-class education system by preventing abuse.

9. Students wishing to switch into work will have to meet 'new higher requirements', otherwise they will be expected to leave at the end of their studies. At present around 7,000 non-EU students a year switch into a work category so this could fall but by how much is dependent on the new requirements.

### iii) Work

10. The Conservatives say that they will ensure that the immigration system works for those sectors that need skills from overseas but they also highlight the need to train the existing population. To that end there is a commitment to invest in technical education. They also commit to doubling the annual Immigration Skills Charge (ISC), payable by employers sponsoring a worker from outside the EU under Tier 2 from £1,000 a year to £2,000 a year. The revenue from the ISC will be used to 'invest in higher level skills training for workers in the UK'.

11. These proposals are welcome as training in the UK has fallen significantly in the last twenty years (see the Social Market Foundation [report](#) authored by Baroness Wolf). One of the reasons for this is that it can often be cheaper to import somebody from abroad rather than invest in the training of someone already in the UK. Immigration is not a long term solution to skills gaps but should be a short term measure to bridge them. An increase in the ISC would both increase the resources available for training and may encourage employers to train a local rather than look overseas.

12. The Conservatives also say that they will ask the Migration Advisory Committee to assess how the immigration system could be better be aligned with the industrial strategy and they envisage that the MAC will recommend the number of visas that should be set aside for strategically important sectors such as the digital economy sector while not adding to net migration.

### **c) EU**

13. The Conservative Party is clear that the UK will be leaving the European Union and leaving the Single Market, both of which require free movement of people. They say that they will build an immigration policy that allows us to 'reduce and control' the number who come from the EU while allowing the UK to continue to attract the skilled workers that the economy needs.

14. We welcome the commitment to end free movement since reducing net migration to the tens of thousands would otherwise be impossible. That said the party does not set out how they will govern EU migration in the future. They do say that any future policy will allow the country to attract the skilled workers that the economy needs, suggesting that any future regime will seek to cut out lower skilled workers but facilitate highly skilled migration. This is the right approach and is what we have recommended in our previous report: [EU Immigration, Post-Brexit – A Comprehensive Policy](#).

15. The Conservatives say that they will 'secure the entitlements of EU nationals in Britain and British nationals in the EU'. This is a welcome stance and we hope that the issue of the rights of EU/UK nationals already living in another member state can be settled as a matter of urgency.

### **d) Asylum**

16. The Conservative Party argue in their manifesto that the current asylum system is geared towards those who are 'young enough, fit enough, and have the resources to get to Britain, rather than those who are most in need of our help'. They say that, where possible, they will offer asylum and refuge 'to people in parts of the world affected by conflict and oppression rather than to those who have made it to Britain'. They will do this by working 'to reduce the number of asylum claims made in Britain' and, as they do so, 'increase the number of people we help in the most troubled regions.' Arguably, this targets support to the most vulnerable around the world and may deter people from making perilous journeys in order to reach Britain but it is not clear how it can be achieved.

17. The Conservatives also say that they will 'work with other countries in Europe, and the UN, to review the international legal definitions of asylum and refugee status'. They will also increase support for local authorities and other NGOs which are involved in providing support for refugees.

18. We believe that it is very important that the public has confidence in the asylum system and therefore welcome the proposals outlined above. It is also important that any future government ensures that those whose asylum claims have failed should be removed from the country. We believe that this is in the best interests of genuine refugees, the asylum system and the system of rule of law.

29<sup>th</sup> May 2017