

Public engagement in advance of the e-petition debate on the threshold for non-EU citizens settling in the UK

The Petitions Committee has said it would “do all it can to maximise the potential for petitioners and other members of the public to be involved with debates on petitions.” With that in mind, the Committee invited members of the public to share their views via an online thread on the parliamentary Facebook page in advance of the debate on Monday 7 March. The questions were as follows:

1. How will the £35,000 income threshold for non-EU citizens settling in the UK affect you?
2. Is the introduction of the income threshold affecting your future plans?
3. How will the introduction of the income threshold affect your business, workplace and/or community?

They were asked to submit their views before midnight on Thursday 3 March. We also informed the public that a summary of their comments, responding to the questions above, would be provided for MPs ahead of the debate.

We received 711 contributions between 1 and 3 March. The comments can be seen in full on the following page:

<https://www.facebook.com/ukparliament>

Summary of Responses to the questions

The message the threshold sends

For many people, the issue was what the threshold says about Britain and the fear that it sends a message that wealth is the only thing that counts. There were also worries about reputational damage.

For example:

Megan Daigle: This £35k threshold determines the worth of an individual based solely on income rather than contribution to society, which is not just inhumane -- it's shortsighted. The UK will lose essential staff like nurses, teachers, and care workers, and for what? More bankers and property developers who price people out of their homes, but make more than £35k? Is that the society we want to build? That £35k salary is far higher than the median income for UK citizens and is no indicator for value. I sincerely hope that Parliament will think better of this foolish, knee-jerk policy.

Amanda Digman: I have signed this petition and then asked to say how it will affect me. Actually, it won't affect me at all directly as I am a UK citizen. However, I am glad to live in a multi cultural society where we can meet people from all different backgrounds and share stories and history, language and culture. This won't affect many people and to throw a few people out of the country just because they don't earn a certain amount seems like clutching at straws just to get the numbers down a bit. We will lose skilled workers and families and loving relationships will be torn apart. I don't see the point and I don't want to live in a country that only welcomes high earners and those who can "benefit us" the most. Let's also welcome people who need help and have potential to become the people they were born to be. Let's remember that benefits (the things that do us good) include kindness, generosity etc, not necessarily or only money or productivity

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Thomas Montenegro-Johnson: Aside from this particular piece of legislation, I feel that much of the recent anti-immigration rhetoric is having a wider negative impact on how we are viewed internationally. A good friend of mine (German) with an industrially-relevant PhD from Cambridge is seeking (lucrative) employment back in Germany, because he no longer feels welcome in the country. A Canadian PhD student in my department will return to Canada after her viva for the same reason - rather than using the skill-set (which she has gained here) to make a positive contribution to our economy.

Need for a regional focus

Many respondents made the point that the level at which the threshold is set does not take into account regional differences in salaries and living costs. Suggestions were therefore made for the threshold to vary either according to region or to profession.

Rita Singer: The proposed income threshold of £35,000 places every area outside London and the South East at a structural disadvantage if they wanted to hire employees from outside the EEA as those regions average annual income falls short even of the median national income -- which in itself was at about 27.7k last year. In essence: if an average British national were to apply for the same visa as their prospective non-EEA colleague, their own country would have to reject them!

Abraham Carder: The average wage of my county (Gwynedd, North Wales), is around £14,500. So even if you can support yourself and contribute to the economy and to your community, sorry but you'll have to leave unless you are working harder and earning significantly more than the majority of people in North Wales? Absolute rubbish. The £35k threshold might make sense in London or other, high salary areas of the UK, but the simple fact that no discretion has been made based on your location in the UK just highlights the thoughtlessness of this law. Please, if you are going to restrict immigrants from living and working in the UK, pass laws that make sense.

Ruth Coustick-Deal: This idea is incredibly biased towards London and the South - in Wales or North Yorkshire a salary of 22k can get you a mortgage on a 4 bed house, and support a whole family. I know hardly anyone earning this amount across many sectors: publishing, engineering, politics, farming - if 35k is the mark of who you'd want in this country, the nation would fall apart. The whole idea suggests that the only value anyone produces is in how much tax they pay - not what they give to the community or society. Is that really all we're worth?

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What Tier 2 visa holders themselves said

Several clear themes emerge from the comments of those who hold this visa:

- 1 – they describe the clear effect on their personal and professional lives.
- 2 – they feel that the rules of the game have been changed in an unfair way and this was not something they signed up to.
- 3 – the sponsor company is affected, as it may have to pay more to keep someone or lose someone in whom it has invested time and money.
- 4 – they are committed to the UK but feels that are being punished for working hard and putting in.

For example:

Abhijit Barthakur: This is the most ridiculous rule ever. Why are tax paying non EU migrants being punished? Surely they understand that this is a Tier 2 SKILLED VISA that we have. As if the rules were not tough enough, they impose a salary which will be near impossible for people to get outside of London.

This must be scrapped immediately. Being told that staying in this country for 5+ years and paying taxes ALL through the five years and a health "surcharge" is not enough...now we need to earn a set salary? Lunacy

Meghan McCrimmon: I am a fully qualified music teacher with a UK Master's degree. I have taught in UK schools full time since 2011. I was on a tier 4 visa for 1 year, Tier 1 PSW for 2 years and have been in Tier 2 for almost 3 years now. By the time I qualify for ILR, I will have been in the UK for almost a decade. This is my home. No teacher in the UK earns more than £35k unless they're in a senior management role. As a tier 2 migrant, I don't qualify for any benefits of any kind and am only paying INTO the system, not taking away from it. Why should teachers/nurses/social workers be expected to earn as much as investment bankers? I am not asking you to consider getting rid of the threshold altogether, I am simply asking you and the Home Secretary to reconsider the terms of this threshold. Each occupation should have its own industry-specific pay threshold that is based on an average salary. Tier 2 migrants should have to satisfy the requirements for settlement that were in place when their Tier 2 visa was initially granted. A reasonable compromise would be to have the MAC research (as they have suggested) industry specific thresholds, so it's not an unfair blanket of £35,000. The national average for salaries is £25,500 but if you take away the top 10% of earners, it drops to £13,000. The industries unable to pay £35,000 will take a huge blow whilst this law barely minimises immigration. If this law comes into effect, I will lose not only my job but the life I've built here - friendships, my relationship (and we can't just get married!), my stability. Please - PLEASE reconsider this horrible law.

Brittany Ell: I understand that this government thinks that more job opportunities should be made available to the British workforce and this is part of their solution. However, if this is the path you are intent on taking despite all reasons against, there needs to be exceptions made for people like myself who have been here long before the new salary threshold was announced, yet are being impacted by them. By the time my Tier 2 visa runs out I will have been in the UK for nearly 9 & 1/2 years. I will have spent almost a decade building my life

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here and contributed an enormous amount of money to system. I don't have a life in the USA now. My home is here. It's not right that I should be forced to leave my life and all loved ones behind for a rule that I was never aware of when I first came to this country.

Lauretta Fumnanya Okwuashi: As someone who has schooled, lived and worked in the UK for over 8years, i find this proposed regulations indeed troubling. I have gone through student visa, post study work visa and I am currently on Tier 2 general, this i got in February 2012..i work for a small charity and I have done so for about 7 years. I started as a volunteer, I have had the pleasure of touching lives of vulnerable people in my community and I am proud of the work we do in our community. in the past 8 years, I have gotten married and moved my husband and his life down to the Uk, under the assumption that i have rightly contributed my quota to the society, I have paid my taxes and i have always worked, I find this 35k threshold, oppressive, discriminatory , it is also retrospective and I do not believe that the government can change the rules of the game half-way through the match. I urge that parliament consider those of us that have spent such a long time in the uk contributing to the society, where does that leave us, we have left our home countries and adapted to the work and professional life here only to be told after ,7,8 or indeed 9 years that the rules under which we thought applied to us no longer applies...what justice is left in this country if that is allowed to happen!

Chelsey Fenn: I came to the UK as a masters student (from the USA) in 2011 and was fortunate enough to be employed on a tier 2 visa by a small entrepreneurial company soon after completing my course. I have now been working in this job for more than 3 years. The codes of practice that define the requirements of my visa dictate a salary (below £35k) that is already a stretch for my employer, though they are paying me at this rate to keep me and my skills in the company. Based on the financial strain I am already imposing on my employer, when I am eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain in 2 or 3 years' time I cannot expect my salary to reach the £35k threshold. Since I am not able to remain on a tier 2 visa for more than 6 years in total, there is not enough time for a more natural salary progression to take place in line with my employer's financial capabilities.

My hope is to settle in the UK to be with my British partner, and I would like achieve indefinite leave to remain in order to feel secure about my immigration status. Though I could switch to a partner visa, this would further delay my ability to apply for indefinite leave to remain by 5 years. The stress of applying for and changing visas can be overwhelming and dehumanising (not to mention expensive), which is why I am terribly keen to be granted indefinite leave to remain as soon as possible. This threshold will prevent me from being granted settlement and may separate me from my work, my partner and the country I choose to call home.

Elio Luna: I am a Colombian national, on a Tier 2 (General) visa working for an English language school. I came to the UK in 2007 (9 years ago!) to do an MA, then I moved to London in 2009 and I have lived here ever since. I am quite established here, having found a job and a circle of friends. Ever since I moved out of my parents' home, this is the city I've lived the longest and I consider it home now. I fill a skill shortage at my company (I speak Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, French and English), I have knowledge of several key markets which help bring income for the company (a British company), accommodation partners

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(including our host families, who are mostly British), and our English teachers (most of them British as well). As you might have gathered, I would not qualify for indefinite Leave to Remain, as my salary is under GBP 35000 and my 5 year period would have been completed in August 2016. The changes proposed by the Secretary of State would jeopardize my ability here to do my job as my life here in the UK. Sectors like the one I work in do not really guarantee that type of salary, let alone outside London. This is really unrealistic for some of us. We do not all work in finance. We have different backgrounds which contribute to the diversity of the United Kingdom. By sending 'low' earning highly skilled migrants away the government would be fracturing part of the society.

Ivan David Opensight: I am a tier 2 worker familiar with the process and rules of sponsorship. The current regulations are really tough and difficult as they are, so it is very discouraging that in the future I will be facing leaving the life I have built in the United Kingdom if this threshold is implemented. I am aware that my sponsor company had a hard time finding the right person for this position as many other businesses that have gone through arduous processes, expenses, stress and inconvenience in order do what is right for their business and to add talent that is not available in the local job market, which is already protected by the existing tough rules as I have already mentioned.

The possibility of settlement for immigrant employees encourages real integration, a sense of ownership for this Country and adds invaluable assets to our society. Determining the value and contributions of individuals by earning power alone is a huge mistake. The contributions that tier 2 workers give to the UK go way beyond money. This threshold ignores this and will definitively discourage “The best and the brightest” from coming. This law is constantly making me and others feel insecure about the future and makes me afraid that this Country will turn into a place that ceased to be inspiring and rewarding of talent and hard work. I love the UK and plan to keep contributing to it through hard work, personal values and the high level of enthusiasm that drives my everyday life despite of how difficult it is to deal with these issues.

I was inspired to come and work here as the UK has always prided itself of having the highest values: Rewarding hard work, open mindedness, opportunity and fairness among other things. This 35K law doesn't represent the values and aspects that attracted me and that would attract other talented individuals in any way whatsoever. All for a contribution to reducing immigration numbers. (that the government has already admitted will be modest).

Laure Valiquette-Talbot: Living here for so long has made me create a life here. I have a boyfriend, wonderful friends, a career I love and a house I've invested time and money on that I would loose. Yes, I have family in my home country but my life is here. I am a resident of the UK with no ties apart from family to my country.

This change wasn't mentioned to me when applied for my latest visa autumn 2014. This also wasn't talked about in the papers and was very much done on the low down. I only knew about it because a friend of a friend had seen it somewhere and was asking me if it was a joke! Sadly, it wasn't. When I saw this I had a panic attack and it felt like I was loosing control of my own life. A feeling I wish upon no one! It's unfair to deal with migrants who are willing to contribute to the economy of the UK like us in such a manner! We are not

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entitled to any social benefits and now also restricted in what they can do and earn. We are very much part of the workforce of this country! We often bring something that is not found otherwise. We contribute to the economy: we earn pounds and spend them here!

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There are worries that this policy will affect certain sectors

1. Start-ups and small businesses

Jen Phillips: A core member of our team is Pakistani. Nobody else in the business has his skills and knowledge. Training a replacement would take months. I don't know if the business would survive. Worst case scenario would be 1 person deported, 11 UK-born people out of work and huge expensive headaches for our customers, who are mostly NHS trusts.

Beatrice Ursula Türler: We are a UK SME and employ a worker from outside the EU. She has been with us for 5 years and is indispensable to the business. If necessary, we will probably increase her salary to the required amount, because we desperately want to keep her - but this is way above the salary we would pay a UK worker for the same job, and indeed what we pay other staff - because we can't afford to put up all their salaries by that amount. How can that be fair?

Tim Barlow: I run a digital marketing agency. We try to train as much as practical from graduate level but that takes time. As a growing business we sometimes have to fill resource gaps quickly. More quickly than training allows. The £35k threshold will stop us from doing that, meaning a slower rate of growth, less UK tax take and ultimately makes it harder for us to compete globally.

Theo Moule: I am a university educated UK citizen. I earn less than 35k.

This is because I work for a startup.

What this policy means is that you are excluding people from starting careers in startups, young SME's and entrepreneurship. I'm sure there are many other career paths essential to the British economy and society these people will no longer be able to choose.

Please re-think the policy and recognise it builds wall and not bridge.

2. Carers and those being cared for

Keith Wallace: There are many workers that perform key tasks in our society that will be directly affected by this measure. My father-in-law at age 92 is totally dependent on the carers in his nursing home: if they were forced to leave the country it is uncertain how replacement workers would be sourced, and his care threatened. As I now approach retirement age, who will staff the nursing homes of the future?

Luke Sapiets: My mother is disabled and needs 24 hour care assistants, many of these assistants over the years have been from non-EU countries and of course, earn nowhere near the 35K threshold. Without these care workers, we would have struggled to get my mother the care she needs. Introducing this 35K threshold will directly affect many of the disabled people in this country and could in fact lead to a shortage of care workers, increasing the pressure and lowering the standard of life for many disabled people.

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3. Universities and the UK research sector

Petra Meier: I lead a research group at a Russell Group university. The policy means that in the junior staff grades, we can't choose the most promising scientists but are restricting UK science to those with the right passport. Our loss...

Josh Powell: The £35,000 threshold essentially excludes all entry or lower level positions, even for graduate schemes. As my girlfriend is a non-EU citizen (South Korea), this is likely to therefore force me to move overseas so that we can spend time together at 22, however much we both might contribute to the UK economy. UK universities are world class, but make no mistake they are also competing with world class universities in the USA - how do we expect the most talented international students to continue to come to the UK to contribute to our education sector, when their chances of employment in the UK on graduating is almost non-existent? They won't. They will simply choose to study in the USA and you see this time and time again if you speak to international students at the elite US universities - they are consistently choosing the US over the UK because of measures such as the £35,000 threshold.

Chris Mainey: Although PhD students may be exempt, this does not affect the first few working years where academics are poorly paid, robbing UK universities of talented academics who cannot stay.

4. The creative industries

Natalie Yiu After reading the response within the website, I absolutely don't understand how this won't affect international students like me at all. I'm graduating this year, and will hopefully be switching to a Tier 2 working visa. That lasts for 6 years, and afterwards I'd want to stay. I graduate with a BA in Arts, how am I to earn £35,000 in a creative sector within 6 years is beyond me.

Henrrs Barkers: The creative industries are critical to the wellbeing and advancement and maintenance of culture, and is the fastest growing sector. But individuals within the creative industries have an average earnings lower than that of £35,000 a year. international cooperation for sharing talent and creativity is vital. I know many american photographers and designers who would love to come to the UK (quickly becoming the epicentre of the world's creative industries), and adding to our market. It would be foolish to turn away such talent and influx of talented individuals our economy could use. The creative industries has increased in the number of jobs available by 13% in the last 5 years, and brings over £71 billion to the UK economy every year. Please take into account your actions on the creative industries in the UK. Thank you

Tracey Benson: As a performer on a low income here, the industry will lose the standard of talent in the west end. Instead of selecting talent on ability, directors and producers will be selecting talent on passports. The whole entertainment industry will suffer the lack of diversity and skills that Australians and other skilled cultures can bring. This will basically stop all of the dancers and singers having a "Broadway" to go to. We train our whole lives to be able to audition and work in Londons West End. This will take away those dreams

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5. The NHS

Sarah Reed: NHS pharmacists are not on the list of temporarily protected occupations. An often overlooked occupation, pharmacists provide vital specialist clinical support to prescribers as part of the multi disciplinary team. In the South West we struggle to fill our pharmacist vacancies. One of my colleagues is Malaysian and will be forced to leave under this ruling as £35,000 is just too high a figure for anyone not in the private sector to attain.

RheyYah Villanueva-Delgado: I am one of the nurses who will be affected by this new policy/law. Unknown to me, it was never discussed when I signed myself to work in the UK since 2012. It was only made known to me when I renewed my visa last year. If I only knew about this, i could have changed my decision to work in another country. I have learned a lot being a nurse here in UK but having a 35k income is impossible to happen even if you work in the private sector. There is not enough funds for trainings or courses, which will allow me to progress and be paid higher than what is expected. The future is bleak and this could cause a tremendous chaos for the nhs and other healthcare sectors who are still struggling in filling out the gaps of nursing manpower.

6. The charitable sector

Tara Mac Aulay: I work at a charity employing close to 30 people from diverse backgrounds. Under these changes, we will have to say goodbye to some of our most valued staff, who help us move millions to those in need each year. These staff have been with us for years, yet now they will need to uproot their lives and families and we will struggle to find UK or EU citizens to fill the skill and knowledge gaps they leave behind. The government claims that there is an alternate path for charity workers under Tier 5, but this route is strictly for volunteer labour, and will not allow us to continue paying salaries to loyal employees who have dedicated years of their lives to doing good in the community. Our staff take large pay cuts to work with us, many of them donating everything over £25,000 to charity, but they cannot work for free.

To reiterate how this will change our plans: If we truly cannot keep our most valued staff in the UK, we will move most of our operations overseas.

Nargiza Saipidinva: In most of the charity organisations, where there are lots of non EU tier 2 holders, 35K is salary of heads of departments with 10-15 years of experience. How people working below these positions are supposed to get 35K after only 5 years of experience? People go to charity sector not to earn but to help vulnerable, affected by conflicts, wars, disasters, poverty people. How will you replace a professional who got 2-3 UK degrees and so much knowledge, passion and expertise in working with these vulnerable people? Tier 2 holders don't have access to any benefits, pay all taxes and huge rates for visas. I have no idea how cutting so many professionals in charity sector will benefit UK?

7. The heritage sector

Steve White As someone who works in the heritage sector, a notoriously low paid sector, it will effect a great number of my colleagues. Average salaries for people in this sector are somewhat below £25k, for those with 10+ years experience. Because of this, almost all of my colleagues who are non EU based (which make up perhaps 5-10% of the entire work force)

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would be forced to leave the country. With new graduates leaving university with more debt than is humanly sane, very few of them will want to enter such a low paid profession.

By 'heritage sector' I should add that I don't just mean individuals working in museums. I mean those who work as archaeologists, those in local government planning, people working on heritage sites, etc.

These people, while not being in the same league of importance as those in the NHS, still perform a necessary role in the economy. This measure will eliminate every single one of them

Effect on other sectors and areas

Other sectors specifically mentioned included: comic books and video games; translators; engineers; alternative therapists; retail; and planning.

A few respondents mentioned the need to protect the Commonwealth and other long-standing international relationships.