Research has helped UK cancer survival double since the 1970s, so today, 1 in 2 people diagnosed with cancer survive for at least 10 years. This life-saving work is being done by a mix of domestic and international talent. At Cancer Research UK (CRUK) alone, 50% of the PhD students we fund are not originally from the UK. Facilitating the movement of research staff means the best talent can come to work on UK science, while UK researchers can collaborate more effectively with international partners. To make the UK the go-to place for global talent, we must ensure researchers can live, work and travel easily across borders.

1. **UK visas must be priced competitively and streamlined**

The current UK immigration system is one of the most expensive in the world. A skilled worker coming to the UK under the Global Talent Visa has to pay more than they would in eleven other leading scientific nations. Similarly, the total average upfront cost for a Tier 2 skilled worker visa – taking the costs to the researcher and their employer together – is £8,419, **540% higher than the average cost in other leading scientific nations (£1,316)**.

96% of CRUK researchers say the ease with which their dependents can access public services and take up work is a key factor in choosing a research destination. But for a researcher to bring three family members to the UK on a five-year skilled worker visa, the upfront costs are £12,880. This is compared with a four year French Talent passport costing approximately £1,040. The UK must be more competitive if it is to remain the destination of choice for global research talent.

**We recommend:**
- A reduction in the total visa costs for a researcher and their dependents – to bring UK visa costs to more internationally competitive rates would require a fivefold reduction;
- An option to spread fees over the lifetime of a visa, to reduce upfront payments which many skilled researchers would struggle to afford;
- An improved digitised system to streamline visa applications and prepare for expected increase in demand.
2. Entry criteria should accommodate all members of a cancer research team

80% of British adults agree the UK’s immigration system should allow scientists, academics and their support staff to work in this country at any stage of their career\(^iv\). Previous proposals for a new immigration system included entry criteria which would penalise essential members of cancer research teams. For example, high salary thresholds would exclude laboratory technicians, the backbone of research teams who are skilled but relatively low-paid, especially outside of London (see Case Study below). A new system must accommodate all essential staff.

We recommend:
- Entry criteria that relate to an individual’s experience, qualifications and skills;
- Flexible definitions of entry criteria to reflect a range of professional levels and roles;
- No arbitrary caps on skilled migration;
- Any salary thresholds set to accommodate all skilled members of a research team;
- Any fast-track research visa should accommodate essential roles beyond lead scientists.

3. Researcher mobility must be a priority in a future UK-EU relationship

Nearly half of all UK cancer research involves international collaboration, with a heavy emphasis on short-term travel for projects, training, and conferences\(^v\). 72% of UK-based researchers spent time at non-UK Institutions from 1996 to 2012\(^vi\). Clinical trials for new treatments are regularly conducted across borders, especially for rare and childhood cancers where individual countries can’t conduct meaningful trials alone. Over a third of CRUK funded clinical trials involve at least one other non-UK country – making easy international travel crucial.

If UK-EU travel becomes substantially more difficult for UK researchers, we risk jeopardising life-saving research projects and weakening our position as a preferred partner on the global scientific stage. In line with the new Political Declaration, it’s crucial short-term movement between the UK and EU is designed to accommodate the needs of research and made as easy as possible.

We recommend:
- Build on commitments in the Political Declaration to ensure UK and EU researchers can continue to move and collaborate easily across borders.

Case study - Barbara Martins da Costa, Portuguese Scientist based at the Institute of Cancer Research

Barbara, originally from Portugal, works as a Scientific Officer at the Institute of Cancer Research (ICR). She assists with trials in the biological service unit as well as looking into brain cancers like neuroblastoma. Barbara completed her ungraduated studies and 5 years’ experience in veterinary biology in Portugal. In 2016, she came to the UK to help advance progress in cancer research, taking up her current role. Barbara was 40 and earned £26,000 when she came to the UK. Under previous proposals for a £30,000 minimum salary threshold, she would not have been allowed into the UK to work, despite her experience and academic background. Minimum salary thresholds should not prevent cancer research institutions employing the most qualified candidates.

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\(^ii\) ibid.

\(^iii\) Survey by CRUK of over 600 CRUK funded researchers

\(^iv\) [https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/New-poll-shows-overwhelming-support-for-an-immigration-system-based-on-skills.aspx](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/New-poll-shows-overwhelming-support-for-an-immigration-system-based-on-skills.aspx)

\(^v\) Elsevier, International comparative performance of the UK research base, 2013

\(^vi\) [https://www.ohe.org/publications/exploring-interdependencies-research-funders-uk](https://www.ohe.org/publications/exploring-interdependencies-research-funders-uk)