



Immigration and Demand for Education: Response to Critics

Our paper published on 14 October attracted criticism from the usual quarters. None of it affected the main thrust of the report which was that there will be a very substantial increase in the demand for education as a result of the massive levels of immigration permitted, even encouraged, by the previous government. However, it should not be allowed to pass unchallenged so brief responses are set out below:

Tim Finch (IPPR) quoted on the BBC website:

“The research was based on “guesstimates”...

No. It was based on actual births and on projections with assumptions stated.

“assumptions included that migrant children would spend the maximum time in the education system ...”

No. The assumption was that they would spend only such time as was legally required.

“Half the children referred to in the figures are those whose mother was born abroad, but whose father was UK born”.

No. Those with both parents born overseas were included. Of those with one UK parent only half were included. They were much less than half the total.

“...these people (migrants)... are contributing to a growing economy, so we should educate their children.”

Yes. But they are also adding to our population.

A major enquiry by the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee

“found no evidence for the argument, made by the Government, business and many others, that net immigration—immigration minus emigration—generates significant economic benefits for the existing UK population”.

Mr. Phillipe Legrain has also criticised the statistical methodology and assumptions that underpinned our paper. His critique, which is reproduced in full below ignores a very substantial amount of evidence from eminent sources supporting the assumptions used in the MigrationWatch paper and in some cases he has misinterpreted the evidence used.

“By using cumulative figures. If you add up spending on anything over a long period of time, it looks much bigger than it really is. Using a single year's statistics, 2009, and MW's deeply flawed methodology, the cost of schooling the children of migrants who have arrived since 1998 is £4.6 b

illion, out of an education budget of £88 billion”.

Taking Mr. Legrain's first point – use of cumulative data – it is apparent that he either misunderstands or ignores the reasons why MigrationWatch used cumulative data to estimate the impact on school places. Put simply, children in the UK receive a minimum of 11 years schooling, so that starting at age 5 pupil numbers and therefore demand for places would accumulate with each successive year until 11 years after starting school, when the cohort born 16 years previously would ‘drop out’ of the data. As a calculation of pupil place requirements stemming from net migration since 1998 – which was the sole objective of MigrationWatch's study - this is a perfectly reasonable methodology.

Mr. Legrain appears to imply that the £4.5 billion calculation by MigrationWatch of the cost in 2009 of educating migrant children who were either born in 1998 or afterwards, or directly migrated to the UK, is small relative to the total amount of public spending in the UK on education in 2009/10 – around £88 billion.

This is an unsound comparison because it is not comparing like with like. Since in 2009, virtually all children born in 1998 and thereafter would still be receiving primary education, the relevant comparator is the cost of primary education which in 2009/10 was £23.7 billion – so that education of migrant children accounted for almost one fifth of this – a very significant proportion.

“By counting children who have one parent who was born abroad as half due to migration. Since Nick Clegg has a Spanish wife, they include half the cost of educating their kids as being due to migration. Excluding that dodgy use of statistics, the cost in 2009 falls to £3.6bn”.

The assumption used by MigrationWatch that half the costs of educating children born to parents with only one UK born parent should be counted as a cost of migration, was implicitly endorsed by the Economic Affairs Committee of the House of Lords which, in its report on the economic impacts of immigration (2008), observed that the approach taken by the then Government of attributing all the costs of educating these children to the UK population was in itself a “questionable approach”.(paragraph 132)

However, even if we strip out the costs of educating all such children from the calculation of the cost of migration on education, the cost of migration in 2009 is still over 15 per cent of the budget for primary education in the UK in 2009.

Furthermore, MigrationWatch's calculation of the costs of migration is also based on highly conservative assumptions and specifically excludes the significant additional demands on education spending made by the particular requirements of children who, for example, are often unable to speak English when starting school. These ‘uncosted externalities’ are very significant. For example, the Government is committed to spend over £200 million on its ‘Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant’.

These matters are discussed at length in paras. 139 – 144 of the House of Lords report referred to above:

“By ignoring the taxes that migrants pay. Research by the Home Office, IPPR, Christian Dustmann at UCL and others show that migrants pay more in taxes than they take out in benefits and public services. Allowing for that, it is not UK-born taxpayers who are paying to educate migrants’

children, it is migrants who are subsidising the education of the children of people born in the UK”.

The research referred to by Mr. Legrain is by no means generally accepted, has been heavily criticised by at least one eminent economist and by the House of Lords Committee who reported as follows:

132. Determining whether immigrants make a positive or negative fiscal contribution is highly dependent on what costs and benefits are included in the calculations. Government claims that the exchequer consistently benefits from immigration rely on the children of one UK-born parent and one immigrant parent being attributed to the UK-born population - a questionable approach. But even using the Government's preferred method, the fiscal impact is small compared to GDP and cannot be used to justify large-scale immigration.

It also relies on the same 'questionable' assumptions criticised by the House of Lords in their report. This is all discussed at length in Chapter 5 of this report.

According to “Full fact report”, “MigrationWatch say that their figures are based on “the ‘principal projection’ by ONS of UK population over the period 2008 – 2033, projects a total of births of 19.8 million, of which 2.3 million are projected to occur, directly or indirectly, because of net migration. But after much searching and head-scratching, Full Fact was unable to discover any ONS projections which broke down predicted birth rates by the parents' place of birth.

A call to the ONS confirmed that no such statistics exist: “We certainly don't publish population projection data by country of migrant or any kind of ethnic background,” said a spokesperson, “the sums themselves won't have been done by us.”

The ONS is correct in saying that it does not publish population projections by ethnicity or country of migrant, but MigrationWatch's report did not say it did. In fact they calculated the difference between the 'natural change' – the excess of births over deaths – of the UK's population projected by the ONS under two assumptions: that in its 'Principal Projection', and that in the 'Zero Net Migration' assumption. For an explanation, see the [ONS's 2008 Population Projections](#).

18 October, 2010