



NUJ parliamentary briefing

Monday 7 March 2016

The union is calling on MPs to oppose the new Tier 2 immigration rules to be debated in parliament on Monday 7 March 2016.

Media workers in the UK have contacted the NUJ to say they are at risk of being deported if parliament agrees the proposed changes.

The new immigration rules compel people born outside the EU, currently working in the UK, to earn at least £35,000 before they are allowed to settle here.

The current proposals will impact on a range of media workers including people who are employed at the BBC World Service.

An NUJ member affected by the proposals said: "My work had to prove no British person could do my job in order to hire me and I've paid all my fees to remain. I've also been paying into the tax and national insurance system for years. I've lived here for over 7 years and have made this my home. If forced to leave I will be leaving a job I really enjoy, my partner who I love and a community I helped build outside of work."

Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary, said: "We are urging parliament to think again about the government's latest immigration proposals. We are calling on the government to engage in dialogue with trade unions and industry experts about alternative proposals that are suitable for specific industries – so we can avoid deporting media workers from the UK."

At the moment a Tier 2 general skilled worker is offered a skilled job in the UK and is from outside of the European Economic Area. They must pay £1,128 to apply for a 5 year Tier 2 visa, along with a healthcare surcharge. After 5 years, if they wish to settle in the UK they must pay £1,500 - £1,900 to apply for 'indefinite leave to remain'.

In 2011 and again in 2015, the **Migration Advisory Committee** recommended a more nuanced threshold that recognises the economic benefits of skilled workers earning less than £35,000.

The Review of Tier 2: Analysis of Salary Thresholds in July 2015 stated: "We prefer occupation specific thresholds, based on the nth percentile for each occupation, rather than flat thresholds which apply across all occupations.

"Occupation specific thresholds, unlike flat thresholds, take into account the different distributions of pay within each occupation and do not prevent certain occupations from being able to recruit."

The arbitrary threshold will start in April 2016 and anyone on a Tier 2 visa who does not earn £35,000 will be ineligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain.

NUJ members working in a range of sectors including broadcasting and not-for-profit media organisations have contacted the union because they are at risk.

An NUJ member who works as a digital producer said: “I train colleagues in London and in 6 different regions across the world, and produce and innovate digital content and data visualisations for our websites.

“A blanket minimum pay of £35,000 is very unfair for certain industries and jobs. Not only will businesses and the third sector be forced to lose important employees, there are not other skilled people to replace those jobs.

“I believe a much more reasonable system could be found for this law, such as having an industry-specific threshold, so in my case working in the media and for a charity is different than say someone in finance.”

An NUJ member who works at the BBC said: “I arrived in the UK 7 years ago to study my masters degree funded by an international NGO that only gives support to community leaders in developing countries. After I finished my masters I had two weeks work experience with the BBC World Service, during that time we were covering the Libyan uprising and when I joined the team and because of my Arabic language and my contacts in the region, the BBC World Service managed to do many exclusive interviews; one of them was the first interview with the head of the Libyan Transitional Council. This BBC interview made the headlines of all UK and international media on that day. I then got my first fixed term contract with the BBC.

“I have moved between the BBC Arabic service and the user generated content hub and because of my language and my contacts in the Arab world, the BBC can reach stories where English speaking journalists can't.

“During all these years I never took any benefits from the UK government, on the contrary I pay tax like any British citizen although I am not one. Being here for all these years I feel the UK is my home now, I have a community and life that I am afraid is threatened by the £35,000 minimum.

“I feel this is unfair and it will demolish all that I have built and worked for here.”

The NUJ is supporting members threatened by the latest immigration proposals and we are urging the government to consider industry-specific thresholds in the first instance.

The union is urging MPs to oppose the government's changes and support media workers from outside the European Economic Area because they provide valuable skills and knowledge that are beneficial to the UK media industry.