

Bioindustry Association submission: Global Talent Network – Implementation Discussion Document

March 2022



Summary of feedback on the Global Talent Network:

1. Access to international talent is fundamental to an innovative biotech sector. The BioIndustry Association (BIA) has consulted widely on the current immigration system and has used its knowledge of the sector's skills and talent landscape to inform this response to the discussion document
 - a. The Global Talent Network (GTN) aims to attract international talent to work in the UK. The BIA recommends a flexible approach is taken to maximise the attraction of suitable candidates to innovative biotech SMEs.
 - b. Measures to attract talent to the UK's biotech sector should include: publicising the significant levels of investment in the sector; signposting initial job, long term career and business opportunities; and showing how they fit in to the funding, investment, and entrepreneurial environment.
 - c. Sectors within scope of the GTN include key BIA innovation focus areas. There is a significant talent gap in the translation of innovative research to clinical and commercial manufacturing in the UK.
 - d. Partnership with the Department for International Trade (DIT) Global Entrepreneur Programme (GEP) and current initiatives such as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs), Collaborative Training Partnerships and funding streams for individual talent, such as Future Leaders Fellowships, should be considered to ensure the ecosystem is visibly linked to the attracted talent.
 - e. Key performance indicators should ensure quality of talent is balanced with quantity of individuals attracted to the UK. The BIA has established a strong network of organisations across the industry and could provide information and evidence to build these targets.

Introduction

2. The Bioindustry Association is the trade association for innovative life sciences in the UK. Our goal is to secure the UK's position as a global hub and as the best location for innovative research and commercialisation, enabling our world-leading research base to deliver healthcare solutions that can truly make a difference to people's lives.
3. Our members include:
 - Start-ups, biotechnology, and innovative life science companies
 - Pharmaceutical and technological companies
 - Universities, research centres, tech transfer offices, incubators, and accelerators
 - A wide range of life science service providers: investors, lawyers, IP consultants, and communications agencies
4. The UK biotech and life sciences sector delivers ground-breaking treatments to a diverse range of patients by creating novel therapies and diagnostics that will help treat and manage conditions enabling a wide scope of people to lead their lives. Access to international talent is fundamental to an innovative biotech sector and BIA has consulted widely on the current immigration system as well as business understanding of barriers to recruiting global talent. There is a strong international talent pipeline required for the life sciences

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industry, as BIA membership includes start-ups, biotechnology and large pharmaceutical and technology companies and a significant proportion of membership is drawn from the global life sciences community.

Q1. The GTN could be designed to link individuals to specific work opportunities in the UK, and/or it could lead them to general labour market requirements in the identified sectors. To which extent do you think the GTN should support businesses in this context? What are the risks with the proposed approach?

5. The BIA has been asked to respond to a Global Talent Network implementation discussion document. The core objectives will engage and attract international talent to work within the UK and BIA would recommend that this is flexible and adaptable to ensure suitable attraction to the innovative SME biotech community. Supporting industry to attract talent to the UK should include signposting both job and business opportunities and how they fit in to the funding, investment, and entrepreneurial environment.
6. Sectors within scope of the GTN include key BIA innovation focus areas of Genomics, Bioinformatics, and Engineering Biology. In addition, a significant, and well documented, talent gap is the translation of innovative research to clinical and commercial manufacturing within the UK. This is of particular interest to the rapidly growing Advanced Therapies industry and focus of the recent Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult [Skills Demand Survey 2021](#) and BIA would recommend Advanced Therapies Manufacturing, Bioprocessing and Engineering be added to the sectors in scope of the health and life sciences.

Q2. The GTN will look to attract talent at all career stages – graduates, those experienced in their industry, and exceptional talent. What do you think would incentivise these people to move to the UK, and how should these incentives be tailored to the different groups the GTN is targeting?

7. Skills gaps across the biotech sector are at all levels including apprenticeships, graduates, those with experience and exceptional talent. Measures to attract talent to the UK should include:
 - a. Publicising the significant level of investment in the UK, the funding environment and how to access the finance to build and grow a business, either within an existing organisation or as a start-up entrepreneur
 - b. Signposting career pathways and a long-term vision of career opportunities within the sector as well as opportunities for continued professional development to ensure early and mid-career talent can progress to future roles
 - c. Demonstrating the political support for the UK becoming a science superpower, reinforcing the long-term nature of STEM careers, support for visa applications and routes to settled status
 - d. Case studies showcasing the diversity of talent across the UK ecosystem and the inclusivity of the sector welcoming international talent to have successful careers across academia, research, and industry
 - e. Showcasing the international nature of the sector, the global academic and industrial collaborations, and the central position of the UK in the international scientific community
 - f. In addition, detailing cultural attractions across the UK, in particular the extensive arts and culture, access to good schools, world class academic and vocational education, the UK's open society, global connectedness, and pro-business environment

Q3. Do you agree with this approach?

8. The BIA actively supports entrepreneurs and welcomes the DIT Global Entrepreneur Programme (GEP) supporting individuals with a track record of entrepreneurship to both relocate their businesses and provide experienced mentorship. As there will be a high degree of overlap between their respective audiences, the BIA believes GTN should partner with DIT GEP to attract experienced and future entrepreneurs with the experience that could contribute to Science and Technology priority sectors in the UK providing mentorship from both industry and government.

Q4. Do you agree that the definition of “talent” should remain broad?

9. The definition of talent should remain open and flexible to ensure it covers the depth and breadth of current and future skills needs. Aligning the definition of talent with existing immigration routes would simplify access; however, consultation with BIA members shows that there is little use of the Global Talent Visa, innovator, or start-up routes. The skilled worker route is by far the most used route, with little benefit seen of using alternatives, as speed of application was the main consideration of visa route selection.
10. Feedback shows the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) is less useful than under the previous immigration systems as skilled worker routes are well understood and using the SOL adds additional administrative burden and time to the process. A considerable number of roles fall under the SOL and many within R&D functions do not, as the list is not updated sufficiently frequently to keep up to date with job titles in the sector. There is also a considerable number of jobs which span multiple occupations in SMEs which are not dedicated roles on the SOL and therefore there was mixed views on whether the SOL accurately reflected the skills gaps within the sector - an approach to thinking about the integration of skills should be considered.

Q5. How can you support the GTN UK-based Hub understand the current and future needs of the targeted sectors?

11. The BIA carries out sector analysis of the future skills need and could support the GTN UK-based Hub understand the current and future needs of our sector through dialogue with member companies and providing specific skills analysis.

Q6. What are, in your view, the key hurdles in attracting and retaining talented individuals from overseas?

12. Key challenges in attracting and retaining talented individuals from overseas include:
 - a. The length of time and complexity of the current UK skilled visa system and the lack of value added or time benefit from alternative visa routes. This includes the complexity of routes to settled status for both the talented individual and family members.. For recognised talent a fast-track visa route and simple communication on long term family status would encourage both attraction and retention.
 - b. The lack of awareness of the vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in the UK and long-term career opportunities to attract top talent and retain businesses within the UK. Access to funding, showcasing success and sign-posting career pathways across academia, research and industry would help to attract and retain talent. Showcasing the international nature of the sector, the global academic and industrial collaborations, and the central position of the UK in the international scientific community

13. International talent in life sciences is geographically mobile. With the end of free movement in the UK, organisations in the EU may look more appealing to EU nationals. Although working in the UK is perceived as a positive experience to have on a CV, the benefits of living and working in the UK, access to highly skilled careers in the sector and perception of UK life sciences should be made clear to those wanting to apply for jobs from outside the UK to attract more talent.

Q7. Where do you see the GTN adding value to existing initiatives (e.g. Knowledge Transfer Partnership, Chevening, Marshall Scholarships, etc).

14. The GTN can add value to existing initiatives such as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and could consider those that invest in individual talent such as Future Leaders Fellowships as well as academic relationships with industry such as Collaborative Training Partnerships. Attracting high performing graduate and post-graduate academic talent helps seed the early entrepreneurial community to establish in the UK.

Q8. We suggest setting numerical targets per sector and profession (e.g. number of individuals the GTN will attract per location/per year/per level of expertise). “Attracting individuals” implies that individuals will have decided to establish themselves in the UK and have taken up a work opportunity. Additional targets could be set to support of the Levelling-up agenda. Do you agree with this approach?

Q9. What metrics of success should be in scope?

Q10. What information and evidence do you have available to build those targets and to measure the impact of the GTN?

15. Key performance indicators should be used to establish the success and impact of the GTN and should ensure quality of talent is balanced with quantity of individuals attracted to the UK. Indicators of success could include the number of spin-out organisations, new businesses established, levels of funding/investment achieved and career progression. The BIA has established a strong network of organisations across the industry and could provide information and evidence to build these targets.

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