British immigration policy

SIR - Your article on immigration and business in Britain did not acknowledge how the government is introducing sensible, sustainable limits to immigration while still attracting the brightest and best students, entrepreneurs and investors ("A harder road", October 20th). For too long mass migration went uncontrolled, without any regard for the impact on public services or the labour market. So we are capping the number of work visas to focus on skilled workers and establishing a minimum salary requirement. If students can speak English and are attending an accredited institution, there is no limit on the number who can study here. Anyone who comes to Britain on a marriage visa must speak English and their spouse must earn enough money to keep them. These common-sense reforms are successfully bringing down net migration without damaging our international competitiveness. Our annual cap on visas has never been reached and not a single employer has been prevented from recruiting talented individuals from outside the European Union.

Meanwhile, the number of high-value migrants using our routes for investors and entrepreneurs doubled in the past year. Of course, there are vested interests who will oppose our policies but there is no evidence at all that uncontrolled immigration makes us better off. We are bringing down net migration and Britain is still open for business.

MARK HARPER MP
Minister for Immigration
London

SIR - It is surely impossible to argue that Britain's immigration policy is "crippling" business and the economy ("The Tories' worst policy", October 20th) when there is no limit to staff transfers between international companies and only half the available work permits have been taken up.

As for the reduction in student visas, that should be no surprise when a system riddled with abuse is tightened up. Your argument mainly concerns the impact of bureaucracy on growing companies. That certainly has to be looked at, but it would be quite wrong to ignore the very strong public demand, which you acknowledge, for immigration to be reduced.

Immigration is valuable when it is controlled. Both parts of this message must be delivered. Exaggerated complaints from businesses and universities convey a negative message to potential students, visitors and skilled workers.

SIR ANDREW GREEN
Chairman
MigrationWatchUK
Deddington, Oxfordshire

SIR - As one of the "planeeload of businessmen" who accompanied the prime minister to Asia in the spring and having recently recruited a foreign technical expert to our small high-tech company, I was delighted to see your leader on immigration. The fact that very few people were admitted last year under the highly qualified worker scheme is claimed by some to indicate low demand, but when we approached the UK Border Agency in February about a candidate, who would have met the highly qualified criteria, we were told that the scheme was closed and we had to apply under the "general" category.

Even when it is open, the highly qualified category has narrow and rigid criteria. For example, we needed someone to help license our technology to Japanese firms with native competence in Japanese, experience of the commercial culture in Japan and an understanding of our specialised field of automatic speech recognition, yet none of these assets counted directly towards our candidate being judged as highly qualified.

Despite using costly immigration consultants, it took us over four months to obtain the visa he needed under the general category (including a month of predictably pointless advertising in Britain). Since several of our successes in selling to Japanese corpora-

Readings of history

SIR - Your briefing on the role of textbooks in fostering national and sectarian antagonism was very much on point ("It ain't necessarily so", October 13th). This is particularly an issue in the Balkans. To meet this challenge the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in South-east Europe, headquartered in Thessaloniki, has for over 12 years developed, published, translated and disseminated a set of textbooks supplements that is now used by teachers in nine countries in the region. Prepared by distinguished historians the material covers politically sensitive periods from the Ottoman empire, the Balkan wars, the second world war and the rise of nation states, presenting a balanced approach that contrasts with some of the more nationalistic textbooks in use.

These histories provide teachers and students with an opportunity to understand their past from a different and more objective vantage point. It is a good model for other regions where it is, as yet, not feasible to change official textbooks but where teachers and students are receptive to thoughtful alternatives.

MATTHEW NIMETZ
Former under-secretary of state
New York

Not free to choose

SIR - You mentioned that Ayn Rand's books outsell Karl Marx's 60-fold, a fact that must be "gratifying" to fans of the strident critic of government intervention ("Who's shrugging now?", October 20th). That is an apples and oranges comparison. One reason for the disparity is that Marx's writings are available free online, whereas Rand's works still enjoy copyright protection and cannot be legally reproduced by any but the rights holder. Would this government-sanctioned monopoly over production similarly gratify her fans? Perhaps more importantly, would she have written those books without the financial incentives copyright creates?

DANA STEFANELLI
Arlington, Virginia

SIR - Rand espoused a theory of human behaviour that has never nor ever will match reality, a Utopian society of individuals behaving selfishly, in a self-regulated and moral fashion. It was and is an ideal of questionable foundation. What sweet irony, but apparently totally lost on the spokesmen from the pro-Rand think-tank in India, that her popularity in that country is partly based on a very much unregulated "thriving trade in pirated editions".

JOE KERRPATRICK
Irvine, California

To the polls!

SIR - As a native Pennsylvania, I paid special interest to your piece on voter-id laws in the state ("Eyes off the prize", October 20th). The founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn, wrote in "Some Fruits of Solitude" that, "Five things are requisite to a good officer: ability, clean hands, dispatch, patience and impartiality." Politicians and voters could do worse than pay attention to all five of those qualities ahead of the vote on November 6th. Regarding the hoopla surrounding voter-id laws, I'll leave the last word to Benjamin Franklin: "Experience keeps a dear school, yet fools will learn in no other."

JOAN BOZT
Hillersville, Pennsylvania