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The starting point in the immigration debate [1]

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At the Telegraph, Conservative MP Gavin Barwell says what for many Conservatives is the unsayable: that immigration is great for the economy [3]:

> Last week, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development published a report which showed that immigration makes a positive contribution to the public finances of many countries, including the UK. Yes, you read that right: migrants in the UK pay more in tax than they consume in public services (that?s not true of every migrant of course, but collectively they make a net contribution). Without them, we would have to make further cuts to public services or pay higher taxes or both. . . .
>
> We have to find a way to earn a living in an increasingly competitive world. Allowing the best and the brightest from around the world to come and study and work here can help us do that. So yes let?s make sure we have control of our borders, yes let?s tackle abuse, yes let?s talk about how many people and who we should allow to move here ? but don?t let?s delude ourselves that immigration is always bad news.

And that's the point. The one point I disagree with Barwell on is when he says that "nobody is claiming immigration significantly increases" GDP per capita. Well, I am. Letting immigrants locate in rich countries deepens the potential division of labour: hiring a Tanzanian accountant to look after my firm's finances instead of doing them myself frees me up to focus on whatever I'm best at.

That minor quibble aside, I'm delighted that Mr Barwell has decided to be brave about immigration policy. While there are legitimate debates to be had about access to public services and social cohesion, the starting-point in any discussion about restricting immigration should be that restrictions make us poorer.

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