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A cap on immigration will hurt Britain [1]

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Britain's immigration policy is wrong-headed and detrimental to its economy, as recent events have shown. (I should declare an interest as an immigrant from the Republic of Ireland now permanently resident in the UK.)

Many have followed the saga [3] of X-Factor contestant Gamu Nhengu. A talented singer, Gamu was seen as having a good chance of winning the talent show until doubts over her immigration status meant that she was removed from the show. The issue was that her mother allegedly claimed benefits while working, and it now seems likely that she will be deported to her home country of Zimbabwe.

Harry Phibbs has already written [4] on this topic over at ConservativeHome, and the case is an example of the problems in the British immigration system. Gamu is an adult ? why should what her mother does be relevant to her immigration status? And isn?t it a clear loss to Britain to lose this entertainer to a potentially brutal fate in Zimbabwe? Obviously Gamu is getting special attention because she is in the public eye ? how many others are deported in similar situations without any attention at all? It?s surprising that so many on the right are (correctly) sceptical about the effectiveness of government programmes, but forget this when considering the supposed need for immigration control.

More happily, the UK-based winners of both the Nobel Prize for Physics and Economics are immigrants [5] from Russia and Cyprus respectively. Whatever the full benefits of scientific breakthroughs taking place in the UK, it?s undoubtedly good for students at British universities to be taught by people of this calibre. Plenty of entrepreneurs come to Britain to escape worse regulatory environments and set up wealth-creating businesses. Many others come to work here and, as Bryan Caplan has recently been arguing [6] on his blog, even low-skilled immigrants increase the wages of native workers, if those immigrants are allowed to work.

Immigrants are good for everybody ? they make Britons richer and they make better lives for themselves. If there is a danger of ?welfare tourism?, an easy solution could be to charge for use of public services for a certain period of an immigrant?s time in the UK. But most immigrants who come to Britain don?t want to sponge off the country ? like Gamu Nhengu and the Nobel-winning Russian physicists at Manchester, they want to be the best they can in a free and open society. We should let them.

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