

Migration and the Future of Work



“The points system is dead, long live the points system!” A review of points-based immigration systems in the U.K.

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From 2021, the U.K. will have a new labour migration policy: an ‘Australian-style points-based immigration system’. This is the latest of several attempts to introduce something touted as a points-based system (PBS) in the U.K. over the past two decades. By some definitions, the U.K. already has a points system for non-EU citizens. In this talk, we ask why points-based systems have had such allure for U.K. politicians and what this tells us about the symbolic role of employment-based migration policies. We place the new points system in a broader historical context through a history of points systems in the U.K., from the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme introduced in 2002, to the five-tier points system introduced in 2008 and its post-Brexit replacement. We examine the policy narratives that have made these systems compelling to politicians and the public, their design, impacts and whether they can be considered effective, before reviewing some important features of the latest PBS, such as having lower salary thresholds for occupations where there are shortages. We conclude with some more general reflections on points systems, their appeal, effectiveness and future.