

EARNED CITIZENSHIP – THE LATEST GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS¹

The new 'earned citizenship' system is due to come into force from July 2011. This will, among other changes, add a new 'probationary citizenship' stage to the naturalisation process. The new system will effectively make becoming a British citizen longer and more difficult. The government now wants to add to the 'earned citizenship' system, with a series of new proposals released in August 2009. MRN has serious concerns about the government's latest proposals and the ethos behind them, in particular:

- **Bringing in a new 'points test' for those applying for British citizenship.** The new paper suggests bringing in an additional test for migrants, probably before they applied for probationary citizenship. This would mean that only those people who are able to clock up enough 'points' would be able to move towards citizenship. Under a points test migrants would gain extra points for showing they have particular qualities – likely to include high earning potential, special qualifications and high English language skills. On the other hand, migrants could also lose points for 'failure to integrate into British life'. Family members and refugees would pass the points test if they could show that they had a continuing family relationship or need for protection so the test would mainly affect economic migrants in the UK. MRN is concerned that a points test would add to the already objectionable 'earned citizenship' framework, and that there is no justification for these changes. The main outcome of a points test would be to disadvantage many migrants coming to the UK to live and work, who if they had applied under the current system could have reasonably expected to settle here.
- **Introducing additional English language and Life in the UK tests.** Migrants moving towards citizenship could be required to take **two** Life in the UK tests, at the beginning and the end of their probationary citizenship period. People taking the 'ESOL with Citizenship' test could also be required to take two tests. The current Life in the UK/ESOL with Citizenship tests have not yet been shown to have any beneficial effect on migrants' local integration or sense of belonging. MRN is concerned that introducing additional tests would add pressure to migrants without serving any wider purpose.
- **Introducing (compulsory, paid-for) local orientation days for migrants.** Although orientation days aimed at helping migrants to settle into local communities would be welcome, in this document the government envisages that they could be both compulsory and paid for by migrants. This would be completely unfair.

What can you do?

- **A government consultation** is underway at the moment. Read all the documents, including the full proposal, at: www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/managingborders/managingmigration/earned-citizenship/points-test-citizenship/. Anyone can take part in the consultation, either by filling in the form on the website above, or by writing a letter to the Home Office before the deadline of 26th October. The government needs to hear how these changes would affect people's lives, so **it is very important that as many people and organisations as possible respond to the consultation**. If you decide to hold a local meeting to discuss these proposals then do let us know.
- **Regional consultation events** – As part of the consultation on new changes to citizenship, regional consultation events are planned. They are not public meetings but if you have the chance to go to one, then don't pass up the opportunity to voice your opinions.
- **Contact your local MP** – None of these changes are certain to happen and your local MP could be a useful source of support in campaigning against them.

We will keep providing comment on the citizenship process, and on other developments in immigration and asylum policy, in the MRN news bulletin and on the MRN website and blog, accessible at: www.migrantsrights.org.uk.

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