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## A new way to earn UK citizenship

**Analysis**  
By **Dominic Casciani**  
BBC News home affairs reporter

### Migration is a journey - and the British government wants to make it a little bit longer and harder to complete.

Home Secretary Jacqui Smith has published proposals to overhaul how a migrant becomes a UK citizen.



Fitting in: How do you measure integration?

And the big theme is that migrants will need to take extra steps to "earn" citizenship and become fully-paid up members of society.

Ministers say that when a migrant steps into the arrivals lounge, that should not be the end of the journey they take to living in Britain.

In future, they will need to spend the next six to eight years proving their worth to the UK as part of a personal journey and contract with British society.

#### THE NEW SYSTEM

- Temporary resident: Five years in most cases
- Probationary Citizen: Minimum one year
- British Citizen: Full rights

At present, an immigrant living in the UK can apply for permanent settlement after about five years.

But that can often be the end of the process - there is no compulsion to take the final step towards becoming a British citizen.

So it's this conveyor belt of belonging that will now change.

Under the new system, ministers say migrants - excluding those from the EEA - will pass through three clear stages.

At first they will be classed as temporary residents - the status they receive as a worker, relative or recognised refugee.

After five years they will be given an entirely new status for a minimum of another 12 months - "probationary citizen".

This probationary status will ultimately lead to someone becoming a British citizen or permanent foreign resident - or being told it's time to move on.

#### On probation

The critical difference between the current situation is around the idea of a probationary period. During this phase migrants will no longer have access to a full range of benefits that are currently available to permanently-settled

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foreign nationals.

The home secretary says probationary citizenship seeks to address national concerns about how well people are integrating into society.

In other words, it will no longer be enough for a migrant to prove they are living in the UK - they will have to prove that they are actively taking steps to fit in.

So how will they be expected to do this?

Migrants will effectively be required to jump through more hoops.

They will have to show that not only have they made some effort to learn English - but they are making progress.

They will have to obey the law and where possible prove they are "active citizens".

On criminality, the equation is simple. Serious crimes will become a bar to achieving citizenship - and may lead to deportation. Minor offences would slow down the process.

Active citizenship is more nebulous. Assessors will be looking for proof that someone is more than just a taxpayer - and the more "active" they are in the local community the quicker their journey to citizenship will become.

Acceptable activities could include proof of voluntary work, of being involved in local groups or the school parent-teacher association. Migrants will need to find referees to vouch for these good deeds.

The scheme's architects think this idea of active citizenship will make the journey from migrant to citizen much more significant because it creates social contract between individuals and their new society.

Crucially, ministers believe migrants would meet more British people more quickly and learn more quickly how to integrate.

### Question of benefits

But there are some tougher measures still.

The government says it recognises that the past few years of record migration and mobility have created pressures on public services.

Under the proposals, would-be migrants will pay a levy on their normal visa fees for a national local impacts fund.

The Home Office says this could be operational from April 2009 and raise tens of millions of pounds.

This has already led to

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“ We had to get our people to adapt to this new life so that they would be accepted, rather than rejected ”

Mahendra Kaul, presenter of BBC 1960s series to help people integrate

[How TV tried to integrate migrants](#)



The Prince of Wales at the first citizenship ceremony in 2004

accusations that migrants, who are net contributors to the economy, will become "cash cows" who are being denied reasonable rights.

Secondly, there is the issue of withheld benefits. Migrants who are clearly settled but not naturalised currently have access to all main benefits, along with the right to send their children to school and use the NHS.

Other than schools, this picture may change dramatically. The new system proposes withholding a dozen key benefits for anyone who has not reached the final stage of citizenship or permanent foreign resident.

We don't know at this stage whether or not that will include access to some or all of the NHS. This means all options are open ahead of consultation late this year.

Ministers know there is currently enormous concern among some grassroots Labour supporters about the effect of migration, particularly in areas that have seen significant upheaval since the arrival of Eastern European workers - although some angry Labour MPs say these new workers will not be affected by the changes because of EU rules.

Nevertheless, there is some anger and a perception that newcomers have become entitled to benefits in society without having first earned their way. These reforms are directly targeted at those fears.

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