



Home Office

Professor Brian Bell
Migration Advisory Committee
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Dear Brian

RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW OF THE SHORTAGE OCCUPATION LISTS

I am very grateful to the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) for its thoughtful and comprehensive report on the Shortage Occupations Lists (SOLs). Whilst the call for evidence was no doubt impacted by the challenges created by the Coronavirus pandemic, the high-quality analysis of the evidence provided is clear.

As you will be aware, whether an occupation is in shortage will be one of the key factors for which a migrant will be able to score tradeable points under the UK's Points-Based Immigration System, and therefore continued operation of the SOLs is essential. However, the Government's careful consideration of the MAC's findings and recommendations must be against the backdrop of the global pandemic and its continuing impact – not only in relation to overseas migrants' ability to travel to the UK, but also the very uncertain future many resident workers in the UK are unfortunately facing.

Furthermore, whilst Home Office analysts have carefully considered the possible impacts of the new immigration system, making best use of existing evidence and data – quite often provided by the MAC – the fact is, Coronavirus is not the only uncertainty. Looking specifically at the new Skilled Worker route, which launches on 1 December, we will need time to monitor its impact on migration flows and the labour market, and whether this is in line with our detailed planning assumptions.

You will be very aware the UK labour market is changing rapidly and it will, no doubt, have changed since I commissioned this report and since you considered your recommendations. At this time, the Government has decided not to immediately accept any of the recommendations contained in the MAC's SOL report.


Before making any changes to the SOLs, we believe it is right to pause and assess how the UK labour market develops and how quickly recovery is evidenced post-Covid 19 and in response to the introduction of the new Points-Based Immigration System, in terms of overall numbers, understanding migrant and employer behaviours, and where incoming migrants go (both geographically and by sector).

Not to forget assessing the impact of a range of unprecedented measures we have taken during the pandemic and recently launched policies, including the new Health and Care visa and the relaunched Global Talent route.

We have always been clear we want to introduce a system which can be adapted and adjusted subject to social and economic circumstances. We also want employers to prioritise and invest in those people already in the UK, a point you recognise as being of vital importance in relation to the social care sector, upskilling our current work force rather than automatically seeking to bring in the skills and talents we need from overseas.

As you know, freedom of movement continues until the end of this year and any EEA or Swiss national who arrives in the UK by then, and applies to the EU Settlement Scheme by 30 June 2021, will continue to enjoy unrestricted work rights. There have been over 4 million applications already. This provides employers with additional flexibility in the short term while we give further considerations to the Committee's recommendations.

We are absolutely not rejecting the advice of the MAC, which continues to be invaluable in ensuring a wide range of views are captured and expertly scrutinised, providing the much needed element of transparency. At this stage, given the reasons outlined above, we intend to continue scrutinising the recommendations to ensure our approach to applying them aligns with the UK labour market, and will consider whether to implement some or all of them in a forthcoming set of changes to the Immigration Rules in 2021. When and how we reach decisions on the recommendations contained in this report will also impact on the timeline for future reviews of the SOLs by the MAC.

With our good wishes


Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary