



MIGRATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Migration Advisory Committee**

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Peel Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

25 August 2022

Kevin Foster MP  
Minister for Safe and Legal Migration  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Dear Kevin,

Thank you for your letter of 24 August 2022 asking the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to review the Shortage Occupation List (SOL). We accept this commission, but before commencing we need to ask for your views on an important issue that has arisen as a result of our preparations for this SOL review.

You have asked us to move towards basing the SOL on the updated SOC 2020 occupation classification and this is in line with a previous MAC recommendation. We have recently become aware of an issue with how the Office for National Statistics (ONS) have collected and applied these new occupational codes to various datasets that we use to inform our recommendations on the SOL and that Home Office use to determine eligibility for the Skilled Worker route. At present we do not have any confidence in this data such that we can reasonably use it to make any recommendations. ONS have announced that they will provide an update in September on the scale of the issue and how long it will take to fix.

In the light of this, one option is to continue using SOC 2010 for this SOL review. We are not aware of any issues with data based on this classification. It would, however, mean that we cannot use timely information for some of our indicators of shortage as ONS stopped providing labour market data directly using SOC 2010 at the end of 2020. This seems particularly problematic given the substantial labour market changes that have occurred as the pandemic has eased. It would also perpetuate the use of an out-dated set of occupational classifications.

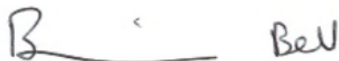
The alternative, which we would recommend, is that we delay the commencement of the commission until the ONS has provided their update. If the update identifies only minor problems confined to a narrow range of occupations, we expect to be able to use the new SOC 2020 classification and move forward reasonably promptly in beginning the commission. If the update identifies more serious problems, we will need to review the issue at that point and decide either to delay the commission until such time as ONS has fully resolved the issue or base the SOL review on SOC 2010.

We recognise how frustrating this will be to stakeholders who have been waiting for the SOL review to begin. However, it is crucial that our recommendations are evidence-based, and that we have confidence in that evidence. We would welcome your views on this issue, and I am happy to meet you, or your officials, to discuss it in detail.

Given the long delays in getting this commission to us and the issues raised by SOC 2020 we will need to ask for more time to complete this review than envisaged in the commissioning letter. However, it is our intention to report to you as early in Spring 2023 as possible; we will update you on a more precise timescale following clarity around the approach to occupation classification. We will also provide a response to the other issues raised in the commissioning letter closer to the launch of our Call for Evidence.

On behalf of the Migration Advisory Committee,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'B' followed by a horizontal line and the name 'Bell' written in a cursive script.

Brian Bell  
Chair, Migration Advisory Committee