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Skilled Migration Cap Under Consideration to Prioritise British Workforce Development

August 6, 2025

— Categories: *Breaking News*



The Home Office is considering the introduction of a cap on the number of skilled foreign workers allowed to enter the United Kingdom under a newly proposed system aimed at reducing net migration and encouraging domestic workforce training. The proposal is part of a broader strategy to shift focus away from long-term reliance on overseas labour and towards the development of a skilled British workforce.

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper has commissioned a new Labour Market Evidence Group (LMEG), chaired by Professor Brian Bell, who also leads the Migration Advisory Committee. The group has been tasked with advising on plans to limit access to foreign labour, especially in sectors experiencing skill shortages, unless employers take concrete steps to train domestic workers.

A central component of the proposal is the potential introduction of an annual or monthly cap on the number of skilled foreign workers allowed under shortage occupation routes. Professor Bell noted in an interview with *The Telegraph* that there is scope for a “temporary shortage list” to address genuine shortfalls, but also warned of the risk of excessive recruitment without proper checks. “The Home Secretary is certainly interested in the idea of an emergency stop,” he stated.

Under the new approach, only graduate-level jobs would qualify for overseas recruitment, replacing the previous threshold set at A-level or equivalent. This change would immediately exclude approximately 120 non-graduate occupations—such as retail workers and chefs—from access to foreign recruitment by the end of 2025. Those roles would be expected to begin domestic hiring and consider automation or internal upskilling programmes.

However, around 60 non-graduate roles that are considered essential to the UK’s industrial and infrastructure strategy may temporarily remain eligible for international recruitment. These include welders, electricians, construction workers, plumbers, car mechanics, painters, decorators, data analysts, and shipbuilders. These sectors will only retain access if they develop realistic and measurable training plans for British workers.

Professor Bell stressed that sectors failing to deliver on training promises would lose their eligibility to recruit from overseas. “If a sector has said ‘we’re going to train 10,000 bricklayers’, and they train 100, then we’re going to say ‘well, tough, you’re on your own now,’” he said. Employers would be expected to commit to “clear and deliverable” plans as a condition of continued access to foreign labour markets.

To prevent undercutting of market wages, salary thresholds specific to each shortage occupation will be implemented, with some potentially set above prevailing market rates to further incentivise domestic training. Professor Bell remarked, “If you’re saying that the problem is that you can’t get these workers and they’re crucial to what you’re doing, well, you might pay a bit more for that.”

He also confirmed that workers who have already entered the country under the current points-based immigration system would be able to renew their visas. However, the Home Office has not yet clarified whether these individuals will retain the right to apply for indefinite leave to remain under future immigration policy changes.

The LMEG will continue reviewing the list of eligible occupations over the next 12 months, assessing each role based on its relevance to the UK’s economic needs, the

existence of authentic labour shortages, and the industry's commitment to upskilling the domestic workforce.

This proposed shift in immigration policy represents a firm stance on reducing dependence on foreign labour, while encouraging British employers to invest in local talent and long-term workforce sustainability.