

25 May 2023

Professor Brian Bell
The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC)

Dear Professor Bell

Shortage Occupation List: call for evidence

Universities UK (UUK) and the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) are grateful for the opportunity to respond to the MAC's call for evidence on the shortage occupation list (SOL). Universities UK is the collective voice of 140 universities across the UK, and UCEA represents the views of 173 higher education institutions (HEIs) in their capacity as employers. This letter is in support of our formal submission to the review.

We fully support the government's ambition to secure the UK's position as a science and technology superpower. Realising this vision requires an immigration system that is able to attract and retain international staff across the different stages of an individual's career. After all, the success of our world-class higher education sector depends on a large and varied base of skilled staff members. With universities competing internationally for talent, many of our university members use the SOL as an important mechanism to attract international staff members which is why we welcome the opportunity to provide evidence regarding this call for evidence.

Before outlining those roles which we believe it is essential to be included within the SOL, we would like to raise our concerns about the decision to abolish the salary threshold discount for occupations subject to a binding going rate and the subsequent narrowing of the roles eligible for inclusion on the SOL. Allowing only occupations for which the going rate falls between £20,960 and £26,200 to be considered for inclusion is like to have an adverse impact on the higher education sector and on universities' ability to recruit to certain roles. In a survey of UUK's members, 18 different SOC codes were raised by our members as roles for which they currently use the SOL that would now no longer be eligible for inclusion. The full list of these can be found at Annexe A. Most frequently raised by our members was

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2136 (Programmers and Software Development Professionals), followed by 2129 (Engineering Professionals NEC) and 2135 (IT Business Analysts, Architects and Systems Designers).

While we understand the MAC's concern that applying a salary discount appears a perverse way to address a skills shortage, our members have told us that the inclusion of these roles on the SOL is key to attracting talent where recruiting from the domestic labour market is difficult, particularly given these are roles which require significant training and expertise. Members are concerned that excluding these roles from the SOL will lead to the reduction of already small talent pools. The knock-on effects of this include preventing growth in specialist fields and the hampering of universities' ability to deliver their teaching to students, as well as affecting their research.

There are other benefits to being on the SOL such as visa discounts, including for dependants, which make the UK attractive for international candidates even if their salaries are above the general salary threshold. Members have raised concerns that exclusion of these roles from the SOL may mean that international candidates are no longer interested in working in the UK because of the loss of the visa fee discounts. As well as this, members are limited in their ability to increase salaries to attract candidates in lieu of inclusion on the SOL, for example, due to universities having well-established pay and grading structures, and because of the need to avoid causing pay disparity with domestic staff members. Concerns about salary are further exacerbated by the increase to salary thresholds. Our members have told us that recruiting to roles under SOC code 2311 (Higher Education Teaching Professionals) and 2119 (Natural and Social Science Professionals NEC) is likely to be increasingly difficult because if staff do not qualify for the new entrant rate or are able to use any other tradeable points, they may not qualify for a Skilled Worker visa.

We would also like to raise our concerns about the potential impact on equality, diversity and inclusion that limiting the criteria for inclusion of SOL may have. Our analysis of HESA data (see Annexe B) indicates that many of the occupations that would no longer be eligible for the SOL due to changes to the salary threshold discount are male-dominated, and are concerned about the impact this may have on gender pay gaps. We are also concerned that the changes may prevent staff from reducing their hours or working part-time because it may bring them in tension with the salary threshold. This may have a detrimental impact on particular groups, for example people with caring responsibilities, disabled people and women. We urge the MAC to fully consider the EDI implications of the decision to abolish the salary threshold discount, and to undertake and publish an equality impact assessment before final decisions are made.

In our submission, we have provided evidence on the occupations we would like to see included on the SOL within the criteria set out in the MAC's call for evidence. This is included in full in our submission, but the SOC codes listed in our response are 4215 (Personal Assistants and Other Secretaries), 3119 (Science, Engineering and Production Technicians), 3111 (Laboratory Technicians), 3543 (Marketing Associate Professionals) and 3212 (IT User Support Technicians).

We would welcome the chance to discuss our submission with you in greater detail. Please let us know if we can be of any further assistance to the committee as you look to compile your evidence.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JA', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jamie Arrowsmith

Director, Universities UK International

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Israni', with a long horizontal line underneath.

Roshan Israni

Deputy Chief Executive, UCEA