

24 June 2020



Professor Brian Bell
Migration Advisory Committee (MAC)
2nd Floor Peel Building
Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Professor Bell,

Shortage occupation list (SOL): call for evidence

I am writing further to the online submission by the University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) to the SOL call for evidence to provide additional information in support of our submission. UCEA represents the views of higher education institutions (HEIs) across the UK in their capacity as employers. UCEA is a membership body funded by subscriptions from 161 HEIs in the UK, in addition to eight sector associate members. Our purpose is to support our member HE employers in delivering excellent and world-leading higher education and research by representing their interests as employers and facilitating their work in delivering effective employment and workforce strategies. This letter provides additional considerations and context which could not be accommodated within the online consultation form.

As you are aware, the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has impacted hugely on organisations and businesses across the UK including the higher education (HE) sector. The sector is facing a high level of uncertainty with regard to the recruitment of home and international students and there are significant financial consequences to this. We recognise that the MAC acknowledges the impact of the pandemic in its call for evidence. As a result of the pandemic the response from our members to the call for evidence has therefore been limited but nevertheless there are a number of occupations at Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) level 3-5 which the evidence indicates should be considered for inclusion in the SOL.

In order to submit a response to the call for evidence we have liaised with Universities UK (UUK). UUK undertook a survey of members based on the MAC survey in order to develop a submission which we supported to save our members receiving two separate requests at this busy time. A significant number of HE employers are members of both UCEA and UUK and we have therefore used the evidence provided by 23 UCEA members to the UUK survey in forming our online submission and this letter. The UCEA respondents cover the devolved nations of the UK and include both pre-92 and post 92 institutions. We fully endorse and support the points made to the MAC by UUK in their letter in support of their submission.

Based on the evidence provided by members about difficulties in recruiting to particular roles we ask the MAC to consider the following roles for inclusion in the SOL at RQF 3-5:

- Technician roles such as laboratory technician (SOC code 3111), IT operation and user support technicians (SOC code 3131 and 3132), science and engineering technicians (SOC code 3119), and building and civil engineering

technicians (SOC code 3114). Around 25% of the roles that HEIs reported difficulties in recruiting were to technician roles.

- IT and digital/web/software development roles. According to the UCEA workforce survey 2019, over three quarters of all HEIs reported at least moderate difficulty recruiting IT support staff.

HEIs seek to recruit the best talent for their roles from both the UK and overseas and the recruitment of high-calibre and suitable staff to technical, IT and software/digital roles is essential. These roles play a key part in the delivery of the UK's HE sector world class teaching and research and contribute directly to upskilling the future UK workforce. The 2018-19 HESA data shows that there are currently 19,803 technical staff in HEIs who contribute to academic work in a technical capacity providing laboratory and IT support including data analysis. It is important that HEIs can access the technical and IT talent they need. Whilst technician roles are classified within RQF levels 3-5, they require highly specialised expertise, reflected by the 77% of technicians who hold a degree (RQF 6). However HESA data shows that only 8% hold a PhD and would not therefore benefit from the ability to trade a PhD qualification and receive the appropriate discounts under the new points-based system.

The UCEA Workforce survey 2019 asked HEIs the main reasons for the recruitment difficulties experienced. HEIs noted that salary expectations in comparison to the private sector were a barrier to recruiting technicians and IT staff. HEIs mentioned also that many IT support staff were based in London and the South East but may not qualify for relocation support. Competition between HEIs was more common for laboratory technicians.

We would also like to highlight to the MAC that the role that HEIs most frequently reported difficulties in recruiting was to higher education teaching professionals (SOC code 2311). Whilst this role is at RQF 6 and therefore falls outside of the scope of the call for evidence we ask the MAC to note that HEIs reported recruitment difficulties in the following subject areas in particular: nursing and midwifery, finance and accounting, business management and quantity surveyor.

We would reiterate the point made by UUK in their response to the call for evidence that the recommendation of the MAC in January this year to move the data source for the 'going rate' for PhD level roles including SOC code 2311 from HE salary scales to ASHE pay data may exacerbate these already existing skill shortages and we ask the MAC to reconsider this decision. It is also the case that only a very small percentage of HE teaching professionals in nursing, midwifery and allied health hold PhDs and would not benefit from the discounts to the 'going rate' salary thresholds under the points based system. UCEA will be writing to the Minister for Immigration and the Minister for Health shortly in this regard.

We would be happy to discuss this letter and our submission with you further and provide any further information which you may find helpful.

Yours sincerely



Raj Jethwa
Chief Executive