

## News

## Sector-specific immigration system needed post-Brexit, minister suggests

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By **Annie Makoff**

Experts welcome government consultation on tightened migration controls, as Pret A Manger says it could face a staffing 'crisis' without EU workers

The UK will need a "bespoke immigration system" post-Brexit, which could see EU migrants facing different rules depending on the sector they work in, immigration minister Robert Goodwill has suggested.

Appearing before the House of Lords economics affairs committee earlier this week, Goodwill told peers that business and industry would be consulted during the summer on the new immigration policy, which would create tighter controls on the number of EU migrants coming into the UK post-Brexit, while providing some flexibility over migration rules across different sectors.

Rachel Marangozov, senior research fellow at the Institute for Employer Studies, director of MigrationWork CIC and expert adviser to the European Commission European Social Fund Thematic Network on migrants, said the government's biggest challenge would be deciding which sectors to prioritise.

"Sectors reliant on EU migrants range from health and social care to hospitality and agriculture, and they'll all be looking to secure some kind of priority access to future EU workers," she said.

Attempting to reassure UK businesses there would be **no "cliff edge" change in the UK's EU migration policy**, Goodwill acknowledged to peers the reliance many British businesses currently have on staff from other European countries, and promised companies would be given time to adjust to the new system. In the long term, the government is committed to developing the skills of British staff to help fill skills gaps while aiming to reduce net migration to below 100,000, he said.

Sophie Barrett-Brown, senior partner and head of the UK practice at global immigration specialists Laura Devine Solicitors, said it was "encouraging" that the government was considering a system for EU immigration that sits outside the "onerous bureaucratic elements" of the current system for non-EU workers.

She said: "A more light-touch, agile approach to immigration for EU workers in specific sectors of the UK economy is likely to be essential for many high and low-skill occupations and sectors alike – including agriculture, hospitality, banking and finance. Yet without a more flexible approach, some sectors will face a real recruitment crisis. With it, the vocal proponents of much stricter immigration

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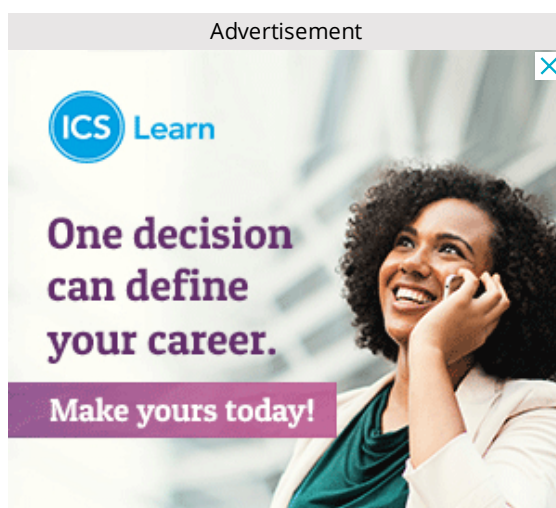
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Meanwhile, the National Farmers' Union (NFU) told peers **the lack of access to a flexible and competent workforce post-Brexit** would have "a number of consequences" for the sector, which currently relies heavily on EU citizens. NFU deputy president Minette Batters warned that the reduction in EU labour would impact on crop numbers and investment, as well as increase food price inflation for consumers. She called on the government to provide guarantees for EU citizens already working in the sector to have the right of residency.

The committee also heard evidence from the British Hospitality Association, which said it could take 10 years to replace EU staff after Britain left the EU.

In February People Management reported that EU migration levels were falling, prompting fears over future talent. At the time, Gerwyn Davies, CIPD labour market adviser, said the fall in numbers was likely to have a "disproportionate impact" on SMEs and low-skilled sectors such as retail and hospitality.

"The figures should sound another warning to employers to widen their recruitment channels and redouble their efforts to make jobs more attractive to applicants from underutilised groups by offering flexible working options and clear progression routes," he said.



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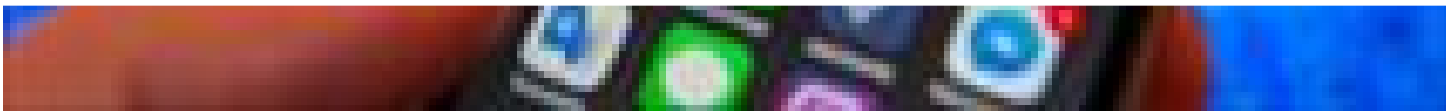
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