

CWB Item 4.2

**Migration Advisory Committee Call for Evidence on Skills Shortages**

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| **Summary and Recommendations**   1. As part of COSLA’s continued commitment to highlight the positive benefits of migration and make the case that a reduction of in-migration to Scotland from European Economic Area (EEA) countries will adversely impact on Scotland’s local authorities, COSLA is providing a response to the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) call for evidence on the Shortage Occupation List. This response is particularly important in the context of the UK Government’s planned introduction of a new immigration system, and in the light of the significant challenges faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. 2. This paper invites members of the Community Wellbeing Board to: 3. Discuss key areas of concern that should be included in COSLA’s response to the MAC call for evidence. |

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| **References**  Previous reports on MAC calls for evidence**:**   * 19-11-08 CWB Board – Response to MAC Salary Threshold and Points Based System Consultation |

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**June 2020**



**Migration Advisory Committee Call for Evidence on Skills Shortages**

# Purpose

1. As part of COSLA’s ongoing commitment to highlight the positive benefits of migration and to lobby for a post-Brexit immigration system that can meet Scotland’s economic, workforce and demographic needs on a local, as well as a national level, COSLA will respond to the current call for evidence on the UK and Scotland Shortage Occupation Lists (SOL).
2. Board members are asked to discuss key areas of concern that should be included in COSLA’s response to the MAC call for evidence.

**What is changing?**

1. The Immigration and Social Security (EU Withdrawal) Bill 2020 will end free movement of persons and is currently at Committee stage of the Parliamentary process. COSLA has consistently argued that the continuation of free movement is the most advantageous system for Scotland.
2. The UK Government published a policy statement in February 2020 setting out a new points-based immigration system, which will apply to EU and non-EU citizens. The system will replace free movement, and if there is no extension of the Transition Period, will come into place 1st January 2021.  COSLA has serious concerns about how this new immigration system will impact on our local economy, workforce and our ability to counteract our demographic challenges, in comparison to the benefits that we have experienced under free movement.
3. Furthermore, to introduce a stringent immigration system at the same time as we are experiencing the damaging effects of COVID-19 will have significant implications for Scottish Local Government, for our economy and our workforce.
4. The Home Secretary commissioned the MAC to compile a UK SOL, which will cover medium-skill occupations (A-levels and equivalent). The SOL is a government compiled list of occupations for which the evidence suggests there are not enough UK workers to fill vacancies.
5. The MAC launched a 6-week call for evidence to review the SOL, in which they want to hear organisations’ views on the roles that are being filled by migrant workers, the salaries they are paid and implications of potential changes. The deadline for the call is 24th June.
6. Whether an occupation is in shortage will be one of the key factors for which a migrant will be able to score tradeable points and therefore the SOL will play an important part of the future immigration system.
7. There will be separate Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish SOLs, as well as the UK-wide SOL.
8. According to the UK Government policy paper *The UK’s points-based immigration system,* if the occupation is designated in shortage by MAC the salary threshold (£25,600) will be lowered by 20%.

# Current COSLA Position

1. COSLA has consistently supported the stance that Scotland has benefited from freedom of movement and we have argued that its continuation would be the most advantageous system for Scotland. However, in the absence of that, our priority is that a future immigration system enables Local Government and employers to attract and retain migrant workers, particularly in key sectors where we are facing skills gaps and shortages. Our immigration system should also give us the ability to encourage inward migration and incentivise young people to work and settle within areas of Scotland where local populations are facing the sharpest decline.
2. COSLA responded to the MAC’s call for evidence on the points-based immigration system and salary threshold in November 2019. The submission was prepared by COSLA in consultation with our member councils. We received formal written evidence from a total of 16 local authorities. These are: Aberdeen City Council, Angus Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Dumfries & Galloway Council, East Ayrshire Council, East Lothian Council, East Renfrewshire Council, Falkirk Council, Fife Council, Glasgow City Council, Highland Council, North Ayrshire Council, Scottish Borders Council, Shetland Islands Council, South Ayrshire Council, and South Lanarkshire Council.
3. The key points highlighted in our response were as follows:

* Migration is crucial to Scotland’s economy, to Scottish local authorities and to our local communities. COSLA and our member authorities recognise that Scotland has benefited significantly from membership of the single market, and the continuation of free movement of people would be the most advantageous system for Scotland.
* COSLA and our member councils are calling for a flexible immigration system that can meet Scotland’s economic, workforce and demographic needs. This must be responsive to local as well as national needs.
* The salary threshold is currently too high and is a barrier to many occupations in our key sectors and in some local areas. There should be more focus on the value and need of the job, rather than on an arbitrary salary threshold.
* There should be no minimum salary, other than the Scottish Local Government Living Wage.
* We support the position of awarding points based on parts of the country in need of increased population.
* Scottish local authorities must have a greater role in monitoring and addressing our immediate and projected labour shortages.

**Proposed COSLA Position**

1. COSLA is concerned about the lack of scrutiny and avenues to influence the new immigration system. The MAC call provides a narrow avenue to ensure some of Scottish Local Government’s needs are considered in the new immigration system post-Brexit.
2. Due to the tight deadline and councils’ capacity at this challenging time, we will primarily draw on the wealth of evidence we have already received for our response to the MAC call in November. However, we are working with councils to garner any further thoughts they have in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and will incorporate these into our response. This work is also highlighted in a paper that will be taken to COSLA Leaders (12th June) to discuss UK-EU negotiations.
3. Particular issues in relation to the Health and Social Care sector will be key points in our response. The response will highlight the challenges of an ageing population, the high demand for care workers and employers’ struggles to recruit to these posts. This situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and will have serious implications for the sector.
4. Education / Early Learning and Childcare will also be emphasised in our response. The statutory duty on local authorities to provide expanded early years and childcare from August has been suspended. However, there are still serious implications for the Early Years and Childcare workforce for the future. Also, there will be implications regarding teacher numbers and sponsoring probationary teachers when stringent immigration rules are extended to EEA citizens.

**Next Steps**

1. Members’ views on key areas of concern that should be included in COSLA’s response to the MAC are welcomed.
2. COSLA will continue to seek every opportunity to lobby the MAC and UK Government for a flexible post-Brexit immigration system that works for every part of the country and will respond to the current consultation accordingly.

**June 2020**