



Welsh Affairs Committee

Monday, 2 March 2026

Mike Tapp MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office

Re: Withdrawal of the visa concession for temporary employment as sheep shearers

Dear Minister,

In November 2025, the Welsh Affairs Committee, which I chair, published the Report of its inquiry *Farming in Wales in 2025: Challenges and Opportunities*. Our Report set out the importance of farming to the culture, economy, and community in Wales, and noted that “the characteristics and composition of farms in Wales differ from elsewhere in the UK. More than 90% of Wales’ land area is dedicated to agriculture, significantly above the UK average of 69%.”

The importance of UK Government policies being developed in such a way that they adequately reflect the particular needs of agriculture in Wales was a key theme of the evidence we heard and illustrated clearly in the findings of our inquiry. Consequently, we recommended that “the UK Government needs to take specific account of the unique cultural, environmental and economic circumstances of farming in Wales when making future policy decisions which have direct implications for the agricultural sector in Wales”.

An issue not covered in the Report, but recently raised with the Committee by Welsh farmers, is the withdrawal of the visa concession for temporary employment as sheep shearers. We are aware that this has caused some concern within the agricultural sector in Wales, in particular because of the time-critical nature of the work, the importance to animal welfare, and the long-standing successful operation of the scheme.

To help us better understand the implications for the agricultural sector in Wales of the withdrawal of visa concessions for sheep shearers, I would be grateful if you could answer the following questions:

- What is the UK Government’s assessment of (a) the number of sheep shearers required for the 2026 shearing season across the UK; and (b) the demand for sheep shearers from agricultural businesses based in Wales?



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- What is the UK Government's assessment of the number of UK-based skilled sheep shearers available for the 2026 shearing season?
- What discussions have Home Office and DEFRA Ministers had with the Welsh Government on the withdrawal of the visa concession for temporary employment as sheep shearers?
- Has the Home Office or DEFRA produced a Wales-specific assessment of the potential impact of the withdrawal of the visa concession for temporary employment as sheep shearers?

I would be grateful for a response by Friday 20 March.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Jones MP
Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee

Ruth Jones MP
Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

13 March 2026

Dear Ruth

Thank you for your letter regarding the visa concession for temporary employment as a sheep shearer in the UK.

Concessionary arrangements are exceptional, temporary and subject to regular Ministerial review. The Home Office has operated the sheep shearing Immigration Rules concession for 14 years, and over this time the sheep farming sector has relied on it for skilled shearers from overseas during the UK's shearing season. We have continued to provide this generous concession to allow time for a domestic supply of skilled shearers to be trained.

In 2025 the concession was approved by Home Office Ministers as a time limited extension that would close after the 2025 shearing season, and to provide plenty of time to plan and transition to new arrangements. The Home Office was advised that the industry would be working with DEFRA during 2025 to find a long-term, sustainable solution to meet seasonal shearing needs without relying on an immigration concession.

However, I recognise the risks to animal welfare if sheep are not shorn during a short window in Spring. In light of this, I have decided to renew the concession on an exceptional basis for one final year, providing the industry with two years to transition to new arrangements and move away from using overseas shearers. The concession will not be renewed in 2027 and will close for a final time on 30 June 2026.

The UK has been an outlier offering such a generous arrangement for such a long period of time – neither Australia nor New Zealand offer visa-free routes for sheep shearers. Additionally, the Immigration White Paper “Restoring Control over the Immigration System” set out that occupations below RQF 6 must be listed on the Temporary Shortage List to access the immigration system. Sectors will only be considered for inclusion where they are central to the industrial strategy or delivering critical infrastructure, and following advice from the Migration Advisory Committee. As an RQF 3 level occupation, shearing does not fit within these parameters.

The sheep farming sector has already made significant efforts to provide skills training within the domestic workforce. I hope that one further year of these efforts will enable the sector to secure sufficient supply of resident shearers allowing it to move away from

reliance on migrant labour. The sector cannot continue to rely indefinitely on a concession to the Immigration Rules, and alternative workforce arrangements would need to be found if they are unable to train enough domestic shearers to fill the skills gap.

In addition, the sector will continue to be able to employ individuals with existing general work rights, such as dependants or Youth Mobility Scheme visa holders, who are able to take up work as a sheep shearer subject to their visa conditions.

In relation to your specific questions, these would be best answered by DEFRA as the Government department responsible for supporting the farming industry and will be best placed to advise on discussions with the Welsh Government on this matter and work underway by the sheep farming industry on long-term arrangements for a sustainable domestic workforce.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mike Tapp', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mike Tapp MP
Minister for Migration & Citizenship