



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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From the Chair of the Committee

Kevin Foster MP
Minister for Safe and Legal Migration
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

17 December 2021

Dear Minister

EFRA Committee hearing into labour shortages in the food and farming sector

Thank you for attending the Committee's hearing on 14 December as part of its ongoing inquiry, Labour Shortages in the Food and Farming Sector. Following our exchange there are two issues where I would be grateful if you could clarify the evidence you provided to the Committee.

Pork processors visa sponsor

At the start of the hearing, you told the Committee that:

“of the four big pork processors, only one currently has a skilled worker sponsor licence. One of the others let theirs expire in September last year, and we are waiting to see if the other two will actually make an application”. [Q285]

I assume that the four processors you had in mind are Cranswick PLC, Karro Food Limited, Pilgrim's Pride Ltd and WM Morrison Supermarkets PLC, which, we understand, together account for over 90% of the UK's pork processing market. The latest Home Office's Register of Worker and Temporary Worker licensed sponsors, available [here](#), lists all four organisations as being registered as sponsors for “Worker (Type A)” under the Skilled Worker Route. Given this information, I would be grateful if you could clarify your statement that only one of the four big pork processors has a Skilled Worker Sponsor Licence.

During the evidence session, your point that only one major pork processor had a Skilled Worker Sponsor Licence was a key part of your argument that the pressures on the sector are not as serious as had been described and that the sector was not doing enough to access the support available through the immigration system. If it turns out your argument is not supported by the latest information, I'd be grateful if you could revise your remarks and commit to reviewing the support that the Home Office is providing to the sector.

English language requirements

For a Skilled Worker visa, an applicant is required to prove their ability to read, write, speak and understand English to at least B1 level under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

During the Committee's discussion of the English proficiency requirement for the Skilled Worker visa, you said:

"The fundamental level that we set is a G [grade] at GCSE level. That is the basic level we set under the skilled worker visa ... We're not asking people to analyse the works of Shakespeare here. We are asking for basic conversational English". [Qq377 and 386]

Your assertion about the GCSE equivalence – which you repeated several times - formed the basis for our exchange of views on whether the level of English proficiency required was appropriate for butchers and others in the sector that are eligible to apply for a Skilled Worker visa.

Ecttis, a leading provider of services in the recognition and evaluation of qualifications and skills, have confirmed that it would not be appropriate to compare grades achieved in national qualifications (e.g. GCSEs, A Levels, etc) to the CEFR without undertaking an in-depth analysis of each examination board's syllabus, grade descriptors and mark schemes (among other aspects) for each of the qualifications.

The Committee asks you to provide evidence that supports your claim that a Skilled Worker visa applicant only requires the equivalent of a 1 grade (or G grade, under the previous grading system) at GCSE.

I would ask that you reply to this letter no later than close on Wednesday 5 January.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Neil', followed by a large, stylized flourish or scribble.

Neil Parish MP
Chair of the Committee