



Neil Parish MP
Chair, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee
Committee Office
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

29 December 2021

Dear Neil,

Thank you for your letter of 17 December, following the Committee's hearing into labour shortages in the food and farming sector on 14 December.

You asked me to clarify the position of the big four pork processors regarding the Skilled Worker sponsor register. On the basis of my briefing, I understood Cranswick Country Foods PLC allowed their sponsor licence to expire in September. However, I have now been informed by officials, the company was relicensed under slightly different names – including one licence granted less than a week before the Committee hearing.

Disappointingly, officials also overlooked the licences held by Pilgrim's Pride Ltd and WM Morrison Supermarkets PLC, due to naming convention issues. I have since been informed of these licences and I am grateful for this opportunity to correct the record.

The key point remains, the Skilled Worker visa route has allowed industry to sponsor butchers from overseas for over a year now having launched in December 2020. Our management information shows, of the big four processors, only Karro Food Limited has sponsored any butchers to date, and the majority of those were only sponsored in November and December. It is open for the others to use the route and we encourage them to do so.

On English language proficiency, as you identify, equivalence with particular qualifications is difficult, however we allow someone to meet the requirement without sitting a language test if they have a pass in an English GCSE qualification, following education at a UK school which began while they were under 18. In this scenario, we consider their English language skills to be of a good enough standard they do not need to pass a language test at B1. The B1 level we require is, as I advised the Committee, basic conversational English.

The CEFR guidance¹ for B1 includes descriptions such as “Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.” and “Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken”.

¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>

I would like to take this opportunity to remind the Committee it asked me to take away and consider the evidence it has received from industry about the barriers it said it was facing in sponsoring Skilled Worker visas. You said you would present this evidence to me in writing. I look forward to receiving it.

Finally, I would again express my surprise how an inquiry into issues with labour shortages in the food and farming sector has heard from employers and their representatives, especially their views on immigration as a solution, but not from a key group who might be able to assist in explaining recruitment difficulties, workers, in the form of their Trades Union representatives.

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Foster', with a large flourish at the end.

Kevin Foster MP
Minister for Safe and Legal Migration