

Written evidence submitted by the British Meat Processors Association (LFS0006)

The British Meat Processors Association represents the majority of companies working in the British meat industry. This includes pork, beef and lamb.

Four Questions

1. What impact will the Government's proposed points-based immigration system have on labour in the food supply chain? Which sectors will be most affected by a reduced ability to recruit from abroad?

- There are at least 75,000 workers in the meat supply chain alone. A recent BMPA survey showed that on average 67% of the red meat labour workforce are non-UK workers. This equates to approximately 50,000 workers.
- Non-UK workers: Length of stay – 80% of our respondents reported staff stay in jobs for 1-6 years, with the average being 3.5 years. This means a relatively high turnover, and a constant pool of workers to recruit from would be required.
- It has been reported by our members that staff turnover has increased notably since the 2016 referendum on the UK leaving the EU. Many of these staff have reportedly gone back to their home countries.
- The sector currently has labour recruitment issues, which will likely be significantly exacerbated by the proposed points-based immigration system. Butchery is skilled work, but substantial training is often conducted in the workplace and thus some unskilled/semi-skilled workers are typically recruited. Therefore, the recruitment process will be difficult as those who are currently recruited would not be considered skilled workers at the point of being recruited, and therefore may not be eligible to work in the UK.
- Around 70% of the jobs currently filled by non-UK workers fit into the categorisation of Butchers. Other roles with a lower required skill level, such as General Factory Operatives, are filled by non-UK workers.
- Salaries: our survey showed that, of current unfilled vacancies, 30.5% were in the £17-£20k bracket, another 30.5% were in the £20-25k bracket and 39% were in the £25k and above bracket. Therefore, at least 61% of job vacancies are under the £25.6K threshold, meaning non-UK workers may not be eligible for jobs in the meat sector.
- As the MAC report [A Points-Based System and Salary Thresholds for Immigration](#) published in January 2020 recommended: "Occupations on the Shortage Occupation List should not have lower salary thresholds on entry" it is impossible to see how the meat sector will fill these lower paid roles, even if butchers do make the Shortage Occupation List.
- The dependency on non-UK staff has moved from 9% on average 20 years ago, to 67% on average now.

2. Will investment in staff retention, productivity, technology and innovation compensate for the Government not implementing an immigration route for "lower skilled workers"?

- There is simply not the volume of UK workforce available to meet requirements. One meat company said: "*We are reliant on these [non-UK workers] individuals because we cannot get the volume of staff, we require from UK availability*"
- It takes up to 18 months to train people to become skilled butchers or slaughtermen. Does the government have a plan in place to invest in training over this period of time?

- Butchery is not discussed or highlighted at schools as a career option. There is a lack of visibility of butchers in public (due to decreasing numbers of butcher shops for example) so it is difficult for people to think of this as a viable career option.
- Automation for certain parts of the factory may be possible, but there are significant investment costs to these. Automation will not be able to replace a lot of the work currently done by people in this sort of factory.

3. What impact has the Seasonal Workers pilot scheme had on agriculture and horticulture? What should be the future of the scheme, including whether it should cover more, or different, agricultural and horticultural sectors?

- The allowance of 10,000 workers is nowhere near enough compared to what is required. Different sectors in the industry will be competing for these workers. In meat plants, seasonal peaks such as at Christmas and Easter see huge increases in demand.
- In one example, just one meat company alone needs to hire an extra 1000 people over Christmas, to meet demand. Multiplied up, this means there is a seasonal requirement of many thousands of workers at Christmas, alongside other peaks throughout the year.

4. How many seasonal workers are required in agriculture and horticulture each year, and how can this demand be reasonably met from 2021?

- As mentioned, the meat industry sees a huge uplift in demand at Christmas and smaller peaks during the year. The industry is not confident it can meet this demand with the UK Government's proposed immigration scheme.