

# Industry given certainty around seasonal workers but told to focus on domestic workforce

The visa scheme to allow seasonal workers to come to the UK will continue, but the government has demanded a plan from the sector to cut the reliance on foreign labour.

The Home Office and DEFRA announced today (24 December) the Seasonal Worker visa route will be extended until the end of 2024, which allows foreign workers to come to the UK for up to six months to work in the horticulture sector.

There will be 30,000 visas available next year, but this will be kept under review with the potential to increase by 10,000 if necessary. The number of visas will begin to taper down from 2023 and the sector will have to improve pay and conditions. Following the 2019 review of the pilot, the Home Office has reviewed the requirements placed on the scheme operators and updated the seasonal worker sponsor guidance to tighten the compliance requirements.

While acknowledging the sector's reliance on foreign workers, the UK is committed to becoming a high-skilled, high-wage economy and the government has been clear that more must be done to attract UK workers through offering training, career options, wage increases and to invest in increased automation technology.

DEFRA will be bringing forward further proposals in due course on ways to support the sector as well as progressing recommendations in the Automation Review.

Minister for Safe and Legal Migration Kevin Foster said:

The extension to the Seasonal Worker visa route strikes the right balance of supporting the industry while it transitions to employing and prioritising domestic workers.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

We had a seasonal worker scheme for agriculture from the time of the second world war and long before we joined the EU. We recognise that agriculture has unique and seasonal requirements for labour at harvest and have listened to our world leading fresh produce industry to understand their needs.

Changes to the route, which has run since 2019, will force companies to pay

those using the route a minimum salary to discourage poor conditions. It will also be extended to ornamental horticulture to support our distinguished flower growers in the UK.

The changes follow a review of the seasonal workers pilot which found the reliance on foreign labour held down wages, disincentivised investment and discouraged workers (both resident and non-resident) into these roles.

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## [UK and international partners condemn Wagner Group's plan to deploy mercenaries in Mali](#)

We, the international partners committed to supporting Mali and its people in their efforts to achieve sustainable peace and stability and combat terrorism, firmly condemn the deployment of mercenary troops on Malian territory. This deployment can only further deteriorate the security situation in West Africa, lead to an aggravation of the Human Rights situation in Mali, threaten the Agreement for peace and reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers process, and hamper the efforts of the international community to ensure the protection of civilians and to provide support to the Malian armed forces.

We deeply regret the choice of the Malian transitional authorities to use already scarce public funds to pay foreign mercenaries instead of supporting the Malian Armed Forces and public services to the benefit of the Malian people.

We are aware of the involvement of the Russian Federation government in providing material support to the deployment of the Wagner group in Mali and call on Russia to revert to a responsible and constructive behavior in the region.

We recall ECOWAS decisions and their concern about the risk of instability for the region should private security companies deploy in Mali, (sixtieth ordinary session in Abuja, 12 December 2021). We also recall the adoption by the European Union of a set of restrictive measures against the Wagner group itself, and against eight associated individuals and three entities connected to it (Foreign Affairs Council on 13th December 2021) involved in serious human rights abuses, including torture and extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and killings, or in destabilizing activities in some of the countries they operate in.

We will not give up our efforts to address the needs of the Malian population. In line with the objectives of the international Coalition for the Sahel, we reaffirm our commitment to continuing efforts to protect

civilians, to support the fight against terrorism in the Sahel and help build long-term stability by supporting sustainable development, respect for human rights and the deployment of public services. We will continue to closely follow and assess the situation.

We urge the Malian transitional authorities to undertake reforms and to restore constitutional order, through the timely preparation and organization of elections, as they have committed to before the Malian people, ECOWAS and the international community. We fully support recent decisions by ECOWAS in that regard.

Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom

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## **National Clinical Excellence Awards: 2021 results**

News story

Information about timings for the 2021 awards results.



The results of the National Clinical Excellence Awards will be communicated to applicants in early January 2022. Nearly 2,000 applications were received for new and renewed awards in this round and we will be working over the festive period update our records.

All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application using their registered email address, so please update your details via your online account if this has changed. Employers will also be informed of the new and renewed awards for their organisation.

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# Ukraine border tensions: Foreign Secretary's statement

News story

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has issued a statement on the current situation on the Ukraine border.



Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

I condemn the Kremlin's aggressive and inflammatory rhetoric against Ukraine and NATO. NATO is a defensive alliance and Ukraine continues to show commendable restraint in the face of Russian provocation and aggression.

Russia's military build-ups on the border of Ukraine and in illegally-annexed Crimea are unacceptable. Any Russian incursion would be a massive strategic mistake and would be met with strength, including coordinated sanctions with our allies to impose a severe cost on Russia's interests and economy. The UK's support for Ukraine is unwavering.

The only way out of the current situation for Russia is through dialogue and I welcome the fact that Russia has signalled it is willing to enter talks in January. The Russian Government needs to de-escalate its activities and engage in serious discussions.

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# Government accepts JCVI advice on COVID-19 vaccination programme

Press release

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid accepted advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation on Wednesday 22 December 2021



Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Our independent medicines regulator, the MHRA, has approved Pfizer's paediatric vaccine for children aged 5 to 11 following a thorough review of the safety and effectiveness.

I have accepted the advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation to offer vaccines to at-risk 5-11 year old children and extend the booster programme to at-risk 12-15s and all 16-17s.

While our current and unrelenting focus is ensuring all eligible adults are offered a COVID-19 booster vaccine by the end of December because two doses do not provide enough protection against the Omicron variant, the NHS will prepare to offer vaccines to at-risk 5-11 year old children.

We have secured supplies of the Pfizer/BioNTech paediatric vaccine which will start to arrive in the UK from mid-January.

Vaccines are our best defence against this virus and our booster programme has accelerated rapidly, with almost 30 million doses administered and more than half of adults jabbed, securing vital protection.

This is a national mission and we urge everybody to play their part by getting their vaccines and booster doses as soon as possible.

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