

# IWP stakeholder update following October town hall events

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Home Office

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## ILR qualifying period, retrospectivity and transitional rules

- The Immigration White Paper published in May 2025 set out how settlement in the UK will be reformed into an “earned settlement” model in the future and an increase in the default

qualifying period for settlement from five to ten years.

- A consultation on the proposals under a new “earned settlement” are subject to a consultation which launched on 20 November 2025. It runs for 12 weeks until 12 February 2026. [Earned settlement - GOV.UK](#)
- There will be mandatory requirements for those seeking settlement including not having a criminal conviction, having no NHS debt, being proficient in the English language at B2 level (as per CEFR) and having contributed by having earnings above £12,570 for at least three to five years. The last requirement is subject to consultation in terms of length of terms.
- People will have the opportunity to reduce their pathway to settlement by speaking English at C1 level and making a measurable economic contribution.
- However, they may be penalised by having additional years added to their pathway to settlement if they entered illegally or have claimed public funds.
- This consultation also includes questions intended to seek respondents’ views on how far the implementation of the earned settlement model should be accompanied by transitional measures.
- Transitional arrangements refer to temporary measures or rules put in place to manage the shift from one system, or policy framework, to another. Without any transitional arrangements, the earned settlement policy will affect people already in the system, who are not already settled when relevant Immigration Rules come into force. Transitional arrangements may be designed to ease the impact of policy change, especially for individuals or groups already afforded permissions by the previous system.
- Specific routes of entry and residence (including those admitted as the partner, parent or child of a British citizen and have held that status for the duration of their qualifying period or as a holder of Hong Kong British National (Overseas) status) will attract a reduction in the qualifying period. These groups will therefore be able to settle after 5 years, as they can now, subject to the mandatory requirements.
- The EU Settlement Scheme and grants under the Windrush Scheme are out of scope of these reforms. These routes remain unchanged.
- As set out in the *Restoring Order and Control: A Statement on the government’s asylum and returns policy*, we will introduce a starting point of a 20-year qualifying period of settlement for those recognised as refugees. Those who move from core protection onto the new core protection-work and study visas will be able to earn reductions. However, refugees will never be in a better position than those coming to the UK on recognised

migration visa (such as workers), who are subject to the usual standard settlement qualifying period of 10 years.

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## £41,700 threshold, going rates and extension

- Those seeking to recruit international workers need to pay the higher of the general salary threshold, the going rate for the job and the hourly rate. This rate applies when an application is being made so sponsors will need to meet the rate when assigning a Certificate of Sponsorship for the first time or when seeking to extend sponsorship for an existing worker.
- Employers are not expected to meet the changing rates during the course of a visa but will need to ensure they are met when the next application is made. However, employer are still required to ensure they comply with all UK Legislation including Minimum wage legislation irrespective of the rate at the time of assigning the initial certificate.
- It is possible for people to get a discount on the general salary threshold where they meet certain conditions, for example the job is on the Immigration Salary List, they hold a relevant PhD or are considered a new entrant – the new entrant discount applies to anyone switching from the Student or Graduate visas, anyone age 26 and anyone working towards professional registration or qualifications. Graduates in these circumstances will not need to meet the £41,700 threshold for 4 years; instead a lower threshold of £33,400 applies.
- Those coming to the UK as students should be aware that this does not guarantee them future employment or extensions to their immigration permission. The Graduate visa is designed to allow UK graduates time to work, or look for work, for a set period after completing their studies. It does not guarantee progression to the Skilled Worker visa, for which a person would need to find higher skilled, higher salaried employment within two years of graduation and meet the requirements in place at the time they make their Skilled Worker application.
- It is possible to reduce the salary threshold through the discounts available such as the new entrant discount for recent UK graduates. However, if someone is new to the Skilled Worker visa, including those in the UK on other immigration routes, they must meet median salary levels. This approach ensures applicants who are new to the visa, no matter where in the world they apply from, are treated equally.

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## Occupation code changes and reclassification at extension

- Medium-skilled jobs below the new threshold are still included as eligible occupations for extension and change of employment applications. This will not be the case indefinitely, but no end date has yet been set – it is likely this will be considered following the upcoming consultation on the earned settlement proposals in the Immigration White Paper.
- We changed the occupation code system we use in April 2024. Those who were sponsored before this will need to apply for extensions in an equivalent code in the new system. The equivalent codes are listed in Tables 2-3a in this section of the Immigration Rules:  
[Immigration Rules - Immigration Rules Appendix Skilled Occupations - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)
- Those applying for extensions need to meet the salary requirements (subject to any discounts) that are in place at the time they make their extension applications.
- If an occupation is removed from the TSL, then workers in that occupation (who were first sponsored after the July 2025 changes) will not be able to apply for extension or change of employment applications in that occupation.
- We cannot give immigration advice to those who are not eligible for Skilled Worker on what their alternative options may be. Such advice is regulated - [Find an immigration adviser: Search for an adviser - GOV.UK](#)
- Routine salary uplifts came into effect on 22 July 2025 for Global Business Mobility visas, increasing thresholds to £52,500 for Senior or Specialist and UK Expansion Workers, and £27,300 for Graduate Trainees, alongside occupation-specific going rates.

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## Graduate → Skilled Worker switching and new entrant rules

- The Graduate visa allows international students who have successfully completed an eligible UK degree to remain in the UK for a limited period to work or seek employment after graduation. It is a transitional visa and does not guarantee progression to Skilled Worker status; graduates must secure a qualifying role and meet Skilled Worker requirements at the time of application.
- Following the Immigration White Paper published on 12 May, changes to the Graduate visa will take effect from 1 January 2027. The permitted stay on the visa will reduce from two years to 18 months for most graduates. The change to 18 months will apply to applications submitted on or after 1 January 2027, with PhD graduates continuing to receive three years of leave.

- This change reinforces the Graduate visa's original purpose: enabling international graduates to transition into skilled roles and contribute to the UK economy. Evidence shows that many graduates are not progressing into graduate-level employment which is the intention of the Graduate visa.

## Temporary Shortage List (TSL) scope, timing and limits

- We commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to assess the Temporary Shortage List (TSL) and they have published an interim report - [www.gov.uk/government/publications/temporary-shortage-list-stage-1-report](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/temporary-shortage-list-stage-1-report)
- The MAC have progressed to the second stage of their review of the Temporary Shortage List (TSL) which will contain their final recommendations for the occupations to be included on the TSL. The MAC expect to publish their review in July 2026. There is a call for evidence which is open until 2 February 2026 for organisations and departments to feed into.
- The Government has no plans to introduce a Resident Labour Market Test. Employers are not required to recruit international candidates where they do not wish to assume sponsorship of a worker, this includes where they do not wish to pay the fees associated with sponsorship or if they do not believe the worker will be eligible for a visa either now or in the future.

## Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) allocations, refusals and processing delays

- The current service level agreement (SLA) for Undefined CoS is 18 weeks and UKVI are operating well within that timeframe currently. Rejections of CoS will outline the specific reasons in the decision letter as to why the request was not approved. A capped priority service is available with a 5 working day SLA.

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## Sponsor Management System improvements and usability

- The Home Office is continually reviewing the Sponsor Management System to ensure it meets operational needs and supports employers effectively. We have already begun essential backend maintenance, such as technical upgrades, to keep the system stable and secure.
- We are also exploring potential future updates aimed at improving functionality and user experience. Any proposed changes will be considered carefully against available funding and wider departmental priorities. We will share further information, including opportunities for feedback and testing, as plans develop.

## Right to Work checks, share codes and other working arrangements

- The outputs provided to third-party checking organisations from the Home Office suite of digital status services (the share codes referred to) are based upon the principles of user research and data minimisation. For the Right to Work Scheme, this means the information provided is only what is necessary to enable the employer to obtain a statutory excuse against liability for a civil penalty. For these reasons, we don't currently provide information such as a person's visa type.
- Where necessary, employers are able to seek additional information that would have been available on a person's BRP or supporting documentation from sponsored workers to comply with their sponsorship requirements. This could include asking them to show their eVisa profile so an employer can take note of the visa category.
- It remains a Home Office priority to continue to engage with employers and their representative bodies, to evaluate safeguards and ensure the Right to Work Scheme remains in step with broader pre-employment checking responsibilities and processes. As part of a continuous improvement approach, we will announce any further initiatives as they are made.
- As already announced, to further ensure people can only work in the UK if they have permission, the government is introducing digital ID. This will be mandatory to prove someone's right to work by the end of this Parliament.
- Through the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, the government is extending the scope of employers required to carry out Right to Work checks to those who engage people under a worker's contract or individual sub-contractors, such as those working in the gig economy, and circumstances where online matching services provide details of a person who is a service provider to carry out work or services for potential clients.
- This means that for the very first time, right to work checks will be extended to cover businesses hiring gig economy and zero-hours workers in sectors like construction, food delivery, beauty salons, courier services and warehousing.
- On 29 October, the Home Office launched a six-week consultation [closing at 11:59pm, on 10 December] which will help inform how the changes in relation to the extension of right to work checks are operationalised and enforced. The consultation seeks views on how the measure will be enforced, shaping the guidance and statutory codes of practice that will be published when the regulatory changes are commenced. The consultation also provides an opportunity to further develop understanding of the recruitment and employment practices in the labour market.

- Further information is available via the following link on GOV.UK:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/extending-the-right-to-work-scheme>

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## English language level (B2) scope, evidence and exemptions

- As set out in the White Paper, we have introduced new requirements for English language in relation to economic migration visas. These measures support the integration of those coming here to work here (and their families) into UK communities.
- The English language requirement for the Skilled Worker, High Potential Individual and Scale-up visas is increased from B1 Level to B2 Level (as defined under the Common European Framework for Reference for Languages (CEFR)).
- The new requirements will apply to those seeking an initial grant of permission in a relevant visa from 8 January 2026.
- Those who have already obtained a permission and that grant was subject to a B1 level requirement will continue to be subject to a B1 level requirement where they are seeking an extension in the same visa.
- New requirements for adult dependants of work and study migrants, as set out in the White Paper, will be introduced in due course.

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## Immigration Skills Charge and fee increases, refunds and phasing

- On 16 December 2025 the Immigration Skills Charge rose by 32% in line with inflation. This means that for a large or medium size employer the cost is now £1,320 per person per year. There will continue to be a reduced rate for small and charitable organisations which is £480 per person per year.
- Further information regarding the Immigration Skills Charge, including refunds, can be found at the following location: <https://www.gov.uk/uk-visa-sponsorship-employers/immigration-skills-charge>.

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## Asylum seekers and permission to work

- Those who claim asylum in the UK are generally not allowed to work while their claim is being considered. This ensures a clear distinction between economic migration and asylum, discouraging those who do not need protection from claiming asylum to benefit from economic opportunities they would not otherwise be eligible for.
- The Home Office may grant permission to work to asylum seekers whose claim has been outstanding for more than 12 months through no fault of their own. This is restricted to jobs on the Immigration Salary List.
- If someone has a visa that allows work (such as a student visa or skilled worker visa) and claimed asylum before it expired, their current right to work will continue under the same conditions until their asylum claim is finally determined.
- Asylum seekers are encouraged to volunteer while their claim is being considered. Volunteering supports local communities and helps integration if leave to remain is granted. Those who are granted leave have unrestricted access to the labour market. Refugees are encouraged to obtain employment or commence studies so as to integrate more fully into the communities providing them sanctuary.

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## Sector shortages: social care, hospitality, logistics, engineering

- It is the Government's policy to reduce reliance on international recruitment in adult social care and improve domestic recruitment and retention. Since carers were added to the Health and Care visa in Spring 2022, more than 100,000 people have been issued visas to work in the care sector. Since Autumn 2023, the number of visas issued to carers has dropped by 80% and international intake has remained broadly stable. This trend is likely due to a number of factors; however we know a significant number of would be employers have been unable to provide evidence that they have sufficient work to support the workers they are seeking to employ. And of the people who have come to the UK to work in care many thousands have found themselves out of work due to employers over-estimating demand for their services or losing their ability to sponsor workers due to non-compliance.
- In the case of care workers who have come to England in good faith to support the sector but have been left without a licensed sponsor, the Department of Health and Social Care has been working closely with the Home Office and UKVI on a process to help support displaced care workers into new roles within the adult social care sector.

- Regional partnerships have received £12.5 million this financial year to support who need to switch employers in order to continue working in the care sector when they have been impacted by their sponsor's licence being revoked. Further details can be found here: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-recruitment-fund-for-the-adult-social-care-sector-2024-to-2025/international-recruitment-fund-for-the-adult-social-care-sector-2024-to-2025-guidance-for-local-authorities](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-recruitment-fund-for-the-adult-social-care-sector-2024-to-2025/international-recruitment-fund-for-the-adult-social-care-sector-2024-to-2025-guidance-for-local-authorities).
- Any affected care workers in your region may want to view the following link for information on the support available to them: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-offer-to-international-asc-workers-whose-employers-sponsor-licence-has-been-revoked/support-offer-to-international-asc-workers-whose-employers-sponsor-licence-has-been-revoked](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-offer-to-international-asc-workers-whose-employers-sponsor-licence-has-been-revoked/support-offer-to-international-asc-workers-whose-employers-sponsor-licence-has-been-revoked).

## Priority sectors/social care

- As set out in DfE's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, we are focusing on 10 key sectors critical to the government's Industrial Strategy and Plan for Change including: Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Energy Industries, Creative Industries, Defence, Digital and Technologies, Financial Services, Life Sciences, Professional and Business Services plus Housebuilding and Health and Adult Social Care.
- Skills England will work with employers and local labour market actors to establish a data-driven national view of skills. This will enable a targeted approach to funding provision that drives growth in priority sectors, including through tailored sector skills packages – worth over £1 billion to support skills training in construction, digital, engineering and defence – and support to help people back into work.
- For other sectors, apprenticeships and technical qualifications continue to be available. These are based on core occupational standards that have been developed in partnership with employers to ensure they represent the knowledge, skills and behaviours that are needed across a range of occupations.
- Across all areas of England, Local Skills Improvement Plans have engaged thousands of local businesses and brought them together with local leaders and skills providers to collaboratively agree and deliver actions to better align provision of post-16 technical education and training with local labour market needs.
- Our modern Industrial Strategy is a critical part of how we deliver our growth mission: creating good jobs and higher incomes across the country by increasing productive business investment through targeted industrial policies. It focuses on sectors with the greatest potential to raise national levels of investment and productivity, spread prosperity to all parts of the country, make us all more secure, and seize the opportunities of net zero.

## Migrant workers

- As set out in the Immigration White Paper *Restoring control over our immigration system*, we are raising the Immigration Skills Charge by 32%, bringing it in line with inflation since 2017.
- The additional funding from the Immigration Skills Charge will be used to upskill the domestic workforce and reduce reliance on migration over the longer term.
- We will limit access to the immigration system for employers in sectors that do not demonstrate a commitment to supporting domestic skills.
- We will use evidence from the Labour Market Evidence Group to inform decisions, including training levels and participation in the domestic labour market, alongside consideration of the workforce strategy that the sector has in place to address skills gaps. We will take action, accordingly, only allowing access to the immigration system for occupations at below degree-level only where the sector has an appropriate Jobs Plan in place.

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## Regional and rural impacts, devolved considerations

- While education and skills policy is devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the UK Government will continue to work in partnership with the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on supporting the skills agenda through partnerships with Skills England, and the JobCentre Plus Network in Scotland and Wales.
- In England, DfE has devolved 67% of the £1.44 billion Adult Skills Fund in 2025/26 to 13 Authorities. This has given local leaders the ability to make decisions that are best for their areas by aligning skills provision to skills need.
- This government is committed to delivering growth both nationally and regionally, including in rural areas. Skills England works in partnership with local leaders and stakeholders to help meet local skills needs, including through Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs).
- At a local/regional level, Local Growth Plans will help to determine which national priorities are relevant to the locality and identify the challenges as well as the opportunities for growth in a place. The skills priorities contained in these will help provide the framework for the development of the LSIP. SAs will also provide a statement of their sector priorities, which should be reflected in the LSIP.

- Across all areas of England, LSIPs have engaged thousands of local businesses and brought them together with local leaders and skills providers to collaboratively agree and deliver actions to better align provision of post-16 technical education and training with local labour market needs.
- There are clusters of the growth driving sectors across the whole country including in rural and coastal areas and the Industrial Strategy addresses the biggest constraints to growth highlighted by businesses in these places. Our Industrial Strategy Sector Plans highlight important clusters outside of city regions, from Clean Energy in Cornwall and Advanced Manufacturing in Gloucestershire to Defence in Lancashire and Life Sciences in Coleraine.
- We have developed the Industrial Strategy in partnership with devolved governments to ensure our plans drive growth in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. We continue to respect devolved arrangements and coordinate with devolved governments' economic strategies. In Scotland, we are supporting Scottish clean energy industries with development funding to advance the Acorn Carbon Capture and Storage project and investing up to £750m in the UK's largest supercomputer at the University of Edinburgh. In Wales, we are investing at least £445m in Welsh rail, with improved infrastructure and connectivity driving growth across Welsh sectors and clusters. We are also driving growth through the new Centre for Integrative Semiconductor Materials at Swansea University and UK Government investment in a new Centre for Doctoral Training, led by Swansea University. In Northern Ireland, we are working with the NI Executive to establish an Enhanced Investment Zone; while funding support for growth-driving sectors like advanced manufacturing and defence will drive growth further where Northern Ireland thrives.
- Our wider Growth Mission supports people and businesses across the country, including those in rural and coastal areas, through policies to create the conditions for businesses to invest and employ, and consumers to spend with confidence. This includes the Plan for Small and Medium Sized Businesses, Growth Mission Fund, and Pride in Place programme. Skills development is a UK-wide priority, with Skills England working closely with devolved governments to align approaches, share best practice, and ensure the labour market meets evolving needs across borders.
- Together, these measures create the conditions for businesses to invest, and communities to thrive, delivering long-term stability and inclusive growth across the UK.

## Business investment signals, offshoring risk and exemptions (energy, maritime)

- Seafarers arriving on a ship, who meet the definition of crew in S33(1) 1971 act, can enter the UK without a visa as long as they are arriving under an engagement requiring them to leave again on that same ship within a reasonable period of time.
- Seafarers can undertake work that is in line with their role aboard the ship and incidental to their employment. Examples of this type of work are:
  - maintaining a vessel while it is in port
  - unloading goods or passengers
- Government has temporarily exempted occupations crucial to the delivery of the Industrial Strategy or critical infrastructure from the increase to the skills threshold for the Skilled Worker visa. This applies to some maritime occupations such as boat and ship builders and repairers.
- Over time, we will move to a system where the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) draw on findings from a new "Labour Market Evidence Group" (LMEG), to advise Ministers on the occupations that should feature on the Temporary Shortage List.

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## Apprenticeships policy (level 7, 20% off-the-job)

- As part of this government's mission to drive economic growth, it is transforming the apprenticeships offer into a new growth and skills offer, which will offer greater flexibility to employers and learners and support the industrial strategy.
- This government also has a driving mission to break down barriers to opportunity. Apprenticeship starts by young people under 25 fell by almost 40% over the last decade. The government therefore wants to ensure that public funding is prioritised towards those at the start of their working lives and at lower apprenticeship levels, rather than those already in work with higher levels of prior learning and qualifications.
- That is why from January 2026 the government will no longer fund Level 7 apprenticeships, equivalent to master's degree level – except for young apprentices under the age of 22. This will enable apprenticeship funding to be re-balanced towards young people entering the labour market and training at lower levels. Given the benefits to business and

employees, the government will be encouraging employers to invest in upskilling their staff aged over 22 to this level to enable levy funding to be re-balanced towards young people.

- The decision to remove funding for Level 7 apprenticeships was informed by a wide range of evidence, including Skills England's analysis of official apprenticeship statistics and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders including employer representative bodies, providers, and young people. The government also considered wider data and representations about Level 7 apprenticeships and weighed this up against its clear priorities.
- In August 2025 we introduced new foundation apprenticeships for young people in targeted sectors, as well as shorter duration apprenticeships. These flexibilities will help more people learn new high-quality skills at work and fuel innovation in businesses across the country. From April 2026 we will introduce new short courses (apprenticeship units) as part of the growth and skills offer. They will be available in critical skills areas such as artificial intelligence, digital and engineering.
- Further detail will be set out in due course and employers can follow the latest updates here: [Find training and employment schemes for your business - The Growth and Skills Levy](#)
- The 20% off the job training requirement is a key part of supporting apprentices to benefit from the sustained and rigorous training that apprenticeships offer.

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## ESOL capacity, funding and alignment to visa English levels

- As set out in the White Paper, we have introduced new requirements for English language in relation to economic migration visas.
- These measures support the integration of those coming here to work here (and their families) into UK communities.
- The English language requirement for the Skilled Worker, High Potential Individual and Scale-up visas is increased from B1 Level to B2 Level (as defined under the Common European Framework for Reference for Languages (CEFR)).
- The new requirements will apply to those seeking an initial grant of permission in a relevant visa from 8 January 2026.
- Those who have already obtained a permission and that grant was subject to a B1 level requirement will continue to be subject to a B1 level requirement where they are seeking an extension in the same visa.

- New requirements for adult dependants of work and study migrants, as set out in the White Paper, will be introduced in due course.
- We will review our adult essential skills offer in English, English for speakers of other languages, maths, and digital skills to ensure that it includes the skills most relevant to meeting the needs of people so that they can progress into and within employment, or to additional education and training. As part of this, we will consider how to better align essential skills training with priority skills gaps.
- Adults aged 19+ in England who speak English as a second or additional language can be supported to access ESOL provision, funded through the Adult Skills Fund (ASF).
- Currently, approximately 67% of the ASF is devolved to 12 strategic authorities (SAs) and the Greater London Authority (GLA). These authorities are responsible for the provision of adult education and allocation of the ASF in their local areas including decisions on ESOL provision.
- The Department for Work and Pensions is responsible for the remaining ASF in non-devolved areas where colleges and training providers have the freedom and flexibility to determine how they use their ASF to meet the needs of their communities.

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## Graduate pathways, university-employer links and student visas

- The government has been clear that it welcomes international students who meet the requirements to study in the UK and positively impact our higher education sector, economy and society.
- Our world-class higher education sector attracts high quality students from across the globe and can offer a fulfilling and enjoyable experience to international students.
- The *Restoring control over the immigration system* White Paper, published in May 2025, sets out a balanced approach - helping the government achieve its manifesto commitment on reducing net migration while maintaining the UK's global competitiveness, and contributing significantly to growth by boosting the UK's skills base, while clamping down on abuse of the system.
- Government will retain the graduate visa but reduce its duration from 2 years to 18 months (3 years for PhD graduates). This will maintain our competitive post-study offer whilst

ensuring people on this visa obtain employment in graduate level roles and contribute to the country's skills needs more quickly.

- And we are committed to putting the HE sector on a secure financial footing so that it can face the challenges of the next decade. Our decision to raise tuition fees annually in line with inflation, alongside refocusing the OfS on monitoring the sector's financial health, demonstrates this commitment.
- Ultimately, as HE providers are independent from government, they are responsible for managing their finances and ensuring their business models provide long-term sustainability.

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## Jobcentre Plus effectiveness, screening and employer experience

- Employers are critical to achieving our long-term ambition of an 80% UK employment rate, but 93% did not carry out any recruitment activity through Job Centre Plus last year and many have raised concerns about candidate quality. This is why DWP is modernising its employment offer to improve both employer confidence and outcomes for jobseekers. This includes a new Jobs and Careers Service, which will provide a more accessible, skills-focused offer. Through enhanced digital tools, careers advice, and skills assessments, people will be supported to access training more quickly and develop the capabilities needed for future roles.
- DWP is strengthening engagement with employers across a range of sectors to help improve screening and ensure better alignment between candidates and vacancies. This includes targeted work with representative sectoral bodies and employers to understand skills gaps and ensure jobseekers receive the right advice and training. Programmes such as the Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP), work experience, and volunteering help jobseekers gain job-specific skills, with employer involvement built in from the outset.
- We are also making more pre-employment training courses available through an expansion of SWAPs to 100,000 places a year from 2025/26 (up from 80,000 a year in 2021/22 to 2024/25), including in priority sectors such as construction, health and social care and clean energy. This will help to provide employers with work-ready candidates and ensure more reliable matching, at no cost to participating businesses.
- Overall, we are aiming to achieve our long-term ambition of an 80% employment rate by reforming the system to enable greater participation, progression and productivity in the labour market. In November 2024, we set out our plan in the Get Britain Working White

Paper, with three main pillars:

- **Reforming Jobcentre Plus into a Jobs and Careers Service** which is more focused on skills and career progression than benefits and compliance, responsive to the needs and challenges of local labour markets and aligned with the needs of employers.
- **Tackling economic inactivity due to ill health** through joined up work, health and skills support and the Pathways to Work guarantee of tailored support for those with health conditions who claim out of work benefits.
- **Delivering a Youth Guarantee** so that all young people have access to education, training or help to find a job or apprenticeship. This includes our recently announced Jobs Guarantee, where every eligible unemployed young person on Universal Credit for 18 months without earning or learning will be provided guaranteed paid work

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## SWAPs, Step into Care and programme coverage

- The Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) is a successful into work intervention run by DWP, with a strong track record of moving benefit claimants into employment. SWAPs offer a flexible, employer-led model providing training, work experience, and a guaranteed job interview for candidates ready to work. They are used across sectors including health and adult social care, construction, logistics, hospitality, and the public sector.
- SWAPs are employer-led interventions built around real vacancies. These initiatives provide clear access routes for employers, ensure transparency on outcomes, and help build a skilled, motivated workforce across adult social care and other priority sectors.
- This year, we are expanding SWAPs to provide 100,000 places, including the expansion of the UKHospitality pilot to 26 new areas, ensuring support reaches regions with high demand for jobs and opportunities. Overall, DWP delivered 86,730 SWAP starts in financial year 2024/25, exceeding the Department's delivery aspiration of 80,000.
- DWP publishes management information on SWAPs every quarter, which sets out the number of starts by geography, employment sector and age of participant. Recent releases also now include data on employment outcomes:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/sector-based-work-academy-programmes-swaps-management-information>
- Employers and training providers interested in offering SWAP opportunities can contact their local Jobcentre Plus Group Partnership Manager. See GOV.UK here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dwp-partnerships/national-partnership-teams>.

- The Step into Care programme continues to widen access to adult social care careers and support employers across a range of care settings. Step into Care, delivered by the Workers Educational Association (WEA), is a values-based, pre-employment programme designed to attract people with no prior care experience. It now covers care homes, domiciliary care, and support worker roles, and has shown strong outcomes in Greater Manchester and Liverpool, with 270 people completing the programme in Manchester (180 securing roles with a 78% retention rate) and initial cohorts in Liverpool already moving into work. The programme is inclusive, regardless of driving ability, and candidates are matched to roles based on both their circumstances and employer needs.

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## Welfare incentives, childcare and in-work retention

- DWP are determined to make sure workplaces are accessible for everyone, which will be achieved through our Get Britain Working reforms to reduce welfare dependency, worklessness and better in-work retention. This will be done through several initiatives including the Sir Charlie Mayfield's Keep Britain Working Review, which will drive action to prevent ill-health, support people to stay in work and help employers' build healthier, more resilient workplaces.
- The Government recognises that high childcare costs and benefit rules can be a barrier to work, particularly for parents increasing their hours. Financial support is available through Universal Credit, which covers up to 85% of eligible childcare costs each month compared to 70% in legacy benefits. This is up to a maximum amount of £1031.88 a month for a single child and £1768.94 a month for families with two or more children. For larger families this could be worth over £21,000 per year.
- Universal Credit childcare element can also be used alongside the Department for Education's early years and childcare entitlements in England and there are similar offers in the Devolved Nations. From September 2025, eligible working parents in England can access 30 hours of funded childcare per week for children from 9 months old, making work more financially viable.
- Universal Credit ensures that work pays, with no minimum or maximum hours, and applies a 55% taper on net earnings so claimants retain 45p of every pound earned. Work allowances and the benefit cap are designed to incentivise work while recognising additional needs such as housing costs, supporting progression into higher earnings and fairness between working and non-working households.
- The Pathways to Work Green Paper set out plans, backed by £1bn of funding per year by the end of the decade, to introduce a guaranteed offer of personalised work, health and

skills support for all disabled people and those with health conditions on out of work benefits.

- For sectors such as adult social care, DHSC is improving pay, conditions, and career pathways, including the Fair Pay Agreement and the Care Workforce Pathway, supporting domestic recruitment and in-work retention.

