

ONS self-employed data raises concerns around the UK's skills stability

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Responding to the latest data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Tania Bowers, Global Public Policy Director at the Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo), has raised concerns around the UK's level of self-employed professionals:

"The continued increase in vacancies being reported by the ONS is a trend we expect to see continue for some time yet and has arguably become the 'norm' for the staffing sector over the last year. However, the fact that the data does also show that the number of self-employed workers remains low following decreases during the pandemic is a real concern given the tight labour market we're experiencing. With highly skilled resources scarce, the UK's economic recovery rests on the ability to tap into flexible resources. However, since the roll out of Off-Payroll, Brexit and following significant challenges during the pandemic, the self-employed have increasingly been driven to alternative employment routes."

"It's crucial that the UK creates a dynamic and flexible workforce, but in order to do so, self-employment working options need to be more attractive. The UK needs an immigration policy that encourages highly skilled international contract professionals to work here. Legislation also needs to be appropriate for this more fluid style of working. Self-employed status needs to be defined in legislation in a way that differentiates highly skilled self-employed independent professionals from dependent contractors, workers, other variants of self-employment and the lower skilled, less independent elements of the gig economy. Reform is also needed to challenge current thinking around how workers and the self-employed can be financially assisted and adequately access benefits that are currently largely enjoyed by employees, including enhanced pensions, life insurance, family and dependent related paid leave, training, and development. APSCo continues to lobby government to ensure legislation is helping create a workforce that supports today's way of work."

Press contact:

Sadie McGrath

BlueSky PR

sadie@bluesky-pr.com

+441582 790700