

# Absence of Employment Bill suggests the skills agenda slipping down Government's priority list

Submitted by: BlueSky Public Relations Ltd

Tuesday, 10 May 2022

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The absence of the Employment Bill in the Queen's Speech delivered by Prince Charles today suggests that the skills agenda is slipping down the Government's priority list. That's according to the Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo).

Tania Bowers, Global Public Policy Director at APSCo commented:

"The Employment Bill has already been delayed and it is disappointing that it was missing from the Queen's Speech today despite multiple calls for its inclusion in recent weeks. The UK's employment market is not fit for purpose in the current economic landscape and APSCo has warned that this long-awaited Bill needs to be pushed forward swiftly if the country is to recover from the impact of the pandemic and Brexit. While it was made clear in today's speech that the Government's priority is to strengthen the economy, the absence of the Employment Bill and no clarity around the Single Enforcement Body will be a limitation on achieving this.

"It's clear that the future of the labour market needs to be flexible, dynamic and fair, but current legislation is not designed to support this. The self-employed have a crucial role to play in the skills short environment that we are experiencing and in order to ensure these individuals are adequately supported and able to operate in a flexible manner without being penalised is important. We're already seeing Off Payroll case law impacting this segment of the market and the UK is at risk of diminishing its own flexible workforce if action isn't taken. Self-employed status needs to be defined in legislation 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.

"Regulation of the Umbrella market is also needed if the UK's economy is to be strengthened. Government must futureproof employment legislation and consider steps such as Single Enforcement Body (SEB) licensing of the "umbrella" market, the mandatory use of client accounts and the introduction of statutory compliance codes.

"As the UK economy struggles to recover post-Covid, it is crucial that we continue to build and borrow vital skills by any means necessary. Only then, can we create a dynamic, flexible, and future-proof labour market with enough skilled workers to enable the country to build back better post-pandemic. This absence of the Employment Bill as many predicted, raises concerns that the skills agenda is beginning to slip down the list of priorities for the Government."

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