

APSCo calls for dedicated visa route for independent professionals

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Immigration Bill not fit for purpose

Following the second reading of the Immigration Bill in parliament this week which paves the way for a points-based immigration system, The Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo) has called for a dedicated visa route for independent professionals.

Speaking about the Bill which, the Government says, is designed to promote a “high skill” economy, Tania Bowers, Legal Counsel and Head of Public Affairs at APSCo commented:

“We have pointed out previously that the proposed legislation as it stands offers no dedicated visa route for independent professionals.”

“It is no secret that there are skills shortage across many high skilled sectors such as engineering, technology, construction and life sciences. Consequently, we need to have an immigration system that recognises that the UK’s ability to attract world class brands to do business here – and promote its strengths when negotiating trade deals after Brexit- pivots on access to skills and a flexible workforce.”

Freedom of movement has so far allowed independent professionals recruited from the EU to work in skill short sectors to support British businesses and operate with complete flexibility and without being bound to one specific role. They often work on medium to long term projects which have a beginning and an end – projects that the employer does not want or need a full-time permanent employee for and yet at present, professional self-employment is not even recognised by the Office for National Statistics. This is reflected in policy makers’ attitudes which is why there is no dedicated visa route for independent professionals.

It is our belief that this will really impact access to skilled talent as it will deter many from wanting or being able to work here. In order to come to the UK, they would need sponsorship by an employer under the Tier 2 general visa and that means we are losing access to a whole segment of the international labour market. The Innovator and Start Up Visas, although positive steps are not suited for most independent professionals.

The Government white paper published earlier this year stated that they will consult on a highly skilled visa which would not require a job offer and this is more genuinely akin to the Australian points system and would fulfil our criteria for a highly skilled self-employed visa. We urge Government to expedite this consultation. Secondly, we ask that they broaden the scope of the Start Up Visa and lastly, consider whether umbrella companies and recruiters should be able to register as an employer to secure Tier 2 visas for agency workers.

We have been in touch with the Home Office so that we can be involved in the consultation on the highly skilled visa as well as continuing to lobby through our programme of MP meetings.”

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