

Shortage Occupation List: Call for Evidence 2023

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

A. Introduction

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is a trade union and professional association representing over 24,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business leaders and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million children and young people across primary, secondary, post-16 and specialist education. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.
2. ASCL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. Our response is based on the views of our members, obtained through discussions at ASCL Council, with relevant advisory groups, and prompted and unprompted emails and messages.
3. When considering the impact of any proposals on different groups, it is ASCL's policy to consider not only the nine protected characteristics included in the Equality Act 2010, but also other groups which might be disproportionately affected, particularly those who are socio-economically disadvantaged. We have answered any equality impact questions on this basis.

B. Key points

4. We note the Migration Advisory Committee have already announced their decision to recommend the shortage occupation list (SOL) salary threshold discount should be abolished for those occupations that are subject to a binding going rate. This will have the effect of removing teachers from the SOL.
5. Whilst the financial benefits for teachers of remaining on the SOL may seem marginal (reduced visa fees for them and family members) the removal may become a barrier for some recruits. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, we are concerned that the symbolic importance of removing teachers from the SOL has not been economically accounted for.
6. As international recruitment of teachers remains a small but important part of the Department for Education's strategy for tackling the current recruitment and retention crisis we are concerned that the removal of teaching from the SOL sends the wrong message and back their calls for their continued inclusion.

C. Argument

7. The symbolic importance of the shortage occupation list should not be underestimated. It is a list that has currency amongst employers and those seeking work opportunities.

We believe that for many of our members the SOL will be this first port of call when they initially start thinking about whether international recruitment may be the right route for them. The SOL is seen as a sign that the government is committed to supporting their sector. It also sends a message to potential employees that there are opportunities available in the UK.

8. We have significant concerns that removing teaching (even the limited roles currently allowed for on the list) from the SOL would send a negative message to both employers and potential employees. It would suggest that the government is not taking the skills shortage seriously at a time when recruitment and retention is at crisis point.
9. We have been working closely with the Department for Education on a number of their workforce strategy strands to address the ongoing recruitment issues. International recruitment is a small but core part of that strategy as it is not possible for teaching to meet all of its needs from the internal graduate market as there are insufficient graduates to meet the demand in some subjects. However, international recruitment for schools has been subject to a period of change following the UK's departure from the European Union and our members tell us that they often feel too overwhelmed by the 'day job' to fully understand what the process might involve.
10. To therefore remove teaching from the SOL at this point, part of the system that does have currency with education employers, seems unnecessarily reckless. We are concerned that it will further undermine our members' confidence in undertaking international recruitment and the opportunities that will afford the system.
11. We also remain convinced of the value to teachers coming through this route of the reduction in visa fees. We are concerned that the removal of this benefit will put some potential applicants off and given the ongoing recruitment issues in teaching this is something the sector can ill afford.

D. Conclusion

12. We are aware that the Department for Education are asking the Migration Advisory Committee to reconsider their recommendation to remove teaching from the SOL and for the reasons set out above we support their position.
13. I hope that this response is of value to your consultation. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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Association of School and College Leaders
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