Submission

Date:	23 October 2026		
To:	homeaffcom@parliament.uk		
Cc:		From:	Lorna Scott
E-mail:	Lorna.scott@nfus.org.uk	Direct dial:	07823 348963

Home Affairs Committee: Work-based immigration

- NFU Scotland (NFUS) is the leading agricultural organisation in Scotland. Representing more than 9,000 farmers, growers, and crofters, our members provide and support thousands of jobs and deliver significant economic, social and environmental benefits across Scotland.
- Agriculture is the lynchpin of rural Scotland and is an important part of Scotland's booming food and drink industry. Scottish agriculture generates a gross output of £5.1 billion annually. The farming and crofting sector is committed to sustainable food production, enhancing biodiversity and helping to tackle climate change.
- NFU Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Home Affairs Committee's call for evidence regarding work-based immigration.
- NFU Scotland is calling for an immigration policy that enables skilled, able and willing workers to come to work in agriculture and food processing sectors. This is important for the agri-food sector to be fully functioning and effective.
- Employers in Scottish agriculture are investing in apprenticeships and upskilling their existing workforce. Despite this, there remains an undersupply of UK domestic labour. The UK and Scottish Governments should continue to work with the agriculture sector on measures that support training and skills development, the adoption of new technologies and career promotion.

- Agriculture provides many attractive career opportunities, and it is well placed to deliver economic prosperity, enhance biodiversity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is important the sector is enabled to build and deliver in these areas so it can continue to enrich rural communities, support jobs, and produce high quality food for our nation and for global markets.
- Some agricultural sectors struggle to recruit domestic labour. Non-UK workers are permanently employed in the pig, poultry, and dairy sectors under the Skilled Worker, or temporarily under the Seasonal Worker visa scheme. Retaining the ability to recruit skilled migrant labour is essential to these sectors, despite the additional cost and complexity involved as reliable domestic workers just aren't available

1. **What impact does immigration policy have on investment in domestic skills and training by employers?**
    - Is there more the Home Office could do to encourage skills investment through immigration policy?

- We need a commitment from Government to develop and deliver migration policy that works for the rural economy, food security, and worker welfare.
- Employers in Scottish agriculture are investing in apprenticeships and upskilling their existing workforce. Despite this, there remains an undersupply of UK domestic labour. The UK and Scottish Governments should continue to work with the agriculture sector on measures that support training and skills development, the adoption of new technologies and career promotion.
- Agriculture provides many attractive career opportunities, and it is well placed to deliver economic prosperity, enhance biodiversity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is important the sector is enabled to build and deliver in these areas so it can continue to enrich rural communities, support jobs, and produce high quality food for our nation and for global markets.
- Some agricultural sectors struggle to recruit domestic labour. Non-UK workers are permanently employed in the pig, poultry, and dairy sectors under the Skilled Worker visa scheme. Retaining the ability to recruit skilled migrant labour is essential to these sectors, despite the additional cost and complexity involved as reliable domestic workers just aren't available.

- NFU Scotland highlights the challenges dairy farmers face in recruiting staff for roles involving essential mechanical tasks and unsociable hours, which can be difficult to fill from the domestic labour market despite efforts to address these barriers. Current Skilled Worker Visa salary and skills requirements are often unsuitable for these positions, while the inability to include employer-provided accommodation in salary calculations fails to recognise the realities of rural employment, where housing may be essential due to limited transport links and out-of-hours working. Despite attempts to recruit locally and across the UK, responses are often limited or non-existent.
- Furthermore, the cost and complexity of the visa process place a disproportionate burden on smaller farming businesses without dedicated administrative staff.

2. **To what extent – and over what time frames – can skills policy influence the scale of international recruitment by employers?**
    - What impact could sector level workforce strategies have on international recruitment? What is necessary to make these plans successful?
    - How, if at all, should the approach the government takes to linking immigration and skills policy vary depending on the level of training required for different jobs?

- For agriculture, job shortages filled by migrant labour can be year-round and vital.
- They can also be extremely seasonal. An example of this is the crucial, but relatively small number of sheep shearers that come to the UK every year.
- NFU Scotland has called for a permanent, affordable seasonal visa route for sheep shearers to provide certainty for businesses and ensure sheep welfare is protected. Although the UK Government reinstated a visa route for the 2026 season after initially planning to end it, we have been told that domestic workforce will be required going forward.
- Despite investment in domestic training, the UK does not have enough qualified shearers to meet seasonal demand, with around 75 overseas shearers needed in 2025. Without access to skilled overseas labour, there is a real risk that sheep will not be shorn on time, increasing welfare risks.
- Furthermore, the number of people who had undertaken sheep shearing courses in the UK have very often done so to take care of their own flock, or be able to tidy up smaller numbers of sheep on farm. They have not undertaken training to become commercial shearers. The number of trained UK staff would not be able to replace those who come to the UK for a shearing season.

- NFU Scotland also called for the reduction in the 6 month "cooling off period" between visas under the Seasonal Workers Scheme (SWS), we welcomed the UK Government's decision last year to reduce this to 4 months recognising the needs of the agricultural sector, particularly in the horticulture sector. We continue to urge for a long term commitment to SWS with confirmed numbers of visas.

Addressing shortages

3. To what extent should addressing labour shortages be prioritised in immigration policy?
    - When, if at all, should international recruitment be allowed to meet labour shortages in lower-paid jobs, and jobs that require less training? How can the skill level of occupations in shortage be accurately and fairly determined?
    - What has been the experience of sectors with labour shortages that have historically been able to recruit internationally? Has this led to a reduction in shortages?

- Addressing labour shortages should be a key priority in immigration policy, particularly where persistent shortages threaten the productivity, resilience and long-term sustainability of essential sectors such as agriculture. Immigration policy should recognise the important contribution agriculture makes to economic prosperity, rural communities, employment, biodiversity, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the production of high-quality food for domestic consumption and global markets.
- While efforts should be made to develop the domestic workforce through training, skills development and improved recruitment and retention, immigration policy must remain responsive to the practical realities facing employers. Some agricultural sectors, including pig, poultry and dairy farming, experience ongoing difficulties recruiting reliable domestic workers. These roles cannot simply remain unfilled without risking animal welfare, reducing production and undermining UK food security.
- NFU Scotland therefore calls for agricultural workers to be reinstated on the Temporary Shortage List and for immigration policy to provide practical, accessible routes that reflect the essential nature of agricultural work and the sector's ongoing workforce needs.
- International recruitment should therefore remain an important and accessible option where genuine labour shortages cannot be met by the domestic workforce. This is particularly important for sectors that have established a reliance on skilled migrant labour and where employers have demonstrated that suitable domestic workers are not readily available. Non-UK workers are permanently employed in the pig, poultry and dairy sectors through the Skilled Worker visa scheme, and retaining the ability to recruit these workers is essential to the continued operation of many businesses.

- The UK Seasonal Worker Visa scheme is also incredibly important to the horticulture sector, which relies on access to a dependable seasonal workforce to plant, maintain and harvest crops at the appropriate time. The scheme provides an essential route for growers to recruit the workers they need, supporting domestic food production, business viability and the resilience of the UK food supply chain. It is imperative that the scheme continues and that there is no further reduction in the number of available permits. Any reduction would significantly undermine growers' ability to recruit sufficient seasonal labour, risking unharvested crops, financial losses and reduced domestic production, with potential consequences for food availability and affordability. We continue to call on the UK Government to commit to retaining SWS in the long term with a fixed number of visas.
- Employers already face additional costs and administrative complexity when recruiting internationally, so immigration policy should avoid introducing unnecessary barriers that could exacerbate existing shortages.

4. **What evidence is available on the effectiveness of shortage lists as a mechanism for using the immigration system to respond to labour shortages?**
    - How long should sectors with shortages be allowed access to the Temporary Shortage List? What should happen if shortages remain unresolved after this period?
    - How can the government effectively assess whether sectors are taking adequate steps to address shortages? What approach should be taken when the causes of labour shortages may be due to factors outside of employers' control?

- NFUS would ask that agricultural workers be reinstated on the Temporary Shortage List.
- In agriculture, labour requirements vary considerably between sectors, and shortages can be particularly difficult to resolve because of the specialist knowledge, practical experience and responsibility required for many roles. The pig, poultry and dairy sectors, for example, rely on skilled workers to maintain animal welfare, manage livestock and ensure continuity of production. Non-UK workers are permanently employed in these sectors through the Skilled Worker visa scheme, and continued access to international recruitment is essential where suitable domestic workers are not available.
- The effectiveness of shortage lists should therefore be assessed not simply by whether the number of vacancies decreases, but by whether businesses can recruit and retain the workers they need to operate sustainably