

Proposed changes to the UK's Shortage Occupation List and its relevance to the energy and utilities sector

November 2023

What is the Shortage Occupation List

The Shortage Occupation List (SOL) is a list of occupations where there is a shortage of suitable skilled labour in the UK, and where it is sensible to fill those shortages with migrant workers through a skilled work visa.

In previous iterations of the SOL, occupations were given several dispensations within the immigration rules, designed to make it easier for employers to access migrant labour to fill vacancies in those areas of identified shortage. However, with the removal of the Resident Labour Market Test and the cap on work visas being suspended, the benefits of the SOL have become more limited.

With the changes now proposed by the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), the key benefits to an occupation being on the list moving forward (as opposed to using the standard Skilled Worker route) are:

- The reduced salary threshold (i.e. the occupation has a “going rate” below £26,200 (which is the Skilled Worker threshold))
- Visa fees are slightly reduced (by £292 for a 3-5 year visa, or £146 for visa lasting up to 3 years – roughly £50 per year).

Therefore, the SOL will only benefit employers whose going rates are comfortably below the general threshold for the Skilled Worker route, allowing those employers to fill low-wage jobs with overseas labour where otherwise they could not meet the Skilled Worker threshold.

Occupations recommended for inclusion on the new Shortage Occupation List

In summary, the MAC has recommended that eight occupations be placed on the UK-wide SOL and two be placed on the Scotland-only SOL.

SOC code	Title	RQF level	Sector	SOL	Conditions
1213	Managers and proprietors in forestry, fishing and related services	3-5	Other service activities	Scotland-only	Add only job title "fishing boat masters"
3111	Laboratory technicians	3-5	Professional, scientific and technical activities	UK-wide	Add only Laboratory technicians with 3 or more years' full-time experience
3217	Pharmaceutical technicians	3-5	Human health and social work activities	UK-wide	
5236	Boat and ship builders and repairers	3-5	Manufacturing	Scotland-only	
5312	Bricklayers and masons	3-5	Construction	UK-wide	
5313	Roofers, roof tilers and slaters	3-5	Construction	UK-wide	
5319	Construction and building trades n.e.c.	3-5	Construction	UK-wide	Add only job title "retrofiters" on the SOL
6139	Animal care services occupations n.e.c.	3-5	Other service activities	UK-wide	Add only job titles "racing grooms", "stallion handlers", "stud grooms", "stud hands", "stud handlers" and "work riders"
6145	Care workers and home carers	1-2	Human health and social work activities	UK-wide	Private households or individuals (other than sole traders sponsoring someone to work for their business) cannot sponsor SW applicants
6146	Senior care workers	3-5	Human health and social work activities	UK-wide	

Conclusions for the energy and utilities sector

Unfortunately for the energy and utilities sector, the current eligibility rules for the SOL mean that the majority of occupations are not eligible – if they are skilled to at least RQF level 3, they are generally paid higher than £26,200. However, this does not preclude these occupations from being recruited via the Skilled Worker route.

Of the occupations recommended for inclusion in the SOL set out above, only four are potentially relevant to employers in the energy and utilities sector:

Title	Potential relevance to energy and utilities sector
Laboratory technicians	Probably most relevant to the water industry as part of their water quality testing activities, but could also apply in other industries where lab testing takes place. Related job titles include Laboratory analyst, Laboratory technician, Scientific technician and Water tester.
Bricklayers and masons	These occupations may be relevant to (i) infrastructure construction companies and (ii) companies involved in the installation of low carbon technologies such as solar PV.
Roofers, roof tilers and slaters	
Construction and building trades n.e.c.	The MAC is recommending that the specific job title of “Retrofitter” be added to the SOL. As for what constitutes a “Retrofitter”, the MAC states that it is ultimately for sponsors to judge whether a specific job role falls within the “Retrofitter” job title within the description of SOC code 5319.

What occupations might be eligible for inclusion in future Shortage Occupation Lists

In future iterations of the SOL, it may be possible for other occupations to be included that are directly relevant to the energy and utilities sector (assuming evidence can be collected that will persuade the MAC to include them on the list), including:

SOC code	Occupation name	Example job titles	“Going rate” for the occupation
2141	Conservation professionals	Conservation officer Ecologist Energy conservation officer Marine conservationist	£24,900 (£12.77 per hour)

SOC code	Occupation name	Example job titles	“Going rate” for the occupation
3114	Building and civil engineering technicians	Building services consultant Civil engineering technician Survey technician Technical assistant (civil engineering)	£23,000 (£11.79 per hour)
3115	Quality assurance technicians	Quality assurance technician Quality control technician Quality technician Test technician	£24,100 (£12.36 per hour)
3116	Planning, process and production technicians	Process technician Production controller Production planner Production technician	£26,000 (£13.33 per hour)
3119	Science, engineering and production technicians not elsewhere classified	Technical assistant Technician Workshop technician	£22,300 (£11.44 per hour)
3131	IT operations technicians	Database administrator IT technician Network administrator Systems administrator	£24,700 (£12.67 per hour)
3563	Vocational and industrial trainers and instructors	NVQ assessor Technical instructor Training consultant Training manager	£24,500 (£12.56 per hour)
5215	Welding trades	Fabricator-welder Fitter-welder Spot welder (metal) Welder Welding technician	£23,100 (£11.85 per hour)
5223	Metal working production and maintenance fitters	Installation engineer Maintenance fitter Mechanical engineer	£24,700 (£12.67 per hour)
5311	Steel erectors	Steel erector Steel fabricator Steel worker (structural engineering)	£23,900 (£12.26 per hour)
8126	Water and sewerage plant operatives	Controller (water treatment) Plant operator (sewage works) Pump attendant Water treatment engineer Water treatment operator	£24,200 (£12.41 per hour)

The future of the Shortage Occupation List

The SOL has changed significantly over recent years and now plays a far less significant role in immigration policy. Indeed, the MAC is now recommending that, if the SOL is retained moving forward, it is heavily reformed and a new name applied to reflect its new purpose.

If the SOL is retained in its current form, the MAC intend to conduct a minor review of the SOL in Spring 2024, when new occupations may be added to the SOL (it is not expected that any occupation will be removed from the list during that review).

The next major review (which is essentially a complete overhaul of the SOL, with occupations both added and removed) is expected in 2026. During this review, the MAC will expect to see evidence of substantial progress in reducing the need to rely on foreign workers for any occupation/job title added in 2024.

When/if these reviews are launched, or a consultation occurs on the future of the SOL, Energy & Utility Skills will consult with its members and respond accordingly.

If you have any questions relating to this paper¹, please email rob.murphy@euskills.co.uk.

¹ If you have any uncertainty or questions around compliance with the immigration rules, you should speak directly to the Home Office or an appropriate legal professional.