

Immigration system will support Scottish economy

By Alister Jack, Secretary of State for Scotland:

Our new borders and immigration system, announced this week, is good news for the Scottish economy.

As we prepare for a bright future outside the EU, it means we will be able to recruit the people we need to do the jobs our economy relies upon.

Businesses across our key economic sectors will continue to be able to attract the right workers. I'm confident they will continue to thrive.

One reason for that is our decision to redefine what a "skilled" job means.

Under the present system, only degree-level jobs count as skilled.

But we want to recognise many more of the jobs our economy depends on – and ensure people with those skills can continue to come to Scotland to work.

The independent Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) keeps a detailed list of jobs at a range of levels.

It shows which jobs will be included in our new definition of "skilled" – which is set roughly at the equivalent of Highers.

In agriculture, they include dairy workers who operate milking machines. As a farmer myself I know just how skilled those jobs are.

Butchers and slaughtermen working in abattoirs are also included.

In the fishing industry, not just trawler skippers but mates and share fishermen – experienced crew members – are all classed as skilled. So are fishmongers, fish filleters and fish processors.

For all those jobs, and many more, employers will be able to recruit workers from overseas.

The system will be less restrictive than at present.

Under the present system for skilled workers, people coming to the UK need the offer of a degree-level job, with a salary of £30,000 or more. Employers recruiting them must also pass a Resident Labour Market Test by advertising the job here first.

In future, there will be no Resident Market Labour Test. And no cap either, as there is at present. And the minimum salary threshold is being reduced from £30,000 to £25,600.

I believe this new, lower salary will work well for Scotland, not least

because wages are higher here than anywhere in the UK apart from London and the South East of England. It will deliver the people our economy needs – and, crucially, protect the wages of people already living here.

Not all the jobs we need are classed as skilled, of course. But there will be other routes for people we've often welcomed into our important hospitality and tourism sectors. More senior roles in the industry, such as hotel and restaurant managers, are classed as skilled jobs.

In agriculture, we have quadrupled the Seasonal Workers Scheme for agriculture from 2,500 to 10,000 in time for this year's harvest, after listening to growers in Scotland and around the UK. The pilot scheme will be assessed with a view to making long term arrangements.

The new system will work well for our world-renowned universities and our burgeoning high tech sectors. They will be able to recruit the world-leading academics and scientists they need.

And the brightest and best students from around the world will continue to come to Scotland. And a new UK-wide graduate route will allow graduates to stay and build their lives here.

I'm pleased we have been able to devise a system that works for Scotland and the whole of the UK. Scottish businesses have been clear they do not favour a separate Scottish immigration system run from Holyrood.

I do not underestimate the demographic challenges facing Scotland and many other parts of the UK – problems of rural depopulation and the issue of our ageing population. But I agree with the MAC: the solution to these issues does not lie in unlimited immigration.

The Scottish Government has extensive powers over economic development at their disposal, and I'm committed to working with them to do all we can to create jobs and to ensure Scotland is an attractive place to live and work.

After 40 years in the EU, creating our own bespoke borders and immigration system is a historic moment. The plans we are putting in place will strengthen Scotland and the whole of the United Kingdom in the years ahead.