

Up to 30,000 workers to help reap 2021 harvest

The number of workers permitted to travel to the UK to pick and package fruit and vegetables will be increased for next year's harvest, the government has announced today (22 December).

The Seasonal Workers Pilot, [originally launched in 2019](#), has been extended and expanded for an additional year with 30,000 visas available for those wanting to come and work on UK farms for a period of up to six months. The workers will play a vital role in helping horticulture growers pick and package their produce in 2021, whilst reducing their reliance on migrant labour as we exit the EU.

The expansion of the scheme follows a long period of close working with the National Farmers Unions and the Association of Labour Providers, across all parts of the UK and in particular recognition of the need for additional seasonal labour in Scotland to support local rural economies and the renowned soft fruit growers.

In addition, the government alongside industry will build on this year's Pick for Britain campaign and actively promote the recruitment and retention of domestic seasonal workers in 2021. This year Pick for Britain helped to raise the profile of roles in the sector, encouraging UK based workers to take on seasonal jobs during the busy harvest months to help keep the nation fed.

Alongside the Seasonal Workers Pilot, Defra will also lead a review into automation in horticulture, to begin in early 2021. The review will report on ways to increase automation in the sector and meet the government's aim of reducing the need for migrant seasonal labour.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

We will always back our farmers and growers, who work hard all year round to provide us with a secure supply of fruit and vegetables.

The measures announced today will provide vital labour, both domestic and from abroad, to our farmers and growers to help gather the 2021 harvest to feed the nation. Our review into automation will pave the way for a pioneering and efficient future for our fruit and vegetable growers.

NFU Vice President Tom Bradshaw said:

This is welcome and positive news, not just for Britain's growers

but also for shoppers who want to enjoy home-grown fresh produce.

By expanding the Seasonal Workers Pilot, the Government is sending a clear message that it is important for Britain to be able to produce its own fruit and veg, which has huge potential for growth. This scheme will allow growers to employ seasonal workers at key times to pick a wide variety of fresh produce on British farms.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury Steve Barclay MP said:

Farmers and growers play a crucial role throughout the year in providing fresh British quality produce for the public. We are determined to support our farming sector as we leave the EU, and to reduce the food miles of food in our shops as part of our wider commitment to the environment.

Extending this pilot for another year and expanding its size show that we are continuing to listen and respond constructively to our farming sector as they prepare for next year's crop.

Today's announcement comes just weeks after the government shared its [blueprint for the agricultural transition period](#), which set out how farmers will be supported to adapt to the future farming policy over a period of seven years.

From next year, farmers will be able to harness the power of on-farm technology and innovation through the Farming Investment Fund, which will open for applications next year. This fund will offer farmers grants for equipment, technology and infrastructure, supporting them to invest in their businesses and boost their productivity.

The [Seasonal Workers Pilot opened in 2019](#) and was designed to test the effectiveness of our immigration system at supporting UK growers during peak production periods, whilst maintaining robust immigration control, and ensuring the welfare of participating migrant workers. It also provides a valuable source of labour for the UK's fruit and vegetable growers helping to make sure that all that we grow in this country gets onto our supermarket shelves.

The UK Government has a long history of helping farmers and growers get the seasonal workers they need. Since the end of WW2, similar schemes for Seasonal Agricultural Workers have welcomed migrant workers into the UK – this latest iteration shows the government's continued commitment to supporting the sector.

PM letter to the The House of Lords Appointments Commission: 21 December

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Political Peerages 2020

Press release

The Queen has been graciously pleased to signify Her intention of conferring the following Peerages of the United Kingdom for Life.



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Nominations from the Leader of the Conservative Party:

1. Rt Hon Sir Richard Benyon – former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and MP for Newbury.
2. Peter Cruddas – businessman and philanthropist.
3. Dame Jacqueline Foster – formerly Deputy Leader of the Conservative Party in the European Parliament and Member of the European Parliament for North West England.
4. Stephanie Fraser – Chief Executive of Cerebral Palsy Scotland.
5. Dean Godson – Director of Policy Exchange.
6. Daniel Hannan – formerly Member of the European Parliament for South

East England.

7. Syed Kamall – formerly Leader of the Conservative Party in the European Parliament and Member of the European Parliament for London.

Nominations from the Leader of the Labour Party:

1. Cllr Judith Blake CBE – Leader of Leeds City Council.
2. Jennifer Chapman – formerly Member of Parliament for Darlington.
3. Vernon Coaker – formerly Minister of State for Schools and Member of Parliament for Gedling.
4. Wajid Khan – formerly Member of the European Parliament for North West England.
5. Gillian Merron – Chief Executive of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, former Minister of State for Public Health and Member of Parliament for Lincoln.

Nominations for Crossbench Peerages:

1. Sir Terence Etherton PC QC – Master of the Rolls and Head of Civil Justice.
2. Sir Simon McDonald KCMG KCV0 – lately Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Head of the Diplomatic Service.
3. Sir Andrew Parker KCB – lately Director General of MI5, the Security Service.
4. The Rt Revd. And Rt Hon Dr John Sentamu – lately Archbishop of York.

The House of Lords Appointments Commission was invited by the Prime Minister to undertake vetting of all party political and cross bench nominations. The Commission is an independent non statutory body. It provides advice, but appointments are a matter for the Prime Minister. The Commission has completed its vetting in respect of all nominees. The Commission advised the Prime Minister that it could not support one nominee – Peter Cruddas. The Prime Minister has considered the Commission's advice and wider factors, and concluded that, exceptionally, the nomination should proceed. The Prime Minister wrote to the Chair of the Commission on 21 December. [This letter can be found here.](#)

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Somerset rivers stocked with fish in run-up to Christmas

Every year, the Agency's Calverton Fish Farm near Nottingham breeds coarse fish for release into rivers and still waters across England to help boost fish populations.

Officers from the Agency's Bridgwater fisheries team spent a busy day on Thursday 17 December putting 2,900 fish into the River Sheppey and 1,450 into Marston Pond. The team also visited West Sedgemoor main drain to release another 1,259 fish.

Earlier they re-stocked 4 other rivers and still waters including the Frome, Yeo, Bird's Quarry and Rust Pond with various species including chub, roach, tench, barbel, dace, rudd, bream and crucian carp.

The Rivers Frome and Sheppey lost a large number of fish following pollution incidents in 2016 and 2018 and will particularly benefit from the re-stocking that will help fish numbers recover.

Jim Flory of the Environment Agency said:

Somerset boasts many angling clubs which is evidence that there is a healthy amount of fish in the county's waterway. But occasionally a helping hand is needed to restore the natural balance in the wake of an incident or decline.

The work of our National Fish Farm is funded by income from licence fees, so in the lead up to Christmas it's great to see the fish farm continuing to produce strong and healthy fish needed for re-stocking and recovery.

The restocking is part of an annual programme funded by income from rod licence sales. Restocking occurs in winter because water temperatures are low and this minimises any stress on the fish, giving them the best possible survival rates.

Restocking is done where numbers are low, have been depleted following a pollution incident or to create new fisheries and opportunities for anglers.

You need a rod fishing licence to fish for salmon, trout, freshwater fish, smelt or eel with a rod and line in England. Get yours from <https://www.gov.uk/fishing-licences>.

Record numbers of doctors and nurses working in the NHS

Professionally qualified clinical staff including paramedics are at record levels, as are scientific, therapeutic and technical staff.

Responding to today's NHS workforce statistics, Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This winter will be challenging as we continue to fight this deadly virus, and I'm hugely grateful to all our staff who continue to save lives and provide care to those who need it.

I'm delighted that record numbers of doctors and nurses are working in our NHS, plus a record pipeline of future talent in nursing, medicine and general practice.

We are backing our NHS and thanks to their unrelenting dedication, we will not only beat COVID but secure the future of our health service and deliver on our manifesto commitment of 50,000 more nurses.

The final figures from this year's admission cycle show there were 29,740 acceptances to nursing and midwifery courses in England, 6,110 more than last year and an increase of over a quarter (26%). The number of new nursing applicants to English providers between 15 January and 30 June was 68% (4,600) higher than the same period last year.

In addition, recent figures for this year show the highest ever number of GPs entering training with 3,793 posts accepted, exceeding the mandated target of 3,250. Health Education England has increased GP trainee acceptances year on year for the last 7 years.

Over the summer the [NHS People Plan](#) set out how the NHS will put staff wellbeing at its heart with a new recruitment, retention and support package. It sets out practical support for wellbeing such as safe spaces to rest and recuperate, wellbeing guardians and support to keep staff physically safe and healthy.

The NHS recently announced £15 million to strengthen mental health support for nurses, paramedics, therapists, pharmacists and support staff. Staff will get rapid access to expanded mental health services that are being rolled out across the country as part of efforts to deal with the second wave of coronavirus.

Today, NHS Digital has published its [monthly NHS workforce data for September 2020](#).

Table summarising NHS workforce statistics in England

	Sept 2019	Sept 2020 full-time equivalent (FTE)	Annual FTE change	Annual change (%)
All staff	1,114,473	1,164,729	50,256	4.5%
Professionally qualified	591,712	618,858	27,146	4.6%
Doctors	116,416	122,446	6,030	5.2%
Nurses	285,871	299,184	13,313	4.7%