

Expat contractors can benefit from skills shortages in the UK

Contractors who are non-UK and non-EU citizens and have specific sought-after skills can benefit from recommendations by the [Migration Advisory Committee](#) (MAC), a body that evaluates skills shortages in the UK.

In its recommended shortage occupation lists, there are usually a number of key contractor roles identified. The significance of the [shortage occupation lists](#) is that expatriate (expat) contractors who cannot qualify for Tier 1 high value or exceptional talent migrant entry may be able to link with an employer who wants to sponsor a Tier 2 Skilled worker for work on a specific project.

There is usually a low-level shortage across most engineering, science, technical and IT roles in the UK, but most are not high enough to warrant a full entry on the shortage occupation lists.

Skills shortages - and opportunities for contractors - in 2012

Those engineering contractor roles in the most recent occupation shortage list include:

Civil engineers across multiple disciplines including geotechnical, mining, reservoir and petroleum, drilling, offshore and subsea, tunnelling, control and process safety

Geologists, geophysicists, geochemists and hydrogeologists

Geoenvironmental, soil mechanics, rock mechanics and geotechnical engineers

Nuclear decommissioning and waste management engineers

Chemical engineers

Mechanical engineers with aerospace skills

Electrical engineers in transmission and distribution

Planning, quality control and production and process engineers.

Other key shortages in core contracting disciplines include:

Interim management and executive roles, including senior managers, directors and chief executives

Software developers and graphic designers with film, TV or video game animation skills

Actuaries

Radiographers.

These skills in demand change on an ongoing basis, although the demand for most engineering disciplines has been sustained over the long term.

Do shortage occupations change?

MAC examines hundreds of occupations in the UK and takes evidence from a huge range of sources, including private businesses and public sector employers that regularly recruit contractors.

Skilled occupations are assessed to determine whether there is a shortage of workers by examining a range of indicators, such as:

Changes in pay

Qualifications

Vacancy rates

Employers' perceptions of skill shortages.

Contractors who are non-UK or non-EU citizens who want to work in the UK, but can't because the Tier 1 (General) Migrant entry route is closed should monitor MAC's list of occupations for changes that might offer them potential entry under the Tier 2 (General) Skilled worker scheme.

Retraining

Some of the roles identified by MAC are likely to remain on the shortage occupations list over the long term, as the number of entry-level workers is falling. This is mainly because there are fewer young Britons entering careers like engineering and science.

It might be possible for expat contractors to retrain and gain work experience in one of these longer term shortage occupations in order to find an employer who can sponsor them for a work permit under Tier 2.

For determined workers from outside the UK and EU who have the potential to become contractors, numerous options can be explored to allow them to enjoy the benefits of an [expat contracting career in the UK](#).

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