

ARE YOU FACING TALENT POVERTY?

Bryony Rest, specialist immigration solicitor and partner at David Gray Solicitors, looks at the UK's skills shortage, especially prevalent in the tech industry, and the issues surrounding recruiting from overseas



Despite a strong economy, the number of positions left vacant because employers cannot find people with the skills or knowledge to fill them has risen by 130 per cent since 2011, according to the UKCES Employer Skills Survey 2015. The so-called 'skills shortage vacancies' now stand at 209,000.

So it's no surprise that employers look abroad to find talent. And it's the smallest employers that face the toughest challenge.

IT skills are among some of the most often highlighted. When survey participants were asked to identify the skills they found difficult to obtain from applicants, tech-related skills made up a staggering 63 per cent of the total. And of those, advanced tech skills were more difficult to identify than basic ones.

This skills poverty is having a huge impact on our region's ability to grow and explains why employers will wish to search overseas for talent.

But, the pressing search for talent overseas collides with a wide range of political issues – which are too well known to restate here.

The impact of this collision is to make the recruitment and retention of overseas talent increasingly complex – the regulations change frequently and the process is difficult to navigate.

Having said that, the Government does recognise the skills shortages that its own surveys highlight. Although the process to recruit overseas talent is tough – it's not so tough as to be impenetrable.

One of the things we should be cautious of is the wide range of scare stories that come alongside the recruitment and retention of skilled workers from overseas.

For example, the Government is set to introduce a new pay threshold of £35,000 for non-EU citizens this month. That sounds like a lot of money and for some skilled people it will be challenging. For others it might not be and there are some caveats around it. Crucially, the £35,000 minimum applies only to those people who want to stay in the UK indefinitely. It's only possible to apply to stay indefinitely after five years.

This is therefore not a recruitment problem; it's a retention problem. There's nothing here to stop an employer recruiting from overseas, and then being able to retain somebody for five years (it's actually six, but that's another quirk).

In the past, employers might have been able to recruit and retain for life. But that's been difficult for a long time. There's nothing here to worry the majority of employers in their pursuit of talent from overseas.



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