The role of migrant workers in filling skill gaps in Agriculture

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Lantra's Role

Lantra is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the environmental and land-based sector, representing 17 industries across the UK

Land Management & Production

Conservation and Management of the Environment

Animal Health & Welfare

SSCs

- Licensed by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
- Work collectively on migration issues through the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils.

3 Core Activities

- Raise employer engagement, demand and investment in skills
- Ensure authoritative labour market information (LMI) for the sector.
- Develop national occupational standards and ensure qualifications meet employer needs

Background

- Technological innovation and a drive towards increasing efficiency have led to high levels of capital investment. Numbers employment have declined, and the nature of work has changed.
- In 2007 over 525,000 work in agriculture (Defra June Survey)
  - 340,000 farmers, partners, directors, family labour
  - 80,000 full time workers
  - 45,000 regular part time workers
  - 60,000 seasonal workers
- Recruitment of workers a problem for employers. 47% of vacancies are hard-to-fill (compared to 27% for all sectors, NESS 2007)
- Shortages acute due to huge difference in labour requirement between low and peak season (particularly in sub-sectors such as horticulture where mechanical harvesting isn't possible).
- Image of sector is of long hours, back breaking work, remote locations.

Celery harvesting

Strawberry picking

What do employers' look for?

- Recruitment of migrant workers based on:
- Skill levels 97%
- Experience 88%
- Qualifications 16%

  'A willingness to work overrides the migrant workers skills, experience and qualifications. Willingness is really the only thing we look for.'

- Migrant workers have been a key source of labour in recent years. Particularly important for filling low skilled seasonal roles.
- Only 90% of migrants have skills required. 40% of migrants are over qualified (Lantra/Defra survey 2007)

Summary

- Migrant workers are important to the sector and fill shortages at a variety of levels.
- They are particularly important in meeting seasonal working requirements for jobs, which may not desirable to UK residents.
- Migrant workers have necessary skills and experience. They are used to physically demanding work.
- Agriculture has adopted other strategies to reduce its requirement for low skilled labour – such as investing in new labour saving technologies, and shifting production to less labour intensive crops.