

# Prospects of change in the SOL for the fashion and textiles industry ahead of 1st of January 2021

The UK has left the EU, as a consequence, from January 2021, EU-citizens willing to work in the UK will have to comply with the new points-based immigration system. Covid-19 has amplified the challenges for the UK labour market, which before the two major events, was benefiting from free movement in the EU. The fashion and artistic creation (creatives) industries combined had a turnover of £84.4b in 2017 and employed more than 730,000 people in the same year, as released by the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\)](#). In this paper, we analyse the current situation of job profiles in the textiles, footwear and clothing industry in the context of the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) together with the points-based immigration system.

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## Glossary

GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education

MAC: Migration Advisory Committee

ONS: Office for National Statistics

RQF: Regulated Qualifications Framework

SOC: UK Standard Occupational Classification

SOL: Shortage Occupation List

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

## Migration Advisory Committee role in the Shortage Occupation List

MAC is an independent, non-statutory, non-time limited, non-departmental public body sponsored by the Home Office. Its role is to advise the Government on migration issues, through transparent, independent and evidence-based advice.

In March 2020, the Home Secretary has commissioned the MAC to compile a UK Shortage Occupation List, which will cover all occupations in the RQF3-5 bracket (medium skills). As a result, Mac has launched a [Shortage Occupation List: Call for Evidence](#) open until 24 June 2020, end of day, to hear organisations' views on:

- The roles that are being filled by migrant workers
- The salaries they are paid
- The implications of the potential changes

Fashion Roundtable urges the textiles and fashion industry to submit answers to MAC consultation on SOL to highlight the labour needs and the importance of EU migrant workers for UK businesses. The Mac will deliver the report by September 2020.

## MAC recommendations progress to Home Office

The Home Office has considered MAC recommendations on salary threshold and points-based system published in a [report in January 2020](#) and has consequently accepted in a policy statement on 19 February 2020 to:

- Lower the general salary threshold from £30,000 to £25,600
- Not introduce regional salary thresholds or different arrangements for other parts in the UK
- Bring the skills threshold down from RQF6 to RQF3
- Suspend the cap on the number of people entering the UK on the skilled-worker route
- Remove the resident labour market test
- Continue to be different arrangements for a small number of occupations where the salary threshold will be based on published pay scales
- Set the requirements for new entrants 30% lower than the rate for experienced workers in any occupation and only use the base salary (and not the allowances or pension contributions) to determine whether the salary threshold is met

## Shortage Occupation List and points-based immigration system

SOL is a feature of [Tier 2 in the Immigration Rules](#) and makes the object of [Immigration Rules Appendix K: shortage occupation list](#) published in 2016 and updated in April 2020. The occupations on the list are given some special dispensations within the immigration rules designed to make it easier for employers to access migrant labour to fill vacancies in those areas of identified shortage.

In MAC's paper "[A Guide to the Shortage Occupation List \(SOL\)](#)", released on 27 May 2020, it is stated that all occupations eligible for the future skilled-worker route of the points-based system, which start with RQF3 and above, will be eligible to be placed on the SOL.

The fashion and textiles professions, as of other sectors that are at RQF level 3 or above, are eligible for the skilled-worker route in the new points-based immigration system. Furthermore, they are eligible to be placed on SOL, for which MAC runs a call for evidence, open until 24th of June.

The occupations on SOL worth 20 points in the points-based immigration system, and enable those with job offers from £20,480 (minimum) salary to acquire the total of 70 points for eligibility to enter in the UK, if they comply with the other requirements: offer of a job by an

approved sponsor (20 points), job at an appropriate skill level (20 points) and speaking English at the required level (10 points).

## Skill levels

[Immigration Rules Appendix J: codes of practice for skilled work](#) published in 2016 and updated in April 2020, outlines the UK Standard Occupational Classification 2010 index, for Tier 2 Sponsors, Tier 5 Sponsors, employers of work permit holders and Tier 1 migrants (where appropriate). Each SOC comes with corresponding skills levels designation from PhD, RQF6 to RQF3 and lower-skilled.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Textiles and Fashion surveyed manufacturers across the UK to map the current state of employment in the UK garment manufacturing sector. More than 80% of respondents consider stitching to be a high-skilled job, the rest consider it to be medium-skilled. No respondents thought it to be a low skilled job. The skill requirement is further evidenced by the five years of training necessary to become a skilled operator. One respondent noted that there may be up to 14 different operations necessary for the completion of a garment, which is definitely not a task for a low-skilled workforce.

We could argue that the term “lower-skilled” used in the UK Immigration Rules, could have connotations and not be encouraging in the choice of a career path. In the MAC new guidance on SOL, skill levels are defined as follows: “skill-levels are designed to reflect how much training and experience is required for someone to do a job and are not a reflection of the value of the work being done”. We believe a more positive term will encourage new generations to enter the jobs currently classified as “lower-skilled”.

## Fashion in Education

Science, technology, engineering and mathematics ([STEM\) Education](#) has always been a highlight of the Government, while the [Cultural Learning Statistics](#) for GCSE show that between 2010 to 2019 in England there was a decline of -38% in the number of arts (Art and Design, Dance, Design and Technology, Drama, Media/Film/TV Studies, Music and Performing/expressive arts) GCSE entries, from 673,739 in 2010 to 419,664 in 2019. Yet, the new T-levels starting in September 2020 bring much hope to the fashion and textiles industry. They follow GCSEs and will be equivalent to 3 A levels. The T-levels have been developed in collaboration with employers and businesses so that the content meets the needs of industry and prepares students for work.

[T courses taught at Fashion Enter](#): Fashion Enter is a not for profit social enterprise which aims to be a centre of excellence for sampling, grading, production and for learning and development of skills within the fashion and textiles industry. Fashion Enter has implemented different T courses: ‘Pattern Cutting Taster Course’, ‘Pattern Cutting Master Course’, ‘Production Pattern Cutting’, ‘Gerber for beginners’, ‘Vectograph Digital Patterns’.

A coherent education, immigration and business government strategy is necessary to secure the prosperity of the sector. As a consequence, the Government should support a framework

that provides an attractive landscape for new players and give certainty for existing manufacturers so that they can make the necessary investments in their businesses.

## Status Quo analysis for fashion and textiles SOC and SOL

Textiles and Garments Trades						
SOC2010 (ONS)	SOC2020 (ONS)	<a href="#">Skills Level RQF</a>  (As per Immigration Rules Appendix J: codes of practice for skilled work)	Salary Rate (2018)  (As per Immigration Rules Appendix J: codes of practice for skilled work)	MAC Guidance on SOL  Jobs that meet the RQF3 skills threshold (SOC 2010)  Eligible for skilled-worker route?  Y/N/In Part	<a href="#">UK SOL Y/N</a>  (As per Immigration Rules Appendix K: SOL)	Scotland SOL Y/N  (As per Immigration Rules Appendix K: SOL)
<b>5411 Weavers and knitters:</b> -Carpet weaver -Knitter -Knitwear manufacturer -Weaver	* Weavers and knitters have been moved in 5419 Unit Group	RQF3	£18,100	Y	N	N
<b>5412 Upholsterers:</b> -Curtain fitter -Curtain maker -Soft furnisher -Trimmer (furniture mfr) -Upholsterer	<b>5411 Upholsterers:</b> -Curtain fitter -Curtain maker -Soft furnisher -Trimmer (furniture mfr) -Upholsterer	RQF3	£18,100	Y	N	N
<b>5413 Footwear and leather working trades:</b> -Cobbler -Leather worker (leather goods mfr) -Machinist (leather goods mfr) -Shoe machinist -Shoe repairer	<b>5412 Footwear and leather working trades:</b> -Cobbler -Leather worker (leather goods mfr) -Machinist (leather goods mfr) -Shoe machinist -Shoe repairer	RQF3	£18,100	Y	N	N
<b>5414 Tailors and dressmakers:</b> -Cutter (hosiery, knitwear mfr) -Dressmaker -Fabric Cutter -Tailor -Tailoress	<b>5413 Tailors and dressmakers:</b> -Costume maker -Cutter (hosiery, knitwear mfr) -Dressmaker -Pattern Cutter -Tailor -Tailoress	RQF3/ Lower-skilled	£18,100	<b>In Part:</b> Bespoke or handcraft tailor jobs that require a completed Bespoke Tailoring Apprenticeship leading to an RQF level 3 in Bespoke Cutting and Tailoring; Jobs that require a completed Modern Apprenticeship in Handicraft Tailoring leading to an RQF level 3 in Apparel Manufacturing Technology	N	N

<b>5419</b> <b>Textiles, garments and related trades n.e.c.:</b> -Clothing manufacturer -Embroiderer -Hand sewer -Sail maker -Upholstery cutter	<b>5419</b> <b>Textiles, garments and related trades n.e.c.:</b> -Clothing manufacturer -Embroiderer -Hand sewer -Knitter -Sail maker -Weaver -Upholstery cutter	RQF3/ Lower- skilled	£18,100	<b>In Part:</b> Jobs that require Licentiatehip (LTI) or Associateship (Ctext ATI) of the Textile Institute; Pattern cutter jobs that require an ABC Level 3 Certificate in Pattern Cutting or an RQF level 3 in Apparel Technology; Head pattern graders; Pattern grader jobs that require a completed Advanced; Apprenticeship in Textiles	N	N
<b>Other Skilled Trades</b>						
<b>5449 Other skilled trades</b> -Diamond moulder -Engraver -Goldsmith -Paint sprayer -Piano tuner -Sign maker -Silversmith -Wig maker	<b>5449 Other skilled trades</b> -Diamond moulder -Engraver -Goldsmith -Paint sprayer -Piano tuner -Sign maker -Silversmith -Wig maker	RQF3	£20,800	Y	N	N
<b>Process Operatives</b>						
<b>8113</b> <b>Textile process operative:</b> -Hosiery worker -Machinist (rope, twine mfr) -Process worker (textile mfr) -Spinner (paper twine mfr)	<b>8112</b> <b>Textile process operative:</b> -Factory worker (clothing mfr) -Hosiery worker -Machinist (rope, twine mfr) -Process worker (textile mfr) -Spinner (paper twine mfr)	Lower- skilled	N/A	N	N	N
<b>Assemblers and Routine Operators</b>						
<b>8137 Sewing Machinists</b> -Overlocker -Seamstress -Sewing machinist -Stitcher -Upholstery machinist	<b>8146 Sewing Machinists</b> -Overlocker -Seamstress -Sewing machinist -Stitcher -Upholstery machinist	Lower- skilled	N/A	N	N	N
<b>Design Occupations</b>						
<b>3422</b> <b>Product, clothing and related designers:</b> -Design consultant -Fashion designer -Furniture designer -Interior designer -Kitchen designer -Textile designer	<b>3422</b> <b>Clothing, fashion and accessories designers:</b> -Bridalwear designer -Fashion designer -Footwear designer -Jewellery designer	RQF4	New entrant: £21,600 Experienced worker: £25,700	Y	N	N

As it can be seen in the table above, garment and textiles SOC 2020 codes: “5414 Tailors and dressmakers” and “5419 Textiles, garments and related trades n.e.c.” are assigned in the RQF3/lower skills bracket, and only in part are recommended by MAC as eligible for the skilled-worker route, which is worth 20 points in the points-based immigration system. Occupation SOC2010 “8137 Sewing Machinist” being marked as “lower-skilled” does not qualify for the skilled-worker route, which requires minimum RQF3 in the immigration system, and therefore the job is not automatically considered for SOL, unless the MAC recommends otherwise.

To obtain 70 points and attain the eligibility 70 points threshold, either the salary should be at the general salary level of £25,600 as per the new points-based immigration system, either the job should be on the SOL. Both criteria worth 20 points, which is needed to add up to the other rather achievable requirements that total to 50 points.

According to the data in the table above, neither the jobs of the fashion and textiles industry are on the SOL so far, and neither the salaries at the required high-level. Therefore, the three salary criteria in the points-based immigration system should be given equally the same worth of 20 points each starting from the minimum £20,480, or the jobs should be demonstrated as SOL needs for the industry.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that ONS has reviewed the socio-economic classification, SOC 2010, to produce [SOC 2020](#), and some occupation groups have shifted. For example, “5411 Weavers and knitters” have moved within “5419 Textiles, garments and related trades n.e.c” and occupation group number 5411 has become “5411 Upholsterers”.

## Textiles, clothing and footwear manufacturing in the SOL

Out of the respondents to the APPG for textiles and fashion survey, more than half employ EEA citizens for machinist roles, and only around 20% employees are non-EEA citizens. Manufacturers based in Greater London boasted the highest number of EEA machinists relative to their machinist workforce, whereas manufacturers based in the East Midlands, which includes manufacturing hotspots such as Leicester, had the highest number of domicile workers. Across all regions, no manufacturer employs more non-EEA citizens than they did either British nationals or EEA nationals.

Furthermore, more than 80% of respondents currently have unfilled machinist vacancies, and out of the manufacturers who have opening positions, the number of vacancies accounts for an average of 65% of existing positions. One respondent reported six open positions for every position filled. When asked whether the UK currently has sufficient domestic skill and interest to fulfil the empty roles, more than three-quarters of respondents answered ‘No’.

Furthermore, more than half of respondents think Brexit will contribute to an increase in machinist vacancies. A worrying amount, considering that respondents have cited up to 30 machinist vacancies per factory. If employers are currently struggling to recruit, the process will be further complicated after freedom of movement with the European Union will cease. Respondents also noted that in manufacturing hotspots such as Leicester, there is very high competition for labour supply, which puts smaller manufacturers at a disadvantage. Bringing

in foreign workers would increase the labour supply, allowing the industry to further prosper as it would sustain the operation of existing companies.

The lack of skilled labour could potentially risk local jobs, as factories that are unable to continue their operations due to lack of labour could choose to relocate or even shut down. Many manufacturers in the UK are micro companies, which employ less than 10 Staff. If retailers are not able to satisfy their demand from UK manufacturers, they have an incentive to move to suppliers in other EU countries.

## Conclusions and call for evidence

The MAC recommendations helped to bring down the skills threshold from RQF6 to RQF3, and has opened the opportunity for occupations at RQF3 skills-level to be eligible for SOL. Fashion Roundtable is willing to support the fashion industry in any way possible. In this regard, evidence from the sector is needed for the engagement in the open consultation with MAC. We call for all fashion and textiles companies to provide evidence in the [MAC consultation on SOL](#) to support the industry by sending their answers on the Governmental portal before 24 June 2020.

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