

WHITE PAPER

Implications for the UK Government's future skills-based immigration system.

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You don't need a PPE degree from Oxford to recognise that immigration is arguably the most hotly debated topic in the seemingly endless conversation over the UK's future relationship with our European neighbours and the wider world. It was one of the hot topics of discussion in the lead-up to the Brexit referendum and has been a mainstay of news reports ever since.

Looking to the future...

Searching 'UK immigration' returns 'about 3,590,000,000 results' (thanks Google)—3.6 BILLION results. You'd have to be Johnny 5 from the cult 1980s film *Short Circuit* to get through that lot in any reasonable amount of time. Despite the copious amount of content on the subject, in the last few days the official policy of the Government on the subject of post-Brexit immigration—and yet more debate surrounding it—has shot to the top of news websites and social feeds across the country.

After reading, a couple of sentences stood out in the Government's policy statement:

"We need to shift the focus of our economy away from a reliance on cheap labour from Europe and instead concentrate on investment in technology and automation. Employers will need to adjust."

Whatever your opinion on the relative merits and flaws of a points-based immigration system and who should shoulder the burden of any of its drawbacks, it's certainly an interesting statement for UK tech businesses—it's now official government policy that businesses should invest in technology and automation. The view of the government being "that employers [should] move away from a reliance on the UK's immigration system as an alternative to investment in staff retention, productivity, and wider investment in technology and automation."

It's undeniable that this position presents unique challenges for many industries in the short, medium, and long term, but it also presents unprecedented opportunities for businesses to explore technology and automation as a solution to those challenges.

Clearly it's not a simple case of business owners and decision makers saying "let's implement technology to automate the areas of our business which may be affected by these policy changes". There are serious practical and financial implications for business owners and the people they rely on to provision their services. Certainly in the short-term there will be adverse effects—it's inevitable with any major shift in government policy.

What is clear is that the government and the technology industry will need to provide robust support and guidance through this period of change. With an annual turnover of £184 billion—the third largest in the world (Global Innovation Index, 2019)—the UK digital technology sector is well-placed to provide this support. The recognition of the need to maintain the momentum of this strong entrepreneurial culture is apparent in education. Starting in September 2020, the new T-Levels in digital production, design, and development are evidence of the need to provide businesses with the necessary skills moving forward.

Again, how government policy changes will affect this momentum is open for debate, but providing proper training for the next generation is a step in the right direction.

As a technology company focused on providing organisations with an accessible route into utilising automation, Fieldfusion is acutely aware that embracing new technology can be daunting. Decision makers may have reservations about adding unnecessary complexity for staff, migrating complicated workflows, or have yet to find a solution which fits the specific requirements of their industry.

Innovation should solve problems and help overcome operational difficulties. We believe in a collaborative and supportive approach of listening to the needs businesses and the people who make them what they are, and responding to feedback.

We can't know for sure what a post-Brexit UK is going to look like, but we do know we're all in this together.