

Law & Policy Group

GRIST

UK: Employment-related legislative priorities outlined in Queen's Speech

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On 11 May 2021, the UK government outlined its legislative priorities in the Queen's Speech, including 30 proposed measures and some initiatives carried over from the previous parliamentary session. The employment-related measures include:

- The National Insurance (NI) Contributions Bill would provide relief from NI contributions to eligible employers in the freeports for up to three years on annual employees' earnings up to £25,000, effective April 2022. Freeports are areas with special rules designed to facilitate new trade and boost employment. Common features include various concessions on customs, tax and planning advantages and reduced bureaucracy. Also, employers who hire veterans would receive NI relief for the first 12 months of employment on earnings of up to £50,000 per year, with the relief backdated to April 2021.
- The Professional Qualifications Bill would establish a new framework for recognizing qualifications acquired in other countries. It replaces the current system introduced after Brexit that gives preference to professional qualifications from the EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. The bill would apply across the UK, and would provide UK regulators with consistent powers to facilitate professional qualifications agreements with overseas regulators.
- A white paper on a "levelling up" program in regions experiencing economic decline would aim to boost training, job opportunities and productivity. The program would include a Levelling Up Fund worth £4.8 billion.
- The introduction of a Lifetime Skills Guarantee would enable eligible individuals to access education and training throughout their lives. Employers and training providers would work together to address local skills needs, especially in the manufacturing, construction, digital, and clean energy sectors. First announced in 2020, the Lifetime Skills Guarantee would apply in England, and certain provisions would apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- An Education Recovery Plan would include reforms of the technical education system after age 16, and would be employer led. The government confirmed the continued rollout of the new technical qualification ("T levels") that includes more workplace experience.
- Increased investment in green industries would aim to create employment opportunities, including "250,000 highly skilled green jobs across the UK."

- The Government is “considering” the findings in the report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, published in March 2021. They “will respond in due course.”

Certain announcements expected to feature in the Queen's Speech — for example, reform of the apprenticeship levy, an employment bill, and the right for employees to disconnect from their workplace — were not included.

Related resources

- [Queen's Speech](#) (UK government, 11 May 2021)
- [Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities Report](#) (UK government, 31 Mar 2021)
- [UK government policy on freeports](#) (House of Commons Library, 19 Mar 2021)

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