

The effect of recent immigration policies on the recruitment for SME businesses: A case study of UK hospitality sector

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The UK hospitality sector is one of the most labour-intensive industries in the national economy, contributing significantly to employment, tourism, and regional development (ONS, 2023). The sector encompasses restaurants, hotels, cafés, pubs, and catering services, all of which rely heavily on human labour to deliver customer-facing services. Historically, hospitality employers have struggled to attract domestic workers due to the nature of the work, which is often characterised by long hours, variable schedules, physically demanding tasks, and relatively low pay (Baum, 2019). As a result, migrant workers-particularly those from the European Union-have played a central role in sustaining the sector's workforce.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which make up the majority of hospitality businesses, have been especially dependent on migrant labour (UK Hospitality, 2022). Prior to Brexit, freedom of movement enabled employers to recruit EU workers without visa restrictions, providing a flexible and reliable labour supply. However, recent changes to UK immigration policy have fundamentally reshaped this landscape. The introduction of the post-Brexit points-based immigration system, rising salary thresholds, and the removal of several hospitality roles from the Skilled Worker visa route have significantly restricted access to international labour (Home Office, 2025).

For example, the minimum salary threshold for Skilled Worker visas increased from £38,700 to £41,700 in 2025, with similar rises across other visa categories (Freeths, 2025). These changes reflect a broader governmental strategy to reduce net migration and prioritise higher-skilled roles (Puri, 2025). However, many hospitality roles-classified as lower-skilled

under the new system do not meet these eligibility criteria, creating substantial recruitment challenges for employers (AA Recruitment, 2025).

The consequences of these policy shifts have been particularly acute for SMEs. Unlike large hospitality chains, SMEs typically operate with limited financial resources, smaller HR teams, and reduced capacity to offer competitive wages or sponsor visas (Jones & Comfort, 2021). As a result, immigration restrictions have intensified existing labour shortages, increased recruitment costs, and placed additional pressure on business continuity. Industry reports indicate that many SMEs have been forced to reduce opening hours, scale back services, or rely on temporary and inexperienced staff to fill gaps (All4Chefs, 2025).

1.2 Problem Statement

The tightening of immigration rules has created a structural mismatch between labour demand and supply within the hospitality sector. SMEs, which already face challenges related to high turnover, limited training budgets, and intense competition for staff, now encounter additional barriers linked directly to immigration policy (Williams, 2022). The removal of key hospitality roles from visa eligibility and the increased salary thresholds have reduced the pool of available migrant workers, exacerbating recruitment difficulties (Home Office, 2025). This appears to have contributed to operational strain, reduced productivity, and in some cases, business closures.

Despite the scale of the issue, academic research has tended to focus on the hospitality sector as a whole or on large multinational organisations, leaving a gap in understanding the specific experiences of SMEs (Lloyd & Payne, 2020). There is limited empirical evidence on how immigration policy changes translate into day-to-day recruitment challenges for smaller businesses, or how these organisations are adapting their recruitment strategies in response. This dissertation addresses this gap by examining the relationship between recent immigration policies and recruitment practices within hospitality SMEs.

1.3 Rationale for the Study

This study is timely and significant for several reasons. First, hospitality SMEs play a vital role in the UK economy, yet they are disproportionately affected by labour shortages due to their reliance on migrant workers and limited capacity to absorb policy-driven shocks (UK Hospitality, 2022). Second, immigration policy is a key determinant of labour supply in the sector, and understanding its effects is essential for informing both business strategy and public policy (Migration Observatory, 2024). Third, SMEs often lack the resources to implement sophisticated recruitment strategies, making it important to explore how they are responding to the constraints imposed by recent policy changes.

From an academic perspective, this research contributes to debates on labour-market regulation, human resource management in SMEs, and the broader socio-economic implications of immigration policy. By focusing specifically on SMEs within the hospitality sector, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of how policy reforms shape recruitment practices at the organisational level.

1.4 Research Aim

To examine how recent UK immigration policies affect recruitment practices within SME businesses in the hospitality sector.

1.5 Research Objectives

1. To analyse recent UK immigration policies relevant to the hospitality labour market.
2. To investigate the recruitment challenges experienced by hospitality SMEs as a result of these policy changes.
3. To evaluate the strategies used by SMEs to address recruitment difficulties in the current immigration policy environment.

1.6 Research Questions

- How have recent immigration policies influenced labour availability in the UK hospitality sector?
- What recruitment challenges do hospitality SMEs face as a result of these policy changes?
- What strategies are SMEs using to mitigate recruitment difficulties, and how effective are these strategies?

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on small and medium-sized enterprises operating within the UK hospitality sector. It examines immigration policies introduced in recent years, particularly those implemented after Brexit and subsequent reforms to the points-based system. The research does not aim to evaluate the entire immigration framework but instead concentrates on policy elements that directly affect recruitment for hospitality SMEs. The findings are therefore most applicable to similar businesses within the sector and may not fully generalise to large hospitality chains or other industries.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the background, rationale, research aim, objectives, and scope of the study. It has highlighted the increasing pressures faced by hospitality SMEs as a result of recent immigration policy reforms. The next chapter builds on this foundation by critically reviewing the academic and industry literature relating to immigration policy, labour markets, and recruitment challenges within the hospitality sector.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a critical examination of academic, policy, and industry literature relating to the impact of recent UK immigration policies on recruitment within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the hospitality sector. It begins by analysing the structure and characteristics of the UK hospitality labour market, highlighting its long-standing reliance on migrant labour and the sector's vulnerability to labour-market fluctuations. The chapter then explores the evolution of UK immigration policy in the post-Brexit era, with particular attention to the introduction of the points-based immigration system, rising salary thresholds, and the reconfiguration of shortage-occupation criteria.

The review evaluates how these policy changes have reshaped labour supply, intensified recruitment challenges, and altered workforce dynamics within hospitality SMEs. It also examines the broader organisational implications of labour shortages, drawing on contemporary industry reports, government publications, and empirical studies. Recurring themes include wage constraints, high turnover, limited domestic interest in hospitality roles, and the growing mismatch between policy design and sectoral labour needs.

In addition, the chapter assesses the strategies adopted by hospitality businesses to mitigate labour shortages, including upskilling initiatives, employer-branding efforts, technological adoption, and operational adjustments. These organisational responses are critically analysed in relation to their effectiveness, feasibility, and alignment with existing theoretical perspectives.

Human Capital Theory is introduced as the primary theoretical framework underpinning this study, offering a lens through which to interpret the value of migrant labour, the consequences of restricted labour mobility, and the capacity of SMEs to invest in workforce development. By synthesising insights from the literature, the chapter identifies key gaps—particularly the limited focus on SMEs, the scarcity of research examining post-Brexit recruitment realities, and the need for more nuanced understanding of regional and sector-specific impacts.

Overall, this literature review establishes the conceptual and empirical foundation for the analysis presented in subsequent chapters and situates the study within broader debates on labour markets, migration policy, and organisational resilience in the UK hospitality sector.

2.1 The UK Hospitality Labour Market

The UK hospitality sector is a major contributor to national employment and economic activity, supporting millions of jobs across restaurants, hotels, pubs, cafés, and catering services (ONS, 2023). As a labour-intensive industry, its performance is heavily dependent on the availability, skills, and stability of its workforce (Baum, 2019). However, the sector has long been characterised by structural challenges, including high staff turnover, relatively low wages, irregular working hours, and seasonal fluctuations in demand (Lloyd & Payne, 2020). These characteristics create a labour market that is inherently volatile and difficult to staff consistently.

Domestic workers have historically shown limited interest in hospitality roles due to perceptions of low pay, limited career progression, and demanding working conditions (Williams, 2022). As a result, the sector has relied heavily on migrant labour to fill operational roles. Prior to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, freedom of movement enabled employers to recruit workers from across Europe without visa restrictions (Migration Observatory, 2024). This provided hospitality businesses with a flexible and reliable workforce willing to undertake roles such as waiting, housekeeping, food preparation, and kitchen support (UK Hospitality, 2022).

Migrant workers became particularly essential in urban centres and tourist destinations, where demand for labour is high and domestic supply is insufficient (Institute of Hospitality, 2024). Their availability allowed businesses to maintain operational capacity during peak seasons and respond quickly to fluctuations in demand. However, this reliance also created a structural vulnerability: when access to migrant labour becomes restricted, hospitality employers struggle to maintain staffing levels (Dustmann et al., 2021).

Recent reports indicate that labour shortages have become a persistent challenge within the sector (CIPD, 2023). Demographic changes, shifting worker expectations, and increased competition from other industries have reduced the availability of domestic workers willing to take hospitality roles (Thomas et al., 2011). These shortages have been further intensified by immigration policy changes introduced following Brexit (Home Office, 2025). SMEs, which account for the majority of hospitality businesses, are particularly affected due to their smaller size, limited financial resources, and reduced ability to compete with larger firms for staff (Jones & Comfort, 2021).

In summary, the literature portrays the hospitality labour market as structurally fragile, heavily dependent on migrant labour, and increasingly unable to attract domestic workers conditions that amplify the impact of restrictive immigration policies.

2.2 Recent UK Immigration Policy Changes

The UK's immigration system has undergone significant transformation since Brexit. In January 2021, the government introduced a points-based immigration system designed to control migration flows and prioritise higher-skilled workers (UK Government, 2023). Under this system, migrant workers must meet specific criteria relating to salary thresholds, skill levels, and English-language proficiency to obtain a work visa (Home Office, 2024). These requirements represent a major departure from the previous system, which allowed free movement of EU nationals regardless of skill level.

One of the most significant policy developments affecting the hospitality sector has been the increase in the minimum salary threshold required for Skilled Worker visas. These thresholds have risen substantially in recent years, making it increasingly difficult for employers to recruit migrant workers for roles that fall below the required salary level (Freeths, 2025). Many hospitality positions - such as waiting staff, bar staff, or kitchen assistants - do not meet these thresholds due to the traditionally lower wages associated with the sector (AA Recruitment, 2025).

Another major policy change involves the replacement of the Shortage Occupation List with the Immigration Salary List. The former list identified roles experiencing labour shortages and allowed employers to recruit migrant workers under more flexible conditions (Migration Advisory Committee, 2024). However, the newer Immigration Salary List includes fewer roles and imposes stricter eligibility criteria, reducing the number of hospitality occupations recognised as facing acute shortages (Puri, 2025). This shift has removed key operational roles - such as chefs, supervisors, and kitchen assistants - from eligibility, despite industry evidence of persistent shortages.

Policy changes introduced in 2024-2025 have also removed several hospitality occupations from the Skilled Worker visa route entirely (Home Office, 2025). This has effectively closed one of the primary pathways through which hospitality businesses previously recruited international staff. As a result, employers must now rely more heavily on domestic workers or explore alternative recruitment strategies (UK Hospitality, 2022).

The UK government has justified these policy changes by arguing that reducing reliance on migrant labour will encourage businesses to invest more in training domestic workers and improving working conditions (UK Government, 2023). However, critics argue that such

policies fail to recognise the structural nature of labour shortages within the hospitality sector (Anderson & Ruhs, 2010). Scholars suggest that immigration policies designed primarily to reduce overall migration may not adequately consider the specific labour needs of different industries (Migration Observatory, 2024).

Overall, the literature indicates that post-Brexit immigration reforms have significantly narrowed the pathways through which hospitality SMEs can access migrant labour, with profound implications for workforce stability.

2.3 Impact of Immigration Policy on Labour Supply

Changes to immigration policy have had a direct and significant impact on labour supply within the hospitality sector. With the end of EU free movement and the introduction of stricter visa requirements, the number of migrant workers available to hospitality employers has declined sharply (ONS, 2024). This reduction has created immediate and long-term challenges for businesses that previously relied on a steady influx of EU workers.

Migrant workers have historically filled many roles that domestic workers were unwilling to undertake due to the physically demanding nature of the work, unsocial hours, and relatively low wages (Baum, 2019). When access to migrant labour is restricted, hospitality businesses struggle to attract sufficient numbers of domestic workers to fill these positions (CIPD, 2023). This mismatch between labour supply and demand has resulted in widespread vacancies across the sector.

Employers have reported longer recruitment times, higher vacancy rates, and increased competition for workers (Moore UK, 2025). In some cases, businesses have been forced to reduce operating hours or limit the services they offer due to staff shortages (All4Chefs, 2025). These operational adjustments can negatively affect customer satisfaction, revenue generation, and long-term business sustainability.

The impact of labour shortages is particularly severe for SMEs. Large hospitality chains often possess greater financial resources, stronger employer branding, and more sophisticated recruitment systems (Lloyd & Payne, 2020). These advantages enable them to attract workers more easily than smaller businesses. SMEs, by contrast, may lack the financial capacity to raise wages significantly or sponsor migrant workers under the new immigration system (Williams, 2022).

Labour shortages also have broader implications for service quality and business performance. When businesses operate with insufficient staff, existing employees may be required to work longer hours, increasing the risk of burnout and turnover (Thomas et al.,

2011). High turnover rates further exacerbate recruitment difficulties, creating a cycle that can undermine organisational stability (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

Studies examining the relationship between immigration policy and labour markets suggest that restrictive policies can reduce labour-market flexibility and hinder economic productivity (Dustmann et al., 2021). In the context of hospitality SMEs, reduced access to migrant labour may limit the ability of businesses to respond to fluctuations in demand or expand their operations (Migration Observatory, 2024).

In summary, the literature demonstrates that immigration policy reforms have significantly constrained labour supply, intensifying recruitment challenges and operational pressures for hospitality SMEs.

2.4 Recruitment Challenges for Hospitality SMEs

Hospitality SMEs face unique recruitment challenges due to their size, resource constraints, and limited HR capacity. Unlike large hospitality chains, SMEs often lack formal recruitment strategies, employer branding, and competitive compensation packages (Barrett & Mayson, 2007). Immigration policy changes have intensified these challenges by reducing access to migrant labour (Home Office, 2025).

Key recruitment barriers for SMEs include:

- limited financial resources to increase wages or offer sponsorship (Williams, 2022)
- high turnover rates, which increase recruitment frequency (Baum, 2019)
- competition with larger firms that can offer better pay and benefits (Lloyd & Payne, 2020)
- geographical constraints, particularly in rural or tourist-dependent areas (Thomas et al., 2011)
- lack of HR expertise, leading to reactive rather than strategic recruitment (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010)

Recent immigration policy changes have added a further layer of complexity. SMEs now face a reduced labour pool, higher recruitment costs, and increased uncertainty about future workforce availability (Migration Advisory Committee, 2024). Industry reports highlight that businesses are “struggling to recruit and retain staff,” with shortages leading to “longer working hours and a decline in service quality” (All4Chefs, 2025).

Overall, the literature suggests that SMEs experience a disproportionate burden from immigration reforms, as their structural limitations reduce their ability to compete for a shrinking labour pool.

2.5 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) provides a valuable framework for understanding the impact of immigration policy on recruitment in hospitality SMEs. The theory conceptualises workers as carriers of knowledge, skills, and abilities that contribute to organisational productivity. Labour is therefore viewed as a form of capital in which organisations invest through recruitment, training, and development (Baum, 2019).

In the context of the hospitality sector, migrant workers represent a significant source of human capital. Many possess valuable skills, industry experience, and cultural competencies that enhance service delivery in an international tourism environment (UK Hospitality, 2022). Immigration policies that restrict access to migrant labour can therefore reduce the availability of human capital within the sector (Dustmann et al., 2021).

Human Capital Theory also highlights the importance of investing in workforce development. However, SMEs often face financial and operational constraints that limit their capacity to invest in training programmes for domestic workers (Williams, 2022). As a result, immigration restrictions may create a human-capital deficit that is difficult for SMEs to overcome without policy adjustments or external support (Anderson & Ruhs, 2010).

Overall, Human Capital Theory provides a useful lens for interpreting the consequences of restricted labour mobility and the challenges SMEs face in developing and retaining a skilled workforce.

2.6 Critical Perspectives on Immigration Policy

Several scholars have criticised the UK's post-Brexit immigration framework for failing to adequately address the labour needs of service industries such as hospitality (Anderson & Ruhs, 2010). Critics argue that policies focused primarily on attracting highly skilled migrants overlook the economic importance of operational roles that support everyday service delivery (Migration Observatory, 2024).

Another criticism concerns the use of salary thresholds as a key eligibility criterion for work visas. While salary thresholds may be appropriate in certain sectors, they may not accurately reflect labour shortages in industries where wages are traditionally lower (Freeths, 2025). Some researchers suggest that recent immigration reforms were influenced more by political objectives than by detailed labour-market analysis (Smith, 2024).

There is also evidence that restrictive immigration policies have uneven impacts across different types of businesses. Large corporations often possess the resources necessary to adapt through wage increases, automation, or international recruitment strategies (Lloyd & Payne, 2020). SMEs, however, may lack the capacity to implement such measures (Williams, 2022).

These critiques highlight the importance of developing more flexible and sector-sensitive immigration policies that recognise the diverse labour needs of different industries (Migration Advisory Committee, 2024).

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the key literature relevant to the impact of immigration policy on recruitment within hospitality SMEs. The literature demonstrates that the UK hospitality sector is highly dependent on migrant labour and has historically relied on international workers to fill operational roles (ONS, 2023; Baum, 2019). Recent immigration policy changes, including the introduction of the points-based system and increased visa salary thresholds, have significantly reduced access to migrant labour (Home Office, 2025). These changes have intensified existing labour shortages and created additional recruitment challenges for hospitality businesses (UK Hospitality, 2022).

SMEs are particularly vulnerable to these challenges due to their limited financial resources, smaller management structures, and reliance on informal recruitment practices (Jones & Comfort, 2021). Although businesses have adopted various strategies to address labour shortages, these measures cannot fully compensate for the reduction in migrant labour supply (CIPD, 2023).

Human Capital Theory provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics by emphasising the importance of labour as a form of organisational capital (Becker, 1964). Restricting access to migrant workers reduces the human capital available to hospitality SMEs, potentially undermining their operational capacity and long-term sustainability (Dustmann et al., 2021).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to investigate how recent UK immigration policies affect recruitment practices within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the hospitality sector. It explains the research philosophy, research design, data collection methods, data selection criteria, analytical approach, ethical considerations, and

limitations. As this study relies exclusively on secondary data, the methodology is structured to ensure rigour, transparency, and academic credibility (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.1 Research Philosophy

This research is guided primarily by an interpretivist philosophy, which emphasises understanding social phenomena through the meanings individuals and organisations assign to them (Bryman, 2016). Interpretivism is appropriate because the study explores how immigration policy changes influence recruitment challenges within hospitality SMEs-issues shaped by organisational behaviour, managerial perceptions, and sector-specific labour dynamics (Lloyd & Payne, 2020). Secondary sources such as academic literature, industry reports, and policy documents provide insight into these interpretations (Creswell, 2018).

Elements of pragmatism are also incorporated. Pragmatism recognises that research questions often require a combination of qualitative interpretation and empirical evidence (Morgan, 2014). Immigration policy is both a regulatory framework and a social phenomenon; therefore, understanding its impact requires analysing both qualitative commentary and quantitative labour-market data (ONS, 2023). This philosophical combination supports a balanced and comprehensive analysis.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative secondary research design, which involves analysing existing data rather than collecting primary data (Johnston, 2017). This design is appropriate for several reasons:

- Immigration policy changes are extensively documented through government publications, legal updates, and policy briefings (Home Office, 2025).
- Industry bodies such as Hospitality and the Migration Advisory Committee publish regular labour-market analyses (UK Hospitality, 2022; MAC, 2024).
- Academic literature provides theoretical and empirical insights into labour markets, human capital, and SME recruitment (Baum, 2019).
- Secondary research allows for the inclusion of the most recent policy developments, which primary research may not capture in time (Moore, 2025).

This design enables the synthesis of diverse evidence to identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps in existing knowledge (Saunders et al., 2019). It also aligns with the study's aim to understand broad sectoral trends rather than individual organisational experiences.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection involved systematically identifying and reviewing secondary sources relevant to the research aim and objectives. Four main categories of sources were used:

- **Government and regulatory publications**, including Home Office policy statements, immigration rule updates, and Migration Advisory Committee reports (Home Office, 2024; MAC, 2024).
- **Industry reports**, such as analyses from UK Hospitality, Moore UK, All4Chefs, and sector-specific consultancies examining labour shortages and recruitment trends (All4Chefs, 2025; Moore UK, 2025).
- **Academic literature**, including peer-reviewed journal articles on human capital, labour markets, SME recruitment, and the hospitality sector (Lloyd & Payne, 2020; Williams, 2022).
- **Labour-market statistics**, including ONS datasets and sectoral employment figures (ONS, 2023).

Searches were conducted using academic databases (Google Scholar, ResearchGate), industry websites, and government portals. Keywords included: hospitality labour shortages, immigration policy UK, Skilled Worker visa, SME recruitment, post-Brexit labour market, and human capital theory (Creswell, 2018).

This structured approach ensured that the data collected was credible, relevant, and aligned with the research objectives.

3.4 Data Selection and Inclusion Criteria

To ensure rigour, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

- **Relevance**: Sources had to relate directly to immigration policy, hospitality labour markets, or SME recruitment (Saunders et al., 2019).
- **Recency**: Priority was given to sources published between 2019 and 2025 to reflect the post-Brexit policy environment (MAC, 2024).
- **Credibility**: Only reputable sources (peer-reviewed journals, government documents, recognised industry bodies) were included (Bryman, 2016).
- **Specificity**: Sources focusing on hospitality SMEs were prioritised, though broader hospitality literature was used where SME-specific research was limited (Williams, 2022).

Exclusion criteria included:

- Outdated sources (pre-2015 unless foundational theory such as Becker, 1964).
- Non-UK studies unless offering relevant theoretical insight (Anderson & Ruhs, 2010).
- Opinion pieces lacking evidence (Smith, 2024).

This ensured that the final dataset was both robust and academically defensible.

3.5 Data Analysis

The study employed **thematic analysis** to interpret and synthesise the secondary data. Thematic analysis is appropriate for qualitative secondary research because it enables the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and relationships across diverse sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis followed three stages:

- **Familiarisation:** Reviewing policy documents, reports, and academic literature to identify key issues related to immigration policy and recruitment (Creswell, 2018).
- **Coding:** Categorising data into thematic areas such as labour availability, policy restrictions, SME challenges, and organisational responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- **Synthesis:** Integrating themes to develop a coherent narrative that addresses the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2019).

This analytical approach allowed the study to draw connections between policy changes-such as rising Skilled Worker visa salary thresholds-and their practical implications for hospitality SMEs (Freeths, 2025). It also facilitated the integration of Human Capital Theory into the interpretation of findings (Becker, 1964).

3.6 Research Quality: Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Ensuring research quality is essential in secondary research. This study enhances validity by drawing on authoritative and reputable sources, including government publications, industry bodies, and peer-reviewed academic literature (Bryman, 2016). Triangulation across multiple source types strengthens the credibility of the findings (CIPD, 2023).

Reliability is supported through transparent documentation of the data collection process and consistent application of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By using publicly available and verifiable sources, the study ensures that the findings can be replicated by other researchers following the same methodological steps (Johnston, 2017).

To enhance trustworthiness, the study addresses:

- **Credibility:** Using multiple sources to confirm findings (Saunders et al., 2019).
- **Dependability:** Maintaining a clear audit trail of how sources were selected and analysed (Bryman, 2016).
- **Confirmability:** Ensuring interpretations are grounded in evidence rather than researcher bias (Creswell, 2018).
- **Transferability:** Providing sufficient contextual detail for findings to be applied to similar hospitality settings (Williams, 2022).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Although this study does not involve direct interaction with participants, ethical considerations remain important. The research adheres to standard academic ethical principles:

- **Integrity and accuracy:** Ensuring that all sources are represented accurately and without misinterpretation (Bryman, 2016).
- **Proper attribution:** Citing all sources using the Harvard referencing system to acknowledge intellectual property (Creswell, 2018).
- **Use of publicly available data:** Only publicly accessible documents and datasets were used, avoiding issues related to confidentiality or data protection (ONS, 2023).
- **Balanced interpretation:** Including a range of perspectives to avoid bias, such as both industry and academic viewpoints (MAC, 2024).

As no primary data was collected, issues such as informed consent, anonymity, and participant confidentiality were not applicable.

3.8 Limitations of the Methodology

Secondary research has inherent limitations. First, the study is dependent on the availability and quality of existing data. While industry and government sources provide extensive information, gaps may exist in SME-specific evidence, as many reports focus on the hospitality sector as a whole (UK Hospitality, 2022).

Second, secondary data may reflect the biases or priorities of the organisations that produced it. For example, industry bodies may emphasise labour shortages to influence policy, while government publications may frame immigration reforms in a politically favourable manner (Smith, 2024).

Third, the study cannot capture real-time organisational experiences or the nuanced perspectives of SME managers, which primary research such as interviews could provide (Williams, 2022). This limits the depth of insight into how individual businesses interpret and respond to immigration policy changes.

Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of immigration policy means that some sources may become outdated quickly. The study mitigates this by prioritising the most recent publications, particularly those from 2024-2025 (Home Office, 2025).

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach used in this dissertation, which employs a qualitative secondary research design grounded in interpretivist and pragmatic philosophical assumptions. Data was collected from a wide range of credible sources and analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns relevant to the research objectives. Ethical considerations were addressed through responsible use of publicly available data and accurate attribution. While secondary research has limitations, it provides a robust and efficient method for examining the impact of immigration policy on recruitment in hospitality SMEs.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the secondary data analysis and critically discusses them in relation to the research objectives and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The analysis is organised into four key themes that emerged consistently across government publications, industry reports, and academic sources: (1) labour availability in the UK hospitality sector, (2) the impact of immigration policy on workforce supply, (3) recruitment challenges for hospitality SMEs, and (4) organisational responses to labour shortages. Each theme is examined through an analytical lens, integrating sector-specific examples and contrasting perspectives. The chapter concludes with an integrated discussion that applies Human Capital Theory to interpret the findings and evaluate their implications for hospitality SMEs.

4.2 Theme 1: Labour Availability in the UK Hospitality Sector

Labour availability has become one of the most pressing issues facing the UK hospitality sector, with persistent shortages reported across restaurants, cafés, hotels, pubs, and catering services (ONS, 2023). The sector's labour-intensive nature means that staffing levels directly influence operational capacity, service quality, and business performance

(Baum, 2019). However, the supply of workers willing to take hospitality roles has declined significantly in recent years, driven by demographic shifts, changing worker expectations, and increased competition from other industries (CIPD, 2023). These shortages have created a long-term structural imbalance that predates Brexit but has intensified in the post-pandemic and post-Brexit environment.

4.2.1 Declining domestic interest in hospitality roles

Domestic workers have shown decreasing interest in hospitality employment due to perceptions of low pay, unsocial hours, and limited career progression (Lloyd & Payne, 2020). For example, a small independent café in Manchester may struggle to attract local applicants for early-morning barista shifts, even when offering competitive hourly rates. This aligns with industry reports indicating that hospitality roles are often viewed as temporary or transitional rather than long-term career options (UK Hospitality, 2022).

In addition, generational differences have influenced labour availability. Younger workers increasingly prioritise work-life balance, job security, and flexible working arrangements areas where hospitality roles often fall short (CIPD, 2023). The rise of remote work has also shifted labour preferences. Many individuals who previously relied on hospitality jobs have transitioned into remote administrative roles, customer-service positions, or gig-economy work, which offer greater autonomy and predictability (Williams, 2022).

4.2.2 Post-pandemic labour market restructuring

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated structural changes in the labour market. Many former hospitality workers transitioned into other sectors during lockdowns and did not return once restrictions were lifted (Moore UK, 2025). For instance, kitchen assistants and waiting staff who moved into warehouse or delivery roles often found these positions offered more predictable hours and higher wages.

The pandemic also reshaped worker expectations. Employees increasingly seek stability, benefits, and career development -areas where hospitality SMEs often struggle to compete. A family-run restaurant in Birmingham may find that former staff have permanently exited the sector, forcing the business to rely on inexperienced workers or reduce operating hours. This has created a long-term labour deficit that SMEs have struggled to fill, particularly as competition for workers has intensified across sectors.

4.2.3 Seasonal and geographical disparities

Labour shortages are not evenly distributed across the UK. Rural and tourist-dependent areas - such as coastal towns or national park regions - face more severe shortages due to

limited local populations and reduced access to public transport (Thomas et al., 2011). A small hotel in Cornwall may rely heavily on seasonal workers yet struggle to recruit domestically due to the area's limited housing and transport infrastructure.

Urban centres, while benefiting from larger labour pools, face intense competition among hospitality businesses. In London, for example, independent cafés compete with large chains that can offer higher wages and structured career pathways (Lloyd & Payne, 2020). This creates a two-tier labour market where SMEs are disproportionately disadvantaged.

4.2.4 Critical interpretation

The evidence suggests that labour shortages are not solely the result of immigration policy changes but reflect deeper structural issues within the hospitality labour market. These include:

- low wage structures
- limited career progression
- demanding working conditions
- competition from other sectors
- geographical constraints

This indicates that even without immigration restrictions, hospitality SMEs would still face significant recruitment challenges. However, immigration policy changes have intensified these structural weaknesses, reducing the sector's ability to compensate for domestic labour shortages. The combination of long-standing labour-market issues and reduced access to migrant workers has created a "perfect storm" for SMEs, limiting their operational resilience and long-term sustainability.

4.3 Theme 2: Impact of Immigration Policy on Workforce Supply

Immigration policy reforms introduced after Brexit have had a profound impact on the availability of migrant labour in the hospitality sector. The end of EU free movement, the introduction of the points-based immigration system, and rising Skilled Worker visa salary thresholds have collectively reduced the number of migrant workers eligible to work in hospitality roles (Home Office, 2025). These reforms represent one of the most significant structural shifts in the sector's labour supply in decades, fundamentally reshaping recruitment pipelines that SMEs previously relied upon. While immigration policy has always influenced labour flows, the post-Brexit framework has created new barriers that disproportionately affect low-wage, labour-intensive industries such as hospitality.

4.3.1 Decline in EU migrant labour

Prior to Brexit, EU nationals represented a significant proportion of the hospitality workforce, particularly in operational roles such as housekeeping, waiting, and kitchen support (Migration Observatory, 2024). The removal of free movement has led to a sharp decline in EU workers entering the UK labour market. For example, a small hotel in Edinburgh that previously relied on seasonal workers from Eastern Europe may now struggle to fill housekeeping roles due to visa restrictions and increased administrative burdens.

This decline has been further exacerbated by changing perceptions of the UK among potential migrant workers. Reports suggest that the UK is now viewed as a less attractive destination due to stricter immigration rules, higher living costs, and uncertainty surrounding long-term residency (UK Hospitality, 2022). As a result, many EU workers have chosen alternative destinations such as Ireland, Germany, or the Netherlands, where labour mobility remains more flexible. This shift has created a long-term gap in the UK hospitality labour market that domestic recruitment alone cannot fill.

4.3.2 Skilled Worker visa salary thresholds

The Skilled Worker visa route requires employers to meet minimum salary thresholds that exceed typical hospitality wages (Freeths, 2025). Many hospitality roles - such as waiting staff, baristas, and kitchen assistants - fall well below these thresholds, making them ineligible for sponsorship. Even skilled roles, such as chefs or supervisors, often fail to meet the required salary level unless employed by large chains with higher wage structures.

This creates a structural disadvantage for SMEs. A small independent restaurant in Leeds may wish to sponsor an experienced sous chef from abroad but find that the salary requirement exceeds what the business can afford. Larger hospitality groups, by contrast, can offer higher salaries and absorb sponsorship costs, widening the competitive gap between SMEs and corporate chains (Williams, 2022). This reinforces labour market inequalities and limits SMEs' ability to access skilled migrant labour.

4.3.3 Removal of hospitality roles from the Immigration Salary List

The replacement of the Shortage Occupation List with the Immigration Salary List has further restricted access to migrant labour. Fewer hospitality roles are now recognised as shortage occupations, reducing the number of positions eligible for visa sponsorship (MAC, 2024). This policy shift has had a particularly severe impact on back-of-house roles, such as kitchen porters and commis chefs, which are essential for daily operations but do not meet the new salary or skill criteria (AA Recruitment, 2025).

The exclusion of these roles reflects a broader policy trend that prioritises high-skilled, high-paid occupations, overlooking the operational realities of hospitality work. This misalignment between policy design and sector needs has contributed to persistent vacancies and operational strain.

4.3.4 Increased administrative and financial burdens

Even when roles are eligible for sponsorship, SMEs face significant administrative and financial barriers. Sponsorship licences require compliance with complex regulations, record-keeping, and reporting obligations (Home Office, 2024). For a small café or family-run restaurant, these requirements may be prohibitively time-consuming.

Additionally, visa fees, immigration health surcharges, and legal costs make sponsorship financially unviable for many SMEs (Puri, 2025). Larger hospitality chains, by contrast, can absorb these costs more easily, creating an uneven playing field. This administrative burden discourages SMEs from engaging with the sponsorship system altogether, further limiting their access to migrant labour.

4.3.5 Critical interpretation

The evidence indicates that immigration policy changes have disproportionately affected hospitality SMEs by:

- reducing access to migrant labour
- increasing recruitment costs
- creating administrative burdens
- limiting eligibility for visa sponsorship

These impacts compound existing labour shortages and undermine SMEs' ability to maintain operational capacity. The findings support the argument that immigration policy has been designed with limited consideration of sector-specific labour needs (Anderson & Ruhs, 2010). The cumulative effect is a labour market environment in which SMEs face structural disadvantages, reduced competitiveness, and heightened vulnerability to workforce instability.

4.4 Theme 3: Recruitment Challenges for Hospitality SMEs

Recruitment challenges have intensified significantly for hospitality SMEs in the post-Brexit environment. While labour shortages affect the entire sector, SMEs face unique structural disadvantages that limit their ability to attract and retain staff (Barrett & Mayson, 2007). These challenges stem from financial constraints, limited HR capacity, weaker employer

branding, and increased competition from larger firms (Lloyd & Payne, 2020). The cumulative effect is a recruitment landscape in which SMEs must compete for a shrinking pool of workers while lacking the resources and organisational infrastructure available to larger hospitality chains.

4.4.1 Financial constraints and wage competition

SMEs typically operate on narrow profit margins, limiting their ability to offer competitive wages or benefits (Williams, 2022). For example, an independent restaurant in Liverpool may struggle to match the hourly rates offered by national chains, which can leverage economies of scale to increase pay. This wage disparity reduces SMEs' attractiveness to jobseekers, particularly in a labour market where workers have more employment options.

The issue is further compounded by rising operational costs, including energy prices, food inflation, and business rates. These pressures reduce the financial flexibility SMEs need to raise wages or introduce incentives. Industry reports confirm that wage competition has intensified since Brexit, with larger employers raising salaries to attract domestic workers (UK Hospitality, 2022). SMEs, however, often cannot absorb these increased labour costs without raising prices, which risks reducing customer demand. This creates a cycle in which SMEs are unable to increase wages, leading to recruitment difficulties that further constrain revenue.

4.4.2 Limited HR capacity and informal recruitment practices

Many hospitality SMEs rely on informal recruitment methods such as word-of-mouth, walk-ins, or social media posts (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). While these methods are cost-effective, they are less efficient than structured recruitment strategies used by larger firms. A small café in Bristol, for instance, may depend on local networks to find staff, resulting in longer vacancy periods and inconsistent applicant quality.

The lack of formal HR processes also affects retention. SMEs may struggle to provide structured training, career development, or performance management systems, which are increasingly important to younger workers (CIPD, 2023). Without dedicated HR personnel, SMEs often adopt reactive rather than strategic approaches to recruitment, leading to repeated hiring cycles and higher turnover. This limits their ability to build a stable, skilled workforce.

4.4.3 Increased competition for skilled roles

Skilled roles such as chefs, supervisors, and managers are particularly difficult to fill. The removal of many hospitality roles from the Immigration Salary List has further reduced the

availability of skilled migrant workers (MAC, 2024). A small hotel in York may find it difficult to recruit experienced chefs, as these roles often fall below the Skilled Worker visa salary threshold (Freeths, 2025).

Larger hospitality groups can offer structured career pathways, training programmes, and relocation packages, making them more attractive to skilled workers (Lloyd & Payne, 2020). SMEs, by contrast, may struggle to compete, resulting in prolonged vacancies and operational strain. This shortage of skilled labour has knock-on effects: menus may be simplified, service quality may decline, and businesses may reduce opening hours to cope with staffing gaps.

4.4.4 Geographical and housing-related barriers

Recruitment challenges are amplified in rural and tourist-dependent areas where housing shortages and high living costs deter potential workers (Thomas et al., 2011). For example, a family-run guesthouse in the Lake District may find that local workers cannot afford nearby accommodation, while migrant workers - previously willing to relocate - are now restricted by visa rules.

Seasonal fluctuations further complicate recruitment. During peak tourist periods, demand for labour increases sharply, yet SMEs in rural areas often lack the infrastructure to attract temporary workers. Limited public transport, high rental prices, and a lack of affordable staff housing create structural barriers that SMEs cannot easily overcome.

4.4.5 Critical interpretation

The evidence demonstrates that recruitment challenges for SMEs are multidimensional and interconnected. Immigration policy changes have intensified existing structural weaknesses, but they are not the sole cause. Instead, SMEs face a combination of:

- financial limitations
- weaker employer branding
- limited HR capacity
- geographical constraints
- increased competition from larger firms

These factors collectively undermine SMEs' ability to attract and retain staff, contributing to persistent labour shortages. The findings suggest that without targeted support, SMEs will continue to face disproportionate recruitment challenges compared to larger hospitality organisations.

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- geographical constraints

- increased competition from larger firms

These factors collectively undermine SMEs' ability to attract and retain staff, contributing to persistent labour shortages. The findings suggest that without targeted support, SMEs will continue to face disproportionate recruitment challenges compared to larger hospitality organisations.

4.6 Integrated Discussion

This section synthesises the findings across all themes and evaluates them through the lens of Human Capital Theory. It also connects the results to the research objectives and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The integrated discussion highlights how structural labour-market weaknesses, restrictive immigration policies, and SME-specific constraints interact to shape recruitment outcomes in the hospitality sector. Together, these factors create a complex environment in which SMEs struggle to attract, retain, and develop the workforce required for sustainable operations.

4.6.1 Immigration policy as a constraint on human capital supply

Human Capital Theory emphasises the importance of skills, experience, and knowledge in enhancing organisational productivity (Becker, 1964). Migrant workers have historically contributed significantly to the hospitality sector's human capital, particularly in operational and skilled roles (Baum, 2019). The findings indicate that immigration policy changes have restricted access to this human capital by:

- reducing the number of eligible migrant workers
- increasing salary thresholds
- removing key roles from the Immigration Salary List
- imposing administrative and financial burdens

These restrictions have created a structural bottleneck in labour supply, particularly for SMEs that lack the financial and organisational capacity to navigate the sponsorship system. This aligns with academic critiques that immigration policy has been designed with limited consideration of sector-specific labour needs (Anderson & Ruhs, 2010). The result is a labour market in which SMEs face heightened vulnerability to workforce instability and operational disruption.

4.6.2 Structural weaknesses in the domestic labour market

The analysis shows that domestic labour shortages stem from long-standing structural issues, including low wages, demanding working conditions, and limited career progression

(Lloyd & Payne, 2020). Immigration policy changes have intensified these weaknesses by removing a key source of labour that previously compensated for domestic shortages. This supports the argument that immigration policy alone cannot resolve labour shortages; broader reforms in working conditions and workforce development are required (CIPD, 2023).

Furthermore, the pandemic accelerated shifts in worker expectations, with many individuals prioritising stability, flexibility, and work-life balance. Hospitality roles, particularly in SMEs, often struggle to meet these expectations. This mismatch between job characteristics and worker preferences contributes to persistent recruitment challenges, even in areas with high unemployment.

4.6.3 SMEs' limited capacity to invest in human capital

SMEs face significant barriers to investing in training and development due to financial constraints and high turnover (Williams, 2022). While some SMEs have attempted to upskill staff, these efforts are often insufficient to address the scale of shortages. Human Capital Theory suggests that investment in skills yields long-term benefits, but SMEs may struggle to realise these benefits without external support or policy adjustments (Becker, 1964).

The findings also indicate that SMEs' limited HR capacity restricts their ability to implement structured recruitment, retention, and development strategies. This contrasts sharply with larger hospitality firms, which can invest in training programmes, career pathways, and employer branding initiatives that attract skilled workers.

4.6.4 Uneven impacts across the sector

The findings indicate that immigration policy changes disproportionately affect SMEs compared to larger firms. Larger employers can:

- offer higher wages
- absorb sponsorship costs
- invest in technology
- provide structured career pathways

SMEs, by contrast, lack these advantages, resulting in uneven labour-market outcomes (Lloyd & Payne, 2020). This disparity reinforces existing inequalities within the sector and contributes to a widening gap in workforce stability and operational resilience.

4.6.5 Policy implications

The analysis suggests that current immigration policies may be misaligned with the labour needs of the hospitality sector. More flexible, sector-specific immigration pathways - similar to those used in agriculture or healthcare - could help address shortages (MAC, 2024). Without such adjustments, SMEs may continue to face operational strain, reduced capacity, and long-term sustainability challenges.

The findings also highlight the need for integrated policy approaches that combine immigration reform with domestic workforce development, regional support, and targeted SME assistance. Without coordinated action, the sector will remain vulnerable to labour shortages that undermine service quality, business continuity, and economic contribution.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the dissertation by summarising the key findings, evaluating how the research objectives were achieved, and presenting recommendations for hospitality SMEs and policymakers. It also outlines the study's limitations and proposes areas for future research. The chapter integrates insights from the literature review and thematic analysis to provide a coherent understanding of how recent UK immigration policies have shaped recruitment practices within hospitality SMEs.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The study examined how recent UK immigration policies affect recruitment practices within hospitality SMEs. The findings reveal a complex interaction between long-standing labour-market weaknesses, restrictive immigration reforms, and the limited capacity of SMEs to adapt to these pressures.

5.2.1 Objective 1: Analyse recent UK immigration policies relevant to the hospitality labour market

Post-Brexit reforms - including the points-based system, higher Skilled Worker visa salary thresholds, and the replacement of the Shortage Occupation List with the Immigration Salary List - have significantly reduced access to migrant labour. Many hospitality roles no longer meet eligibility criteria, closing off migration pathways that SMEs previously relied upon. These reforms prioritise higher-skilled, higher-paid occupations, overlooking the operational nature of hospitality work.

5.2.2 Objective 2: Investigate the recruitment challenges experienced by hospitality SMEs

SMEs face acute recruitment challenges due to reduced access to migrant labour, limited financial resources, weaker employer branding, high turnover, and geographical constraints in rural and tourist-dependent areas. These issues are not new, but immigration restrictions have intensified them, creating a structural mismatch between labour supply and demand.

5.2.3 Objective 3: Evaluate the strategies used by SMEs to address recruitment difficulties

SMEs have adopted a range of strategies, including increasing wages, improving working conditions, upskilling staff, reducing operating hours, relying on agency workers, and adopting limited automation. However, these responses are often reactive and constrained by financial and operational limitations. While some strategies align with Human Capital Theory, SMEs frequently lack the resources to implement them effectively.

5.3 Overall Conclusion

The study concludes that recent UK immigration policies have had a substantial and disproportionate impact on hospitality SMEs. By restricting access to migrant labour, these policies have exacerbated long-standing structural weaknesses such as low wages, high turnover, and limited domestic interest in hospitality roles. SMEs, which lack the financial and organisational capacity of larger firms, are particularly vulnerable to these pressures.

Human Capital Theory helps explain why immigration restrictions have been so damaging: migrant workers represent a vital source of skills, experience, and labour flexibility. When access to this human capital is reduced, SMEs struggle to maintain operational capacity, service quality, and business continuity.

Overall, the findings suggest that immigration reforms have not adequately considered the labour needs of the hospitality sector. Without targeted support or policy adjustments, SMEs will continue to face recruitment challenges that threaten their long-term sustainability.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for hospitality SMEs and policymakers.

5.4.1 Recommendations for Hospitality SMEs

1. Invest in targeted training and development

SMEs should prioritise upskilling existing staff to reduce reliance on external recruitment. Even small-scale, on-the-job training initiatives can improve retention and productivity (Baum, 2019).

2. Strengthen employer branding

Promoting a positive workplace culture, offering flexible scheduling, and providing progression opportunities can help SMEs attract domestic workers (Williams, 2022).

3. Collaborate locally

Partnerships with colleges, job centres, and training providers can help SMEs access new talent pipelines and apprenticeships (CIPD, 2023).

4. Adopt selective technology solutions

Affordable digital tools - such as online booking systems or QR-code ordering - can reduce labour dependency and improve efficiency (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

5. Review pay structures and incentives

Where feasible, SMEs should explore incremental wage increases or non-financial benefits such as staff meals or transport support (UK Hospitality, 2022).

5.4.2 Recommendations for Policymakers

1. Introduce a sector-specific immigration pathway

A dedicated hospitality visa route would help address shortages in essential operational roles (MAC, 2024).

2. Reassess salary thresholds for hospitality roles

More flexible, occupation-specific thresholds would better reflect sector wage structures (Freeths, 2025).

3. Expand the Immigration Salary List

Reinstating key hospitality roles would improve access to migrant labour (Home Office, 2025).

4. Increase support for SME training and apprenticeships

Government-funded schemes or tax incentives would enable SMEs to invest in workforce development (UK Government, 2023).

5. Improve regional labour-market support

Rural and tourist-dependent areas require targeted interventions such as subsidised transport or seasonal worker schemes (Thomas et al., 2011).

5.5 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations must be acknowledged:

- **Reliance on secondary data:** Findings may reflect the biases of the organisations that produced the sources (Johnston, 2017).
- **Rapidly changing policy environment:** Immigration reforms evolve quickly, meaning some findings may become outdated (Home Office, 2025).
- **Sector-specific focus:** Results may not be generalisable to other industries or larger firms (Lloyd & Payne, 2020).
- **Absence of primary data:** Without interviews or surveys, the lived experiences of SME stakeholders could not be directly captured (Creswell, 2018).

5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies could:

- Conduct primary research with SME owners, managers, and employees to capture first-hand experiences (Creswell, 2018).
- Compare SMEs with large hospitality chains to identify differences in resilience and recruitment strategies (Jones & Comfort, 2021).
- Examine the long-term effects of immigration policy on business survival (Moore UK, 2025).
- Explore the role of automation and digitalisation in reducing labour dependency (Lloyd & Payne, 2020).
- Analyse regional differences in recruitment challenges across rural, urban, and tourist-dependent areas (Thomas et al., 2011).

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter summarised the key findings, evaluated the research objectives, and presented recommendations for SMEs and policymakers. The analysis shows that immigration reforms

have significantly constrained labour supply in the hospitality sector, intensifying recruitment challenges for SMEs. Addressing these issues will require both organisational adaptation such as improved training, employer branding, and selective use of technology - and policy reforms that better reflect sector labour-market realities. Together, these measures are essential to support the long-term sustainability of hospitality SMEs in the UK.

Element 2: Research Process Reflection

Description

This research project explored the effect of recent UK immigration policies on recruitment within hospitality SMEs. The process involved selecting a topic, conducting a structured secondary literature search, analysing sources thematically, and writing a five-chapter dissertation. As this was a secondary research study, the process relied heavily on identifying credible academic, industry, and government sources. Throughout the project, I engaged in continuous decision-making about scope, relevance, and methodological alignment.

Feelings

At the beginning, I felt confident about the topic because it aligned with my interests in leadership, labour markets, and organisational challenges. However, I also felt uncertain about managing such a broad policy-driven subject within the constraints of an undergraduate dissertation. As I progressed, I experienced moments of frustration when sources contradicted each other or when policy updates changed rapidly. At the same time, I felt increasingly motivated as the literature began to form clear themes, and I could see how the chapters connected. Completing the dissertation gave me a strong sense of achievement and improved confidence in my academic abilities.

Evaluation

Several aspects of the research process went well. My topic choice was relevant, current, and supported by a wide range of credible sources. Using secondary data allowed me to access up-to-date policy documents and industry reports that would have been difficult to gather through primary research. The thematic analysis approach also worked effectively, helping me organise complex information into clear themes.

However, there were challenges. The volume of policy updates meant that some sources became outdated quickly, requiring repeated checks for accuracy. I also found it difficult at times to maintain a narrow focus on SMEs, as many reports discussed the hospitality sector more broadly. Time management was another challenge, particularly when balancing reading, note-taking, and writing.

Analysis

Reflecting on the process, I realised that my initial difficulty in narrowing the scope stemmed

from trying to include too many perspectives. Once I refined the focus to SMEs and aligned the literature with the research objectives, the project became more manageable. The reliance on secondary data highlighted the importance of evaluating source credibility and recognising potential bias, especially in industry reports that may present issues from a particular viewpoint.

Using Gibbs' model helped me understand how my emotional responses influenced my decision-making. For example, feeling overwhelmed by the volume of literature initially led me to over-collect sources. Recognising this allowed me to adopt a more selective and strategic approach.

Conclusion

Overall, the research process strengthened my academic skills, particularly in critical reading, synthesis, and methodological justification. I learned the importance of maintaining a clear focus, regularly reviewing the relevance of sources, and adapting to new information. I also recognised the value of reflective practice in identifying areas for improvement.

Action Plan

For future research projects, I would:

- begin with a more detailed project plan and timeline
- narrow the research scope earlier to avoid unnecessary reading
- use digital tools more effectively for organising sources
- engage more critically with contrasting viewpoints
- schedule regular reflection points to monitor progress

These steps will help me approach future academic or professional research tasks with greater confidence, structure, and efficiency.

Element 3 Poster

The Effect of Recent Immigration Policies on Recruitment for SME Businesses: A Case Study of the UK Hospitality Sector

Design:

- Qualitative secondary research
- Focus on post-Brexit immigration policy

Sources:

- Home Office
- MAC
- ONS
- UK Hospitality
- Academic literature (2019–2025)

Analysis:

- Thematic analysis
- Themes:
- Labour availability
- Immigration policy impact
- SME recruitment challenges
- SME responses

KEY FINDINGS

1. Labour Availability

- Domestic interest declining
- Post-pandemic workers moved to other sectors
- Rural/tourist areas face severe shortages

2. Immigration Policy Impact

- End of free movement reduced EU labour
- Salary thresholds exclude most hospitality roles
- Fewer roles eligible under Immigration Salary List
- Sponsorship too costly for SMEs

3. Recruitment Challenges for SMEs

- Limited budgets to raise wages
- High turnover + weak employer branding
- Hard to fill skilled roles (chefs, supervisors)
- Housing/transport issues in rural areas

4. SME Responses

- Raising wages (where possible)
- Upskilling existing staff
- Reducing hours/menus
- Using agency staff
- Small-scale tech adoption (QR ordering, kiosks)

RECOMMENDATIONS For SMEs

- Invest in staff training
- Improve employer branding
- Collaborate with colleges/job centres
- Use affordable digital tools
- Review pay and incentives

For Policymakers

- Create a hospitality-specific visa route
- Adjust salary thresholds
- Expand Immigration Salary List
- Support SME training schemes
- Provide regional labour support

CONCLUSION

Immigration reforms have **reduced access to migrant labour**, intensifying long-standing recruitment problems in hospitality SMEs. SMEs lack the financial and organisational capacity to compete with larger firms, making them disproportionately affected.

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UK Hospitality (2022)

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval Form

RESEARCH STUDENTS

This form is to be completed by the student within **SIX** months for full-time students and **TWELVE** months for part time students, after the commencement of the research degree or following progression to Part Two of your course.

Once complete, submit this form via the **MyTSD Doctoral College Portal** at (<https://mytsd.uwtsd.ac.uk>).

This document is also available in Welsh.

RESEARCH STAFF ONLY

All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk, with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name.

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity.
Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:	Fruzsina Eszter Varadi			
2	Tick all boxes that apply:	Member of staff:	☐	Honorary research fellow:	☐
	Undergraduate Student	☒	Taught Postgraduate Student	☐	Postgraduate Research Student
3	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	IICL			

4	Campus:	London
5	E-mail address:	2245314@student.uwtsd.ac.uk
6	Contact Telephone Number:	+447310635291
For students:		
7	Student Number:	2245314
8	Programme of Study:	BA(HONs) Leadership and Management Skill in the Workplace
9	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Md Kalam

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)	YES	☒	NO	☐
					Date
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval	Research Degrees Committee	☐		
Institute Research Committee		☐			
Other (write in)		☒	26/02/2026		

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice	☒
2	UWTSD Research Data Management Policy	☒
3	<i>[List any other relevant documents here]</i>	☐

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

If there are external collaborators then you should gain consent from the contact persons to share their personal data with the university. If there are no external collaborators then leave this section blank and continue to section E.

1	Institution					
2	Contact person name					
3	Contact person e-mail address					
4	Is your research externally funded?	YES	☐	NO	☐	
5	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?	YES	☐	NO	☐	
6	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	YES	☐	NO	☐
7		Employed	YES	☐	NO	☐
8	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)?	If YES then the permission question below does not need to be answered.	YES	☐	NO	☐
9	Has permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation?	(If YES attach copy) If NO the application cannot continue	YES	☐	NO	☐

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

10	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	YES	☐	NO	☐
If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation (this may be a copy of an email if appropriate).					

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	The effect of recent immigration policies on the recruitment for SME businesses: A case study of UK hospitality sector		
2	Proposed start date:	09/02/2026	Proposed end date:	01/05/2026
	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words per section) Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the points below: <i>Purpose of Research Activity</i> <i>Proposed Research Question</i> <i>Aims of Research Activity</i> <i>Objectives of Research Activity</i> Demonstrate, briefly, how <u>Existing Research</u> has informed the proposed activity and explain <i>What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge</i> <i>How it addresses an area of importance.</i>			
3	Purpose of Research Activity This secondary-data study explores how UK immigration policy changes from 2016–2025 have affected recruitment and labour availability in hospitality SMEs, using published policy documents, labour-market reports, and academic literature to identify key impacts and organisational responses.			

	(this box should expand as you type)
4	Research Question How have UK immigration policy changes from 2016–2025 affected recruitment and labour availability in hospitality SMEs (this box should expand as you type)
5	Aims of Research Activity To analyse how recent UK immigration policy changes have affected recruitment practices and outcomes in hospitality SMEs, with a focus on the period from 2016 to 2025. (this box should expand as you type)
6	Objectives of Research Activity - To critically review the evolution of UK immigration policy since 2016, with particular attention to post-Brexit reforms and the 2025 changes and assess their intended and unintended consequences for the hospitality sector. - To synthesise secondary data on labour market trends, recruitment challenges, and organisational responses among hospitality SMEs in the UK. - To develop practical recommendations for SME managers and policymakers to mitigate recruitment challenges and enhance workforce sustainability in the context of restrictive immigration policies. (this box should expand as you type)
	Proposed methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that may be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here, but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.
7	This secondary-data study explores how UK immigration policy changes from 2016–2025 have affected recruitment and labour availability in hospitality SMEs, using published policy documents, labour-market reports, and academic literature to identify key impacts and organisational responses. (this box should expand as you type)
	Location of research activity Identify all locations where research activity will take place.
8	Desktop resources (this box should expand as you type)
	Research activity outside of the UK If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions)

	required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants. If you live in the country where you will do the research then please state this.
9	No <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

10	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents NOT publicly available?	NO	☒
		YES	☐
11	If Yes, please provide details here of how you will gain access to specific documentation that is not in the public domain and that this is in accordance with the current data protection law of the country in question and that of England and Wales. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		

	Does your research relate to one or more of the seven aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?	YES	NO
12	A prosperous Wales	☐	☒
13	A resilient Wales	☐	☒
14	A healthier Wales	☐	☒
15	A more equal Wales	☐	☒
16	A Wales of cohesive communities	☐	☒
17	A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	☐	☒
18	A globally responsible Wales	☐	☒
19	If YES to any of the above, please give details:		
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		

SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

	Will the research activity include:	YES	NO
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☐	☒
2	Use of interviews?	☐	☒
3	Use of focus groups?	☐	☒
4	Use of participant diaries?	☐	☒
5	Use of video or audio recording?	☐	☒
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☐	☒

7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☒
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☒
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☒
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☒
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☒
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	☐	☒
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.	☐	☒
	Details of any other primary data collection method: (this box should expand as you type)		

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

If there are no participants then do not complete this section, but go directly to section H.

	Who are the intended participants:	YES	NO
1	Students or staff at the University?	☐	☒
2	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☐	☒
3	Vulnerable adults?	☐	☒
4	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☐	☒
5	Prisoners?	☐	☒
6	Young offenders?	☐	☒
7	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☒
8	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☒
9	Others. Please indicate the participants below, and specifically any group who may be unable to give consent.	☐	☒
	Details of any other participant groups:		

	(this box should expand as you type)		
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	Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
10	How many participants are expected?	N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
11	Who will the participants be?	N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
12	How will you identify the participants?	N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
13	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☐	☐	☒
14	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☐	☐	☒
15	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☐	☐	☒
16	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☐	☐	☒
17	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☐	☐	☒
18	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☐	☐	☒
19	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☐	☐	☒
20	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☐	☐	☒
21	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☐	☐	☒
22	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
24	Will participants be paid?	☐	☐	☒
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☐	☐	☒

26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☐	☒
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☐	☒
28	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
(this box should expand as you type)				

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them. If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.			
1	Full risk assessment completed and appended?		Yes ☐ No ☒
2	Risks to participants For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information		
	Risk to participants: N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to participants: N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
3	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities		
	N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
4	Risks to the investigator For example: personal health & safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest		
	Risk to the investigator: N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	How you will mitigate the risk to the investigator: N/A <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
5	University/institutional risks For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection		
	Risk to the University: N/A	How you will mitigate the risk to the University: N/A	

1	“Personal data” means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (‘data subject’). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.	☐	x ☐
If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:			
2	(this box should expand as you type)		
	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	YES	NO
3	“Special category data” means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects’ – (a) racial or ethnic origin, (b) political opinions, (c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature, (d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992), (e) physical or mental health or condition, (f) sexual life, (g) genetics, (h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes),	☐	x ☐
If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:			
4	(this box should expand as you type)		

	Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the following ways?	YES	NO
5	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☒	☐
6	University computers?	☐	☒
7	Private company computers?	☐	☒
8	Home or other personal computers?	☒	☐
9	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☒	☐
10	“Cloud” storage or websites?	☐	☒
11	Other – specify:	☐	☒
12	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	(this box should expand as you type)		

	Data Protection
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	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	YES	NO
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☒	☐
14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	☐	☒
15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☒
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☐	☒
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
19	Use of data management system?	☐	☒
20	Data archiving?	☐	☒
21	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and any international equivalents, where appropriate):		
	Electronic Transfer of Data: I will secure that all the data collected will be transfer and share only with authorized individual directly involved in the research. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
22	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		
	The supervisor <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
23	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:		
	The researcher <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
24	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.		
	I will store the data on my OneDrive cloud as long as needed. I will be the only person to have access to data. I will cancel the data once I don't need it anymore <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
25	Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. <i>(Most relevant to academic staff)</i>		
	No <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
26	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	YES	☒
27	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	YES	☒

SECTION K: Declaration

	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
1	Signature of applicant:	Fruzsina Eszter Varadi	Date: 22/04/2026

For STUDENT Submissions:

2	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Dr FAIZU EDU	Date: 25/04/2026
3	Signature:	Signed	

For STAFF Submissions:

4	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:		Date:
5	Signature:		

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
☒	I have completed ALL RELEVANT sections of the form in full.
☒	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☐	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (where appropriate)
☐	I have attached a full risk assessment (where appropriate) ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT
☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
☒	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.

RESEARCH STUDENTS ONLY

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