

Starmer plan to train UK workers in latest U-turn on migration

As Sunak calls for 'best and brightest'

By **John-Paul Ford Rojas** and **Jason Groves**

SIR Keir Starmer will today warn firms to train British workers instead of relying on cheap labour from abroad in his latest U-turn on immigration.

The Labour leader, who vowed as recently as 2020 to 'defend free movement', will pledge to be 'pragmatic' about issuing new visas in shortage areas.

But, in a speech to the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Sir Keir will tell employers: 'We will expect you to bring forward a clear plan for higher skills and more training, for better pay and conditions, for investment in new technology.'

'But our common goal must be to help the British economy off its immigration dependency - to start investing more in training up workers who are already here.'

'Migration is part of our national story... but the days when low pay and cheap labour are part of the British way on growth must end.'

Sir Keir campaigned for Remain and pushed for a second Brexit referendum. During his campaign to succeed Jeremy Corbyn in 2020, he promised to 'defend free movement as we leave the EU'.

But in a speech in July this year, he said he now wanted to 'make Brexit work' and would no longer pursue the restoration of free movement. His

Priorities: Rishi Sunak at the CBI conference yesterday



NO Swiss-style Brexit

RISHI Sunak denied going soft on Brexit yesterday - and vowed to never sign a 'Swiss-style' trade deal that imposes EU rules on Britain.

He made the promise after a furlous backlash from Tory MPs over reports that such a deal was being considered.

Speaking at the Confederation of British Industry conference in Birmingham, he said: 'Let me be unequivocal about this: Under my leadership, the United Kingdom will not pursue

any relationship with Europe that relies on alignment with EU laws.'

Mr Sunak said Brexit was 'already delivering enormous benefits' including control of migration and access to the fastest growing global markets.

Ex-Brexit minister David Jones said: 'The PM has rightly squashed this idea... A Swiss deal would leave us in a perpetual state of negotiation. We would have to take their rules and we would have to pay them to trade with us.'

address today comes after Rishi Sunak appeared to open the door to immigration reform to allow the 'best and brightest' to come to Britain.

But the Prime Minister told the CBI's annual conference in

Birmingham yesterday that this could happen only if illegal migration across the Channel was brought under control.

He is under increasing pressure from business leaders who have reported shortages

of workers in a wide range of industries including construction, transportation, hotels, restaurants, agriculture, social care and the NHS.

Mr Sunak told the CBI: 'If we're going to have a system that allows businesses to access the best and brightest from around the world, we need to do more to give the British people trust and confidence that the system works and is fair. That means tackling illegal migration.'

He added that 'part of the reason we ended the free movement of labour was to rebuild public consent in our immigration system'.

More than 40,900 people have arrived in Britain in small boats via cross-Channel routes so far this year, up from 28,000 for the whole of 2021.

Mr Sunak said: 'The country's number one priority right now, when it comes to migration, is tackling illegal migration. It's stopping people coming here illegally on small boats across the Channel.'

His speech came after CBI chief Tony Danker said Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's Autumn Statement last week had done nothing to boost growth.

That risked a 'doom loop' of stagnation and an ever-higher tax burden to pay for public services, he claimed.

Mr Danker wants the Government to make it easier to bring in workers in sectors where employers are finding it hard to recruit. He pointed to vacancy levels topping a million and the growing level of people of working age who are declared inactive as reasons to reform immigration rules.

Mr Sunak also revealed yesterday that he is drawing up plans for a 'radical' shake-up of the national curriculum.

In his speech to the CBI, he said education was 'the closest thing we have to a silver bullet in public policy - it's the most transformative thing we can do for our people'.

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