

# **Early Insights Evaluation of Scotland's Migration Service**

**Constitution, International, and Migration  
Analysis**

**Office of the Chief Economic Adviser**

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# 1

## Executive Summary

# 1. Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the early insights evaluation of Scotland's Migration Service (SMS), conducted by Scottish Government (SG) analysts in September and October 2025. SMS aims to help attract and retain international talent to Scotland by providing business immigration support to employers and investors. It also provides personal immigration and reception support to individuals to help them move to and settle in Scotland. This holistic support aims to help address Scotland's demographic challenges and workforce needs. The service includes two digital platforms. These platforms offer information and one-to-one advice sessions for migrants, employers and investors, as well as additional resources (including webinars) for employers and investors.

This report provides early insights to inform policy development and resultant required decisions in early 2026 regarding whether to re-procure operational supplier contracts. A re-procurement will be needed in order for the service to continue to operate from the 2027/28 financial year onwards. The analysis was conducted less than a year after the full service launch in November 2024, which meant it was not possible to assess longer-term outcomes. The evaluation aimed to assess early evidence of the implementation, early impact, and indicative value for money of SMS, drawing on monitoring data, user feedback, qualitative research, and economic analysis.

The evaluation was constrained by limited data availability in relation to user experiences and small and unrepresentative sample sizes. Findings should therefore be interpreted in light of this short operational period as well as the data limitations, and should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive. A follow-up evaluation is recommended after two to three years of full operation to robustly assess the impact of the service and inform future policy decisions. In line with this recommendation, a future evaluation of SMS is planned to provide a more comprehensive assessment of longer-term outcomes.

## Context

Scotland faces a distinct demographic challenge, with declining birth rates and an ageing population threatening long-term economic sustainability and the delivery of public services.<sup>1 2</sup> Migration plays a critical role in offsetting these trends by increasing the working-age population and addressing skills shortages.<sup>3 4</sup> SMS is a key deliverable of the SG's Population Programme and contributes to national commitments in the SG's Population Strategy and National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) by supporting efforts to maximise the use of the

immigration system and attract more individuals to Scotland to address skills shortages and demographic challenges.<sup>5 6</sup>

## Evaluation approach

This early insights evaluation sought to address the following main evaluation questions (EQs):

**EQ1:** To what extent has Scotland's Migration Service been delivered as intended?

**EQ2:** To what extent is Scotland's Migration Service achieving its intended outcomes?

**EQ3:** To what extent does Scotland's Migration Service deliver value for money?

The intended outcomes for SMS are articulated in a [theory of change](#). The evaluation drew on both quantitative and qualitative evidence to respond to evaluation questions, including:

- Monitoring and performance data from April 2024 to August 2025;
- Web analytics data from April 2024 to August 2025;
- User feedback data, from surveys completed immediately after appointments (n=61) and 3-6 months following appointments (n=21);
- Qualitative interviews (including written interview responses) from migrant users of the service (n=12) from September and October 2025;
- Qualitative interviews with employers (n=2) from October 2025;
- Focus groups with service advisers (n=15) from October 2025;
- Stakeholder feedback (n=8) from October 2025;
- A narrative evidence submission of SMS delivery and implementation by the SG SMS team.

All evidence sources were analysed using the SMS evaluation questions and the SMS [theory of change](#) as the analytical framework. An indicative value for money assessment was also conducted by comparing the service's economic contribution to its costs. Quantitative data analysis was not tested for statistical significance due to small and unrepresentative sample sizes, which would have limited the reliability of inferential statistics.

## Key findings

### Process

- Based on the early evidence analysed as part of this evaluation, SMS was found to have been largely delivered as intended, with core components

implemented in line with its theory of change, including two digital platforms and tailored advice services for migrants, employers, and investors.

- The digital platforms were developed using a user-centred design approach. Two separate platforms were created for migrants and employers/investors, reflecting divergent user needs.
- Scotland's Migration Service webpages, hosted over the two platforms, received over 1.4 million views between March 2024 and August 2025. They were visited by individuals from 183 countries, with the largest number of visitors located in India, the US, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Vietnam.
- Analysis of web analytics data suggests that the SMS webpages have reached a large international audience and helped direct traffic towards adviser appointments. This evidence also suggests that the Brand Scotland Study in Scotland campaign substantially boosted international awareness of SMS.
- Feedback from stakeholders was broadly positive, with 6 out of the 8 stakeholders providing feedback praising the service. One representative from a university careers advice service commended SMS for providing support to recent graduates, who otherwise may need to pay for legal advice at an important time in their careers. Other stakeholders working with international students credited the service for clearly articulating information linked to immigration policy, which can often be hidden or confusing.
- While the SMS project team has a structured process in place for ensuring that the service's online content always reflects the latest changes to UK Government immigration policy, one stakeholder commented that they would like to see online content updated more quickly to align with changes in immigration policy. As such, it may be beneficial for the service to more clearly indicate that online content reflects the most recent changes in policy, or to give an indication of when online content was last reviewed.
- Focus group discussions with Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) advisers highlighted opportunities for strengthening delivery, including creation of a centralised hub of immigration advice. CAS advisers also discussed whether it would be beneficial to access more information about appointment attendees in advance to ensure the provision of appropriate support. While one adviser felt this would be a welcome improvement, other advisers worried this may not be helpful as advice provided prior to appointments wasn't always accurate or relevant to the issues users wanted to discuss at appointments. Advisers also reported a lack of capacity to support complex cases.

## Impact

### Migrants

- In the first 17 months that the service was in operation, 804 one-to-one advice appointments were held with 753 migrants, with 51 migrants attending more than one appointment with the service.
- The majority of these appointments were held with migrants who were already living in Scotland (79%) and who were aged between 25-44 (65%). Slightly more women attended appointments (45%) than men (41%). Appointments were attended by migrants from a wide range of nationalities, representing 92 countries, with the most common nationality amongst appointment attendees including; Nigerian (20%), American (13%), and Indian (13%). There was not sufficient data to establish whether different groups of migrants were experiencing or being impacted by the service in different ways.
- The evaluation was not able to robustly establish whether SMS makes it easier for migrants to move to Scotland and settle into their communities, two of the service's key intended outcomes. This is partly due to lack of data on service user experiences to date, but also because the full service had been operational for less than a year at the time of evaluation.
- However, preliminary evidence indicates that SMS has supported migrants to relocate and settle in Scotland, and most users who responded to feedback surveys indicated that the service had met their needs. Furthermore, some migrants reported that the existence of SMS, and the fact that it is a Scottish Government service, had positively reinforced their decisions to relocate or settle in Scotland. The early insights evaluation also highlighted the positive impact of the service on migrant users' wellbeing, confidence, and knowledge of the immigration system.
- There is therefore early evidence to suggest that SMS is delivering its desired outcomes, meeting migrants' needs and helping migrants to move to Scotland and settle into communities.

### Employers and Investors

- In total, 749 employers and investors attended SMS webinars from June 2024-August 2025, and the service delivered 146 one-to-one appointments, with 82 employers and 29 investors between April 2024 and August 2025. The majority of appointments were held with employers (77%). Most organisations had fewer than 20 employees (60%), almost a quarter (24%) had between 20 and 200 employees, and around 15% had over 200 employees. 20% of employers and investors were from the information and communication sector (including those working in IT and telecommunications), while 15% were in the professional scientific and technical activities sector (covering organisations working in law, accounting and research and research and development).

- Preliminary evidence suggests SMS has helped employers and investors use the immigration system more effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, evidence described in this report indicates that the service has supported employers in meeting their skills and labour needs.
- One investor reported successfully incorporating their business in Scotland following an SMS appointment.
- Two employers were interviewed for the early insights evaluation, though no interviews were conducted with investors. Both employers spoke positively about SMS, with one employer reporting that SMS helped them make informed decisions regarding the recruitment of two individuals.
- While the evaluation was not able to robustly establish whether SMS has had an impact on its employer and investor-related outcomes due to limited data, early evidence suggests employer and investor needs have been met through the service and that SMS is supporting employers and investors to use the immigration more effectively to meet their labour and skills needs.

### **External factors**

- The evaluation also evidenced ways in which external factors are constraining the service's contribution to its intended outcomes. Notably, elements of UK immigration legislation were referenced by a number of participants as barriers to long-term settlement and international recruitment. These barriers had influenced how positively they experienced the support received from SMS.

### **Indicative Value for Money**

- As an early insights assessment, this analysis is not intended to provide a full economic evaluation, but rather an indicative assessment based on the evidence currently available.
- This early assessment is constrained by very limited outcome data and applies conservative assumptions to generate illustrative estimates of the employment-related economic activity supported by the service.
- In the absence of direct employment data, this analysis uses self-reported "needs completely met" responses from a small, self-selected sample as an indicative proxy for employment-related outcomes.
- Follow-up response rates were very low: 3% for migrants (24/753), 35% for employers (29/82), and 27% for investors (8/29).
- Returned surveys suggest 46 employment-related outcomes, comprising 18 migrants (75%) and 28 employers (97%) reporting that their needs were completely met. These responses were treated as having potentially supported employment.
- For modelling purposes, non-respondents are excluded, which is a conservative approach and so understates the potential employment supported as a result of the service..

- Using minimum visa salary thresholds, 46 employment outcomes are estimated to contribute £1.2–£1.9 million in Gross Value Added from employment income, compared with £2.3 million in service costs to date.
- On this basis, the estimated benefit–cost ratio (BCR) is 0.51–0.85, which is below 1 (where benefits equal costs), but is indicative and based only on an illustrative estimate of employment income of survey respondents and should be interpreted as an illustrative lower-bound estimate based on the outcomes suggested by returned user feedback surveys.
- Sensitivity analysis shows that break-even would be achieved under our modelling framework if:
  - the 46 outcomes were associated with an average salary above £49,050; or
  - the service supported 91 outcomes at an average salary of £25,000; or
  - the service supported 55 outcomes at £41,700 (i.e. nine more than the outcomes evidenced in surveys).
- Under our modelling framework, only 2–11% of non-respondents would need to have achieved an employment outcome supported by SMS for the service to have a BCR of 1.
- Economic spillovers, investment impacts and wider social benefits, such as improved wellbeing, reduced stress, and increased confidence navigating the immigration system, are not monetised due to data constraints, but contribute to benefits.
- Overall, while the available evidence does not demonstrate that the monetised benefits of the service outweigh its costs to date, sensitivity analysis indicates that under our modelling framework, a BCR of 1 could be achieved with a relatively small number of additional employment outcomes beyond those suggested by the survey data. Taken together, these findings suggest the service may be delivering value for money, though this conclusion remains highly uncertain.
- **It is important to note that these findings should be treated as conservative estimates.** As mentioned, analysis was based upon data from a small number of user surveys, and did not consider the outcomes of users who did not return a user feedback survey. As such, the potential employment supported as a result of the service may have been understated. Secondly, while SMS provides services to individuals, employers and investors, the timing of the evaluation means that analysis focused on the employment outcomes of individuals completing user feedback surveys. As such, economic benefits specific to employers and investors were not considered as part of this economic analysis. Lastly, this analysis did not account for the wider social benefits of the service (e.g. improved wellbeing of migrants and increased confidence in navigating the immigration system), which also contribute to benefits.

- Looking ahead, the value generated by the service may increase as awareness and uptake grow. Strengthened outcome tracking, particularly on employment, earnings, investment, and the role of SMS in facilitating these outcomes, will be essential to enable a fuller Value for Money evaluation in the future.

## Recommendations

- **Digital content improvements:** Feedback from one stakeholder suggests that it may be beneficial to more clearly signpost that SMS' online content is consistently aligned with the latest changes in UK Government immigration policy, to increase confidence among users that the content is up to date. Advisers also recommended adding case studies, such as international students securing employment in Scotland or employers addressing skills gaps through global talent, to enhance relevance and engagement.
- **Marketing and visibility:** Advisers suggested branding SMS more strongly as a Scottish Government service could help expand its reach, and both advisers and stakeholders commented on the importance of increasing the social media presence of the service. Seraphus lawyers suggested using more digestible content formats including video reels, short how-to-guides, and short clips to widen the reach of SMS.
- **Training and resources for advisers:** Evidence from both CAS advisers and migrant users highlighted opportunities to strengthen service delivery through enhanced training and resources for CAS advisers. CAS advisers recommended the development of a centralised knowledge hub with up-to-date guidance, and template materials on common visa routes. This was suggested as an opportunity to streamline processes, reduce time spent on follow-up emails, and support the continued delivery of efficient, high-quality support to migrant users.
- **Availability of appointments and advice:** Both migrant and employer users provided suggestions for improving availability of appointments and advice. For migrants, this included expanding the number of appointments offered to individual users as the maximum of three per year was felt to be insufficient for more complex cases (although it should be noted that < 1% of migrant users had three appointments, with 90% only requiring one appointment). It may also be beneficial to consider how migrants who approach CAS in person or via a central CAS email address or phone number for migration advice could be supported more quickly, particularly as 'walk-in' users are likely to be more vulnerable or have more complex needs than SMS users who access the service through the online booking tool. One employer expressed a desire for an increase in the available appointments per year due to the complexity of the immigration scenarios they face. Another employer suggested SMS should consider developing a 'helpline' employers and investors could phone for

advice, in addition to the available phone and online appointments. This employer did acknowledge this may be an unrealistic ask of a free service, and similarly noted that advisers would not have any time to prepare for these helpline calls which could limit advice.

- **Improved data collection and evidence use:** Data availability and quality limited the ability of this early insights evaluation to draw robust conclusions. Collection of outcome and output data, disaggregated by user characteristics, is required to enable assessment of the service's performance and impact. Further analysis and use of evidence could support policy development and resultant strategic service delivery for SMS. This could include filling evidence gaps in relation to which sectors and regions of Scotland have unfilled vacancies. Similarly, a better understanding of which parts of the world have an excess number of workers in relevant fields and who might stand a realistic prospect of moving to Scotland would also be desirable to inform targeting of promotional activities.
- **External factors:** This recommendation relates to recognising and communicating how external factors, such as market complexity and the UK Government legal and policy environment, shape the service's ability to succeed and achieve its intended outcomes. SMS could be viewed as a relatively low-budget intervention within both a sensitive domestic political context and a highly complex global migration market. While it has been possible to gather some evidence regarding the practical and personal value of the service to its users, it is more difficult to understand the macroeconomic impact of the service while isolating the effect of external factors. It has also not been possible for the service to provide tailored service offerings for subgroups of users or provide informative data related to subgroup service usage to stakeholders. These limitations, related to both the service's scale and the context the service exists within, should be clearly articulated to decision-makers and stakeholders to manage expectations and inform decision-making, including the ministerial decision on whether the service should continue beyond March 2027. It is important that decision-makers and stakeholders fully understand the limitations and constraints of what a service of this kind can deliver, particularly when relatively small in scale.
- **Address service gap in relation to job opportunities for international graduates:** Evidence from the evaluation suggests that one of the challenges for SMS in meeting users' needs is supporting international graduates to find skilled work in Scotland with an organisation holding a sponsor licence. Stakeholder feedback flagged that demand from international students for jobs far exceeds the supply of relevant roles. The service should consider if further marketing and promotion of the service to Scotland-based employers, with an emphasis on the potential benefits of obtaining a sponsor licence, could mitigate this barrier.

- **Follow-up evaluation:** A full impact and value for money evaluation should be conducted after at least two to three years of full operation to assess long-term outcomes, including migrant relocation and settlement. This should include longitudinal quantitative analysis, in-depth qualitative research with migrants, employers, and investors, and a cost-benefit assessment which includes consideration of social benefits.

Overall, this early insights evaluation has suggested implementation fidelity, indicated signs of progress towards SMS outcomes and value for money, although it was not able to draw robust conclusions due to data limitations. A follow-up evaluation is required to assess longer-term impact to best inform policy advice.

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<sup>1</sup> [NRS \(2024\) \*Scotland's Population 2023 - The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends.\*](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Scottish Fiscal Commission \(2025\) \*Fiscal Sustainability Report.\*](#)

<sup>3</sup> [NRS \(2024\) \*Scotland's Population 2023 - The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends.\*](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Scottish Fiscal Commission \(2025\) \*Fiscal Sustainability Report.\*](#)

<sup>5</sup>SG (2021) [A Scotland for the future: opportunities and challenges of Scotland's changing population.](#)

<sup>6</sup> SG (2022) [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#)

# 2

## **Introduction and background**

## 2. Introduction and background

### Purpose of this report

The Scottish Government's (SG) Population Strategy, published in 2021, sets out a long-term vision to address Scotland's demographic challenges. Scotland faces declining birth rates and an aging population, which threaten long-term economic sustainability and public service delivery<sup>1 2 3</sup>. Scotland now has considerably more people aged 65 and over than people under 15.<sup>4</sup> Inward migration from the rest of the UK and internationally means we have more people in younger age groups than we otherwise would, and without this inward migration Scotland's population would be in decline with deaths exceeding births.<sup>5</sup> This has been the case for the past 10 years.<sup>6</sup> Scotland's distinct demographic challenge means that the economic role of migration is particularly important to help offset the challenges arising from an ageing and shrinking population via boosting the size and proportion of the working age population. One of the ways in which the SG is using its devolved powers and other levers at its disposal to contribute to efforts to grow our economy and address demographic challenges is through Scotland's Migration Service (SMS). SMS aims to help attract and retain international talent to Scotland by providing business immigration support to employers and investors, and personal immigration and reception support to individuals. The commitment to deliver SMS was initially set out within the 'Attractive and Welcoming' pillar of the Population Strategy:

"We will explore, through our talent attraction and retention service, how we can attract talent from across the rest of the UK, particularly in key sectors identified in our Inward Investment Plan".<sup>7</sup>

SMS is also highlighted in Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET), where the service's attraction of key skills and talent is emphasised in order to help realise economic ambitions<sup>8</sup>. Further detail on the policy context and the operating model for the service is included in the rest of this chapter.

SG analysts conducted a light-touch early evaluation of SMS in the autumn of 2025. Drawing upon monitoring data, user feedback, qualitative research, and economic analysis, the evaluation assessed to what extent the service cohered to the original policy vision, the early impact of the service, and the extent to which SMS delivers value for money. The evaluation was constrained by limited data availability in relation to user experiences and small and unrepresentative sample sizes. As an early insights evaluation, it was conducted less than a year after the full service launch in November 2024, which meant it was not possible to assess longer-term outcomes. Findings should therefore be interpreted in light of this short

operational period as well as the data limitations, and should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive.

The early insights evaluation was conducted to assess emerging evidence on the implementation, impact, and value for money of the service during early implementation. This report provides insights to inform policy development and resultant required decisions in early 2026 regarding whether to re-procure operational supplier contracts. A re-procurement will therefore be needed in order for the service to continue to operate from the 2027/28 financial year onwards. A follow-up evaluation is recommended after two to three years of full operation to robustly assess the impact of the service and inform future policy decisions.

## **Policy context**

### **Scope of the Scottish Government's migration policy objectives**

Immigration policy is [reserved](#) to the UK Government, meaning that the SG has no control over the operation of the immigration system. Immigration rules are set and implemented by the Home Office, a department of the UK Government. This places major constraints around the SG's scope for action on immigration matters. Without direct powers over immigration policy, the SG's wider strategic approach to migration policy focuses on three key strands:

- Making the most of the existing immigration system – supporting employers to navigate the system and individuals to come to Scotland (via Scotland's Migration Service);
- Building a robust evidence base to support arguments for changes within the UK immigration system;
- Making the case for tailored migration routes for Scotland which reflect Scotland's distinct demographic challenges.

This work sits within the International Relations, Population and Migration Division, part of the SG's Directorate for Culture and External Affairs. SMS specifically sits within the first bullet above.

### **Inward migration and its impact on Scotland**

Inward migration to Scotland contributes to a number of positive outcomes.<sup>910</sup> Research shows a positive impact of migration on host countries – for example, a meta-analysis of 41 studies found a positive and statistically significant impact of immigration on the economic performance of host countries.<sup>11</sup> Inward migration is associated with increased productivity<sup>12</sup>, and [research from the Federation of Small Businesses](#) (2019) found that one in ten SMEs in Scotland are immigrant led.

Those who choose Scotland as their home help to grow our economy, increase our productivity and innovation, address skills shortages and make essential contributions to communities.<sup>1314</sup>

Migrants to Scotland are more likely to be of working age than the population in general<sup>15</sup> and are therefore more likely to be working and contributing to public finances<sup>16</sup>. Due to this, the Office for Budgetary Responsibility generally stresses increased net migration as a key lever for long-term fiscal sustainability.<sup>17</sup> As referenced in the introduction of this paper, inward migration is also a key component to help address Scotland's distinct demographic challenge, helping to support a sustainable Scottish population far into the future. National Records of Scotland's (NRS) population projections highlight that the number of people of pensionable age is projected to increase dramatically, while our overall population growth and that of working age people is slower than in the UK as a whole.<sup>18</sup> The size and total share of the working age population, those individuals aged 16 to 64, is very important for the economy and public services. In their [Fiscal Sustainability Report](#), the Scottish Fiscal Commission (2025) projected that Scotland's long-term GDP growth rate will be consistently below that of the UK, with the difference being driven by Scotland's more pronounced reduction in labour supply and demographic change. This projected demographic change has significant implications for communities, economies and public service planning and delivery. Scotland's distinct demographic challenge means that the economic role of migration is particularly important, as it could help offset the challenges which will arise from an ageing and shrinking population in Scotland by helping to boost the size and proportion of the working age population.

For further information on Scotland's distinct demographic challenge, the economic impacts of migration and the policy options designed to ensure that the migration system meets Scotland's needs, please refer to the paper [Migration – Meeting Scotland's Needs](#) published in January 2025.

## **Background to Scotland's Migration Service**

### **Operating model for Scotland's Migration Service**

Scotland's Migration Service supports:

- People who want to move to and work in Scotland (referred to in this report as 'pre-move migrants' or simply 'pre-movers')
- People who want to settle in Scotland long-term and need help with the UK immigration system or other elements of building a life here ('post-move migrants' or 'post-movers')

- Scotland-based employers who want to use the UK immigration system to help fill vacancies
- Inward investors and entrepreneurs who want to set up or expand businesses in Scotland

SMS is delivered by two operational suppliers:

- Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), which delivers information and advice to migrants and;
- Seraphus, which delivers information and advice to employers based in Scotland and inward investors.

The service provides:

- Two tailored digital advice platforms, one aimed at employers and investors, and one aimed at migrants,
- Immigration support for employers and investors via one-to-many resources (including webinars, how-to guides, and tutorials) and one-to-one advice sessions
- Immigration support and reception support for migrants through one-to-one advice sessions.

Online information and one-to-many resources are accessible to anyone who uses the internet, at no cost.

One-to-one advice sessions for migrants are available via video call, telephone call, or in-person at Citizens Advice Bureaux in Scotland. The appointments are free but users must meet certain criteria to be eligible for an appointment.<sup>19</sup> Migrants are asked to provide some information about their circumstances via a booking form so that their eligibility can be assessed prior to the appointment being confirmed.

One-to-one advice sessions for Scotland-based employers and investors are available via video call or telephone call, for free. Employers and investors are asked to provide some information about their organisation via a booking form so Seraphus can assess whether they represent a legitimate and credible organisation prior to the appointment being confirmed.

### **Overview of policy development and service design process for Scotland's Migration Service**

Initial direction for the service was set in February 2022, with Ministers agreeing the service should focus on talent attraction and retention, and present a package in support of people moving to remote and rural areas and the specific needs of key workforces<sup>20</sup>. It was confirmed at this stage that support for asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland was out of scope due to the existing provisions in place for these groups. The service's aims, outcomes, and outputs were developed through

the Ministerial Population Taskforce and engagement with successive Ministers with portfolio responsibility<sup>21</sup>.

A period of policy scoping and development work took place between 2022 and 2023. This included undertaking research, considering different service delivery models, and finalising funding through an organisational Spending Review Process. A procurement exercise was also undertaken to secure operational suppliers to deliver the service.

The intended outcomes and outputs for SMS were set out in a service specification, which formed part of the invitation to tender for operational suppliers, in 2023:

Table 1. SMS original intended outcomes and outputs from service specification

Outcomes	Outputs
<p><b>Employers can use the UK’s immigration system effectively and efficiently to help meet their skills and labour needs</b></p>	<p><b>Immigration support for employers</b></p> <p>Tier 1: a universal offer, available to everyone, to include the provision of up-to-date and accurate immigration information in plain English on the digital platform</p> <p>Tier 2: a ‘one to many’ offer, with a range of products covering more detailed immigration information</p> <p>Tier 3: a ‘one-to-one’ advice service for employers in Scotland’s public, private and third sectors whose needs are not met through the first two tiers</p>
<p><b>People can easily access good quality information and advice to help them move to Scotland and settle into their communities</b></p>	<p><b>Reception support for people moving to Scotland</b></p> <p>Tier 1: a universal offer, available to everyone, to include the provision of up-to-date and accurate information about moving to Scotland and immigration advice in plain English on the digital platform.</p> <p>Tier 2: a ‘one-to-one’ advice service for people in the UK and people moving to Scotland.</p>
<p><b>People’s and employers’ needs are met through a digital platform</b></p>	<p><b>Digital platform</b></p> <p>Users will access the service in the first instance through an online portal or platform.</p>

Following initial policy scoping and development, the SMS project entered into a design and delivery stage. Design and delivery of the service has taken place across five phases:

- Project initiation phase: December 2023
- Discovery phase and launch of interim service: January to April 2024
- Alpha phase: April to July 2024
- Beta phase and launch of full service: July to November 2024
- Continuous improvement phase: February 2025 until present

The terms ‘Discovery’, ‘Alpha’, and ‘Beta’ refer to digital service design phases used in Agile project management, which is considered the best practice approach for development of new government services.<sup>22</sup> Within Scottish Government, the service design process must meet the Digital Scotland Service Standard (DSSS), a set of criteria the project is assessed against at each of the three stages.<sup>23</sup> In order to meet the DSSS, the Scotland’s Migration Service undertook extensive user research at each design stage.

Table 2. Timeline for SMS 2022 - 2025

<b>Date</b>	<b>Milestones and Activities</b>
February 2022	Broad remit and aims of service agreed by Ministerial Population Taskforce
Early 2023	Intended outcomes and outputs set out through service specification
March to December 2023	Policy scoping and development phase
December 2023	Project initiation
January to April 2024	Discovery phase
27 March 2024	Interim service launched
April to July 2024	Alpha phase
July to November 2024	Beta phase
19 November 2024	Full service launched
February 2025 to present	Continuous improvement

An interim service was launched on 27 March 2024. This included a digital platform hosted on Scotland.org which contained high-level advice for migrants seeking to relocate to or settle in Scotland and for employers and investors looking to recruit internationally or expand their business in Scotland. As part of the interim service, advice appointments were also offered via Seraphus to employers and investors who were Scottish organisations who employ or want to employ international staff, overseas businesses interested in expanding their businesses in Scotland, or investors or entrepreneurs interested in setting up a business in Scotland. The migrant-focused element of the interim service offered appointments via CAS to international students in their final year of studies at a Scottish university or college and migrants living in Scotland for less than six months.

The full service launched on 19 November 2024. From this point onwards, the offer of tailored advice appointments were expanded to include migrants who:

- Want to work in Scotland and have a job offer
- Want to join a close family member in Scotland
- Have moved to Scotland and have arrived within the last 24 months

- Are currently living in Scotland who have limited leave to remain or enter the UK.

More recently, the service also began to offer appointments to migrants who had studied at a Scottish college or university in the previous five years and were interested in moving back to Scotland. Most of the outcomes and outputs set out during the scoping and policy development phase remained as policy aims during the service design process and into delivery of the live service. They were articulated in a theory of change during the service design process. This is discussed in further detail in chapter 2. A description of how outcomes and outputs changed during the design and delivery of the service is provided in chapter 4 of this report.

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<sup>1</sup>SG (2021) [A Scotland for the future: opportunities and challenges of Scotland's changing population](#)

<sup>2</sup>NRS (2024) [Scotland's Population 2023 - The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends](#).

<sup>3</sup>Scottish Fiscal Commission (2025) [Fiscal Sustainability Report](#).

<sup>4</sup>NRS (2024) [Scotland's Population 2023 - The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends](#).

<sup>5</sup> [NRS \(2025\) Mid-2024 Population Estimates](#).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> SG (2021) [A Scotland for the future: opportunities and challenges of Scotland's changing population](#), p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> SG (2022) [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#)

<sup>9</sup> SG (2016) [The impacts of migrants and migration into Scotland](#).

<sup>10</sup> MAC (2018) [EEA migration in the UK](#).

<sup>11</sup> Luz et al (2025) 'Meta-Analysis: The Impact of Immigration on the Economic Performance of the Host Country', *Economies*, 13(8).

<sup>12</sup> Campo, F et al (2018) [The Impact of Migration on Productivity and Native-born Workers' Training](#); see also IZA Institute of Labor Economics (2025) [Migration and Productivity in the UK: An Analysis of Employee Payroll Data](#)

<sup>13</sup> SG (2025) [Migration – Meeting Scotland's Needs](#).

<sup>14</sup> Randolph and Kay (2024) 'The potential impact of recent UK immigration policy announcements in Scotland', *Fraser of Allander Economic Commentary*.

<sup>15</sup> NRS (2024) [Scotland's Population 2023 - The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends](#).

<sup>16</sup> Scottish Fiscal Commission (2025) [Fiscal Sustainability Report](#).

<sup>17</sup> See for example OBR Fiscal risk and sustainability reports [2025](#), [2024](#), and [2023](#).

<sup>18</sup> [NRS \(2025\) Projected Population of Scotland: 2022-based](#)

<sup>19</sup> Current eligibility criteria are available here: [Book an advice appointment | Scotland.org](#).

The eligibility criteria were devised based on four principles:

- 1) Eligibility criteria should be clear and transparent.
- 2) Eligibility criteria should be set at an optimum level to manage demand.
- 3) The service must not duplicate existing services.
- 4) The service must use its limited budget effectively and efficiently to have the greatest impact on service users and Scotland's economy.

<sup>20</sup> Scottish Government (2022). [Population Taskforce minutes: February 2022 - gov.scot](#)

<sup>21</sup> Emma Roddick MSP in her role as Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees between March 2023-May 2024; from May 2024 Kaukab Stewart MSP in her role as Minister for Equalities

<sup>22</sup> [Agile - Service Manual](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Digital Scotland Service Standard - Service Manual](#)

# 3

## Evaluation approach

### 3. Evaluation approach

This evaluation sought to capture early evidence relating to the process, impact, and value for money of Scotland's Migration Service. In spring 2024, Scottish Government analysts developed a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy for SMS, which set out evaluation questions, key performance indicators (KPIs), and a theory of change. This strategy was developed in the development phase of the service, and prior to the interim launch. The M&E strategy was designed to measure the operation and impact of the service, and was also aligned to [Digital Scotland Service Standard \(DSSS\) criteria](#), which all Scottish Government digital services are required to meet. As a living document, the strategy was refined during the initial months of interim service delivery to ensure it was effectively set up for measuring performance and impact of SMS.

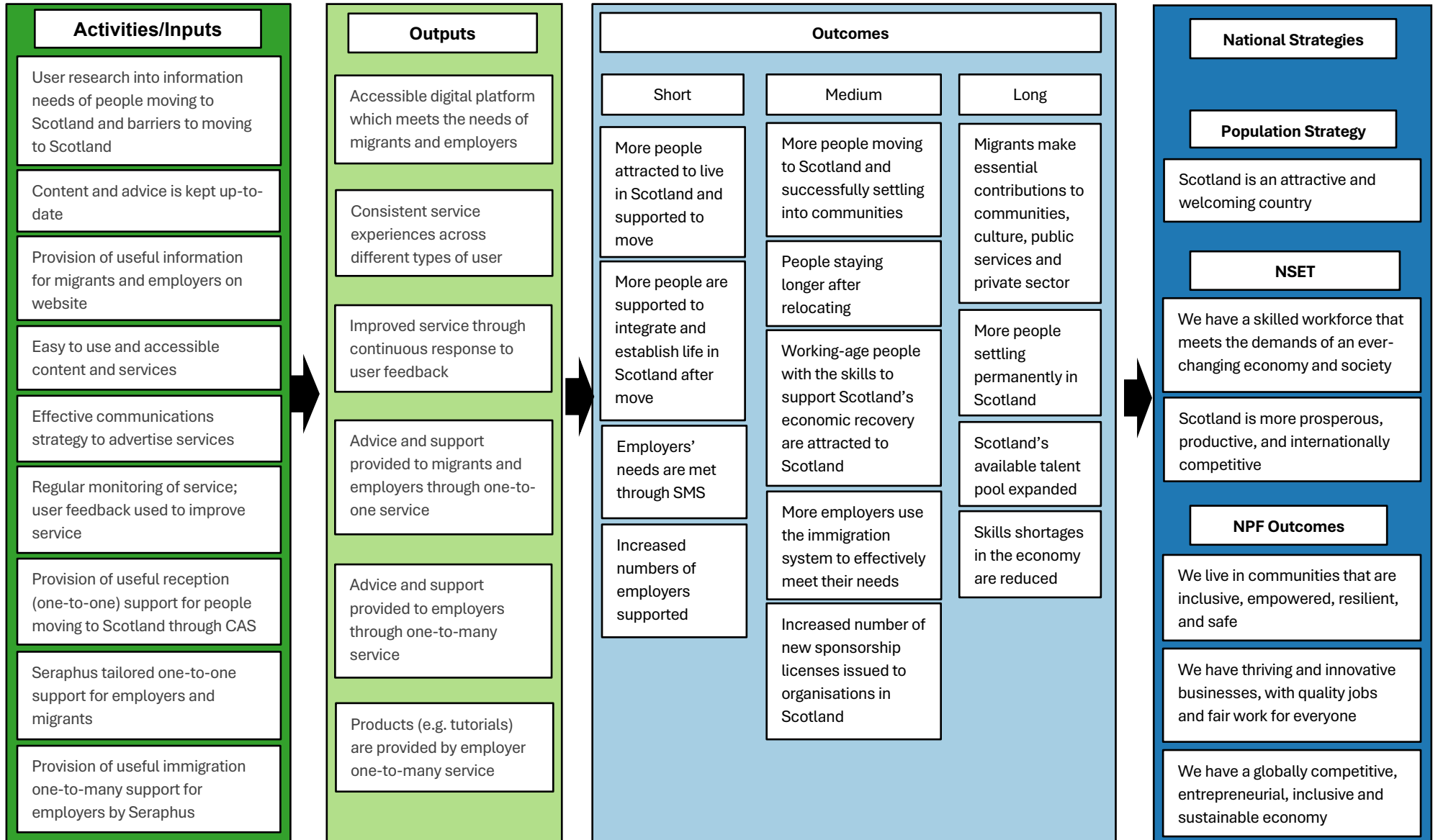
The SMS theory of change articulates the pathway from service inputs and outputs to the short, medium, and long-term outcomes the service intends to achieve. It also illustrates the logic which underpins this pathway and how success at the activity, input, and output stage can in the longer term be reflected in successful contributions to the overarching strategic outcomes that SMS is expected to contribute to. This theory of change is presented [overleaf](#) and acts as a framework for this early insights evaluation.

When the theory of change was developed, a number of external factors were identified which were considered likely to influence and/or constrain the success of the service. These factors include:

- **UK Government Legislation:** Immigration is a [reserved](#) matter to UK Government, which means that any changes to legislation which may impact the ability of migrants to move to and work in Scotland is out of the Scottish Government's control.
- **News and media narratives:** It is possible that narratives around migration in the media may influence people's decisions to move to and settle in Scotland.
- **Skills and experience:** The level and relevance of migrants' skills and experience to the skills gaps in Scotland's labour market and specifically those sought by the employers that engage with Scotland's Migration Service will also influence outcomes.
- **Labour market:** Related to the above, the number of available employment opportunities and the relevance and attractiveness of these is also an external factor which will influence the Scotland's Migration Service outcomes set out in the theory of change

# SMS Theory of Change

Figure 1. Scotland's Migration Service Theory of Change



## Evaluation questions

This evaluation assessed early evidence to respond to the following evaluation questions:

- **EQ1 (Process):** To what extent has Scotland's Migration Service been delivered as intended?
  - Is the information and advice provided by the service useful and up-to-date?
  - Is the service easy to use and accessible?
- **EQ2 (Impact):** To what extent is Scotland's Migration Service achieving its intended outcomes?
  - To what extent are different groups of migrants experiencing and being impacted by the service in different ways?
  - Is there evidence to suggest that SMS makes it easier for migrants to move to Scotland and settle into their communities?
  - Do the services provided help employers use the immigration system more effectively and efficiently? Does the service assist employers in meeting their skills and labour needs?
  - To what extent do experiences of the service vary according to the type of employer using the service?
- **EQ3 (Value for Money):** To what extent does Scotland's Migration Service deliver value for money?

This report presents findings in relation to each of these three main evaluation questions in the following chapters. Given the full service had been operational less than a year (November 2024-September 2025) when this evaluation was carried out, it was not possible to fully address the above evaluation questions. This was particularly the case in relation to EQ2 (to what extent SMS is achieving its intended outcomes), as many of these relate to longer term impact, e.g. supporting movement and settlement of migrants in Scotland. Instead, this report presents the initial evidence in relation to the above questions and makes recommendations based on these, including for future evaluation. It is limited in the conclusions it is able to draw.

## Evaluation approach and methods

This evaluation was carried out by SG analysts in Central Analysis Division and the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser and was informed by the [Magenta Book](#) for Government Evaluation. The SMS theory of change set the framework for the evaluation, which drew primarily on existing monitoring and performance data.

Given the short period the full service has been operational, data availability was limited and in many cases analysis drew on small sample sizes. The evaluation consisted of analysis of a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, including:

- service monitoring and performance data;
- user feedback data;
- narrative accounts of the delivery and implementation of the service;
- and small-scale qualitative research with service users and service providers.

Further detail on each of these evidence sources and the analysis of these is set out below. Key data issues and limitations are also outlined.

## **Sources of evidence**

It should be noted that while some of the sources which the evaluation drew on (described below) contain data for every month since in April 2024 (the first month for which data was available, following the launch of the interim service at the end of March 2024), for other sources, data has only been captured since the full launch of the service in November 2024.

### Appointment records from Citizens Advice Scotland and Seraphus

Project records from CAS include details of over 1,000 booked appointments with current and prospective migrants, out of which 804 went ahead. These records provide key characteristics of those attending appointments (including current location, age, sex, nationality, ethnicity, and reason for requesting appointments), as well as a summary of the advice provided.

Seraphus records cover close to 200 booked appointments, out of which 146 appointments went ahead and were attended by employers or investors, including organisations currently based in Scotland as well as those considering operating from Scotland in the future. Records include characteristics of employers and investors attending appointments (including their location, nationality and sector), as well as an indication of the subject of appointments and a summary of the advice provided.

It should be noted that statistics on appointments reported in this early insights evaluation, may differ slightly from those presented in quarterly SMS statistics publications<sup>1</sup>.

### Web analytics data

The SMS web analytics dashboard captures website traffic for pages linked to the service, including pages on [Scotland.Org](#) and [Scotland's Migration Service for Employers and Investors](#). The dashboard contains data for each month since the

interim launch of the service in late March 2024, though the number of web pages which SMS oversees has significantly grown since this time.

### Service accessibility data

Evidence on the accessibility of the digital service is drawn from an accessibility audit carried out by a third-party accessibility testing organisation in the Beta phase of the service. This audit was carried out in line with DSSS requirements, and commissioned to test the service's compliance relative to WCAG 2.2 level AA, which is a standard all government services must meet in relation to accessibility for disabled users. The second indicator was based on a standardised readability assessment of the SMS' online content, with a target for online content set at a reading age of 12. While the Scottish Government's Service Manual recommends a reading age of between 9 and 11 years, this was not feasible for the service, given that some terms which had to be referenced as part of SMS' online content (e.g. the names of specific visas) would automatically exceed this recommendation.

### Service user feedback surveys

Service users were invited to fill out feedback surveys immediately after, and 3-6 months after, having an appointment with either CAS or Seraphus. These had a very low response rate, which is a common trend for feedback surveys and online surveys in general<sup>2</sup>. The low response rate limited analysis and meant it was not feasible to test for statistical significance. Between September 2024 and August 2025, the proportion of service users completing feedback surveys<sup>3</sup> was as follows:

- User feedback surveys completed by current or prospective migrants shortly after appointment: 3% (n=24)
- User feedback surveys completed by migrants 3-6 months after appointments: <1% (n=5)
- User feedback surveys completed by employers or investors shortly after appointment: 33% (n=37)
- User feedback surveys completed by employers or investors 3-6 months after appointments: 14% (n=16).

### Qualitative research with users and service providers

Researchers from CAS carried out a small number of qualitative interviews and focus groups with service users and advisers for the purposes of this evaluation in September-October 2025. Focus groups were held with advisers from CAS (2 focus groups with 6 advisers) and from Seraphus (1 focus group with 3 advisers) to gather insights about their experiences of delivering the service and providing advice to migrants (CAS advisers) and employers and investors (Seraphus lawyers). Group discussions were prompted by questions linked to the type of users

which advisers had interacted with, the most common advice and support provided, the extent to which advisers had felt able to support users and views on how the service could be improved in the future.

One-to-one interviews were held with employers (two interviews) and migrants who had relocated to Scotland at the time of their appointment (four interviews). Due to challenges with recruitment, eight migrant service users (six already living in Scotland [post-movers] and two looking to move to Scotland [pre-movers]) completed written feedback which answered the same questions asked in the four interviews. Interviews and written feedback with service users asked questions about the perceived impact of SMS and the user's full SMS journey, including any barriers to accessing the service and suggested improvements.

### Narrative accounts of SMS delivery and implementation

To inform the process component of the evaluation, the SMS Team was asked to submit a narrative account of work completed as part of the development, design and launch of the service and digital online platform. This overview was produced using a template developed by Scottish Government analysts, which asked the SMS Team to submit details of:

- The policy background to the service
- The extent to which the service had delivered intended outcomes
- The sources of evidence used to monitor service performance
- Challenges encountered and intended next steps for the service.

This was thematically analysed and triangulated with the other available qualitative and quantitative data on service delivery. This was then systematically assessed against the SMS theory of change to respond to EQ1.

### Stakeholder feedback

To inform this evaluation, feedback on the service was gathered from eight stakeholders, including representatives from six universities (who engage with and represent migrant/international students) who submitted a joint response, as well as two employer and investor service users. Six additional organisations were approached for feedback but did not respond to this request.

Stakeholders who responded to the request for feedback were asked to comment on the perceived impact of the service on the group(s) that they represented and make recommendations for the future of the service. Identifying details have been limited in order to maintain the anonymity of stakeholders.

## Analysis

Evidence described above was analysed and systematically assessed against the SMS theory of change. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to provide a summary of any data which could demonstrate the reach and impact of the service among migrants, employers, and investors. Quantitative data analysis was not tested for statistical significance due to small and unrepresentative sample sizes, which would have limited the reliability of inferential statistics. Using quantitative analysis, KPI data was analysed to provide mean, minimum and max responses.

Thematic analysis was carried out on the following evidence sources to identify key themes aligned with the evaluation questions and components of the Theory of Change:

- Usable open text responses from the migrant service user and employer service user feedback surveys
- Evidence from focus groups (CAS and Seraphus lawyers), interviews (employer and migrant service users), and the written responses to the interview questions (migrant service users).

The value for money chapter ([Chapter 6](#)) estimates the economic activity supported by the service by user group to date, focusing on migrants, employers, and investors using feedback survey data and assumptions about average migrant salaries to calculate gross value added (GVA) to the economy. This GVA estimate is then compared to service delivery costs to date to produce an illustrative benefit-to-cost ratio.

## Limitations

There are several limitations of the data which should be noted when interpreting the findings in this report.

### Potential bias

As set out above, analysis relied primarily on existing monitoring and feedback data, which is limited in its ability to capture the complexity of experiences of users and progress towards the nuanced SMS outcomes. Feedback data is particularly susceptible to bias due to the self-selected nature of samples and self-reported experiences. This means that the validity and reliability of results may be skewed, as individuals who have particularly strong views, either positive or negative, are often more likely to respond to feedback surveys than those who have had more routine experiences. As such, findings drawn from this data should be interpreted with caution, especially considering the small sample size highlighted above.

Findings should also be interpreted in light of the external factors outlined in this chapter, as it has not been possible to isolate the influence of these.

### Small sample sizes

Evidence of user experiences was gathered through surveys completed after users attended appointments and webinars, as well as through qualitative interviews. Both of these sources have small sample sizes which cannot be considered representative of SMS users. Between September 2024 and August 2025, a total of 29 migrants had completed a user feedback form on their experiences of appointments (5 completed 3-6 months after appointments), and 53 had been completed by employers and investors (16 completed 3-6 months after appointments).

Low uptake of invitations to participate in qualitative research meant that only four migrant interviews went ahead, with a further eight migrants responding to interview questions via MS Forms. Only two of these participants were migrant service users who had not relocated to Scotland at the time of their engagement with the service. Similarly, there was low uptake among employer and investor users, meaning only two interviews with employers went ahead and no investors were interviewed. Both employers represented Scottish NHS boards which impacted the ability of the qualitative evidence to explore experiences across different sectors. Regardless, this qualitative evidence is valuable in the rich insights it generated in terms of user experiences and the impact of the service.

The above sample limitations mean this evaluation has been constrained in terms of what conclusions it can draw on the impact of the service, as we were not able to establish a sample that was representative of the full user base. This has also meant it has not been possible to explore how user experiences may have differed based on socio-demographic characteristics or by type of organisation, as it has not been possible to break down findings linked to these variables in a way that avoids individual service users being identifiable in the final evaluation report.

### Socio-demographic characteristics

Relatedly, while CAS intended to collect data on users' socio-demographic characteristics for appointments with the service, this data was not collected in full for all users. In particular, the ethnicity of migrants booking appointments was unavailable for 59% of appointments. This therefore further limited the extent to which we could assess whether user experiences of the service varied by socio-demographic characteristics.

## Data quality and availability

A number of data quality and availability issues were encountered during analysis which affected the ability of the evaluation to answer specific evaluation questions and to link evidence to some components of the SMS Theory of Change.

- **Key Performance Metrics:** The KPIs which informed the evaluation of the service were only available from January 2025. This resulted in only 8 months of KPI data for the employer and investor focused service, and only 7 months of KPI data for the migrant focused service (given that no migrants submitted feedback surveys in May 2025). The low number of data points available combined with the small feedback survey sample sizes limit the reliability of conclusions concerning how SMS met user needs.
- **Web Analytics:** The ability to draw conclusions from the web analytics data has been impacted by some missing data and inconsistencies in how data was recorded. There is a discrepancy where the total page views of the SMS dashboard do not align with the sum of individual pages across different parts of the platform due to the way data is indexed, however a consistent approach is adopted to analysis to minimise the impact of this. These data gaps and inconsistencies could have impacted the conclusions drawn about the impact and reach of the SMS digital content as figures should be considered an estimate rather than exact number.
- **Changes in feedback survey questions:** New questions on overall satisfaction and on health and wellbeing were added to the CAS feedback survey in May 2025. At the time of analysis, there were only four months of data which meant this evidence could not be used to inform the impact evaluation.
- **Inconsistencies in variables:** Inconsistencies in how variables were recorded in the monthly appointment records required significant data cleaning and harmonisation before analysis could begin. This included correcting formatting inconsistencies and coding for incomplete or missing data. Some variables were not recorded until August 2024 which included capturing how migrant service users discovered the service.

## Long-term outcome measurement

Measurement of long-term outcomes is also out of scope for this evaluation, given the service has not been operational for long enough to allow for this. This means we have not been able to robustly assess whether the service has contributed to outcomes such as migrant retention in Scotland, reducing skill shortages in the Scottish economy, or the wider contributions of migrants to Scottish communities, culture, public and private sectors.

The above limitations have constrained the ability of this evaluation to respond to its evaluation questions, which is highlighted at relevant points throughout the report, and the results of this evaluation should be interpreted in light of the above limitations.

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<sup>1</sup> Data from project records used in this early insights evaluation may differ slightly from figures published in quarterly performance data publications for SMS. Quarterly publications use the latest, and most up-to-date data available. By comparison, this evaluation analysed records available up to August 2025, and in some cases, CAS and Seraphus had retroactively added details about some appointments, which were not initially included in appointment records. This can account for discrepancies in figures reported here and in SMS' quarterly publications.

<sup>2</sup> SG (2025) [Understanding Survey Nonresponse Behaviours: Evidence and Practical Solutions](#)

<sup>3</sup> The sample sizes for the user feedback surveys were calculated from the total number of users not the total number of appointments.

# 4

**EQ1: To what Extent has SMS been Delivered as Intended?**

## 4. EQ1: To what extent has SMS been delivered as intended?

The first component of this early insights evaluation considers the delivery and implementation of SMS and seeks to answer the following evaluation question:

- EQ1: To what extent has SMS been delivered as intended?

This chapter presents findings from analysis of:

- a narrative evidence submission from the SG SMS team on service development, implementation, and delivery to date;
- appointment records, KPI data and web analytics data.
- focus groups with CAS and Seraphus lawyers (n=15) conducted in the autumn of 2025;
- and stakeholder feedback.

The SMS theory of change was used as a foundational framework to assess whether SMS was implemented as intended. It provided a structured representation of the expected causal pathways, including key activities, outputs, and short- and medium-term outcomes. By comparing actual implementation against the theory of change, we sought to:

- identify whether core components of the service were delivered as planned;
- examine the delivery practices and the original design;
- explore contextual factors that influenced implementation fidelity;
- and highlight any deviations, adaptations, or gaps in delivery.

This approach enabled a systematic assessment of how closely the service adhered to its intended design and supported the identification of suitable recommendations.

### **Delivery of an Accessible Digital Platform Which Meets the Needs of Migrants and Employers**

A key output articulated in the SMS theory of change is the delivery of an accessible digital platform which meets the needs of migrants, employers, and investors. In addition to providing more in-depth advice to users through one-to-one appointments and webinars, one of the key aims of the service is to provide free online content which can be a source of clear and useful information for migrants, employers and investors. In developing the service, it was anticipated that many of

those who engaged with SMS' online content would find the information they required and not require additional support beyond this.

An interim version of SMS was launched in late March 2024, with the first operational data on the service available in April 2024. This included the creation of new webpages on [Scotland.org](https://www.scotland.org) (a pre-existing website operated as part of Brand Scotland), which offered high-level advice for migrants seeking to relocate to or settle in Scotland and for employers and investors looking to recruit internationally or expand their business in Scotland. The full service was launched in November 2024, and since then the SMS online content offered to migrants, employers and investors has significantly expanded. It has also been consistently updated to reflect any changes in the UK Government immigration system since the service launched. Information is now provided across two websites; [Scotland.org](https://www.scotland.org) (primarily providing content and advice for migrants) and [Scotland's Migration Service for Employers and Investors](https://www.scotland.org/employment). At the time of this evaluation, across these sites, there were around 20 pages of content aimed at migrants interested in relocating to or settling in Scotland, and around 80 pages aimed at employers and investors. Amongst other topics, these pages currently offer advice and information on moving to Scotland, studying or working in Scotland, employing and sponsoring international workers and investing in Scotland.

### **Design of digital platform**

The development of SMS' two digital platforms (one for migrants and one for employers and investors) was overseen by the SG SMS Team with the digital supplier (Dentsu Creative, later replaced by Leith Digital in January 2025) leading on the design and technical operation of the platform.

User research was conducted at several stages with prospective service users, service users from the interim launch, and advisers working with delivery partners. The original intention of the service was to deliver a single digital platform for migrants, employers and investors. This intended design was deviated from as a result of findings from the user research. This research highlighted the divergence of needs between user groups, with employers and investors requiring tailored information on business immigration matters and guidance on navigating the immigration system, while migrants require information on personal immigration aspects and life in Scotland. Therefore, two online platforms were developed instead to better meet the needs of different categories of user. While this decision impacted the implementation fidelity of the service, it represents an evidence-based service adaptation in order to enable the service to better deliver the intended output and meet its desired outcome of meeting the needs of migrants, employers, and investors. The extent to which this was successful is discussed in the next section.

As indicated above, SMS’ migrant-focused online content is hosted on Scotland.org. Prior to the development of SMS, Scotland.org included a number of pages aimed at prospective and recent migrants, which included content and guidance linked to living and working in Scotland. As part of the launch of the SMS migrant-focused platform, the SMS Team updated the content of these pre-existing pages, and continue to have a role in ensuring that the content of these pages is up-to-date and accurate. As such, analysis of web-analytics data presented in this report covers user engagement with web-pages either created or maintained by the SMS team.

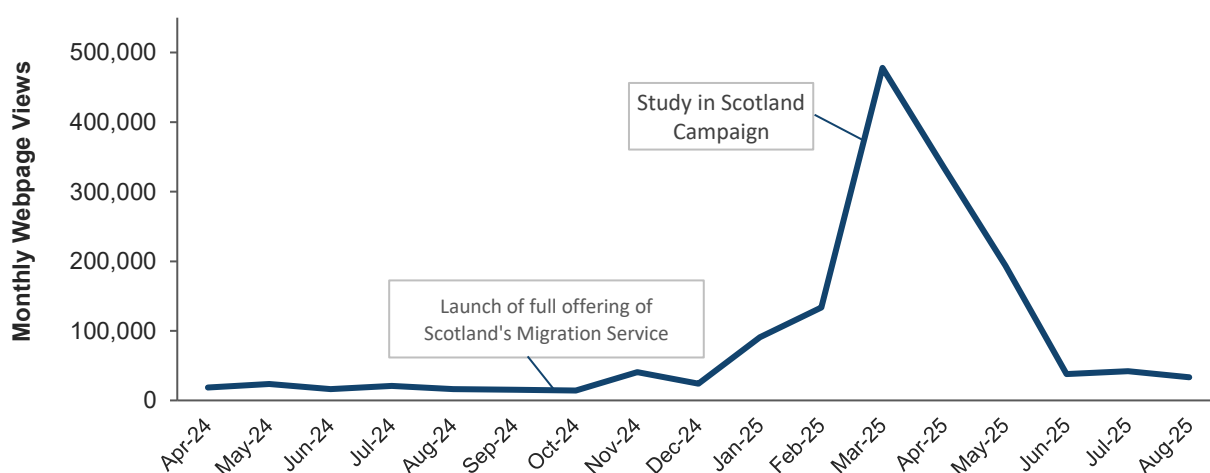
Performance and delivery of digital platform that meets users’ needs

Since the launch of the interim service in March 2024, web analytics data for SMS indicates that SMS’ two digital platforms have received an estimated<sup>1</sup> total of 1,425,787 views (up to August 2025)<sup>2</sup>, suggesting that the service has had significant reach online.

### Migrant-focused platform

The level of traffic which migrant-focused platform has received has gradually increased since the full launch of the full service in November 2024, with the number of views per month peaking in March 2025 at 447,196, following the launch of the Brand Scotland Study in Scotland marketing campaign (Figure 2; while this campaign was not specifically intended to promote SMS, it boosted traffic towards SMS’ migrant-focused content on Brand Scotland’s Scotland.org).<sup>3</sup>

Figure 2. Monthly Views (April 2024–August 2025) for SMS’ Migrant-focused Platform



Migrant-focused SMS webpages have received visits from individuals located in 183 different countries, with the highest number of visits from a single country coming from India, United States, Indonesia, Pakistan and Vietnam (see Annex A,

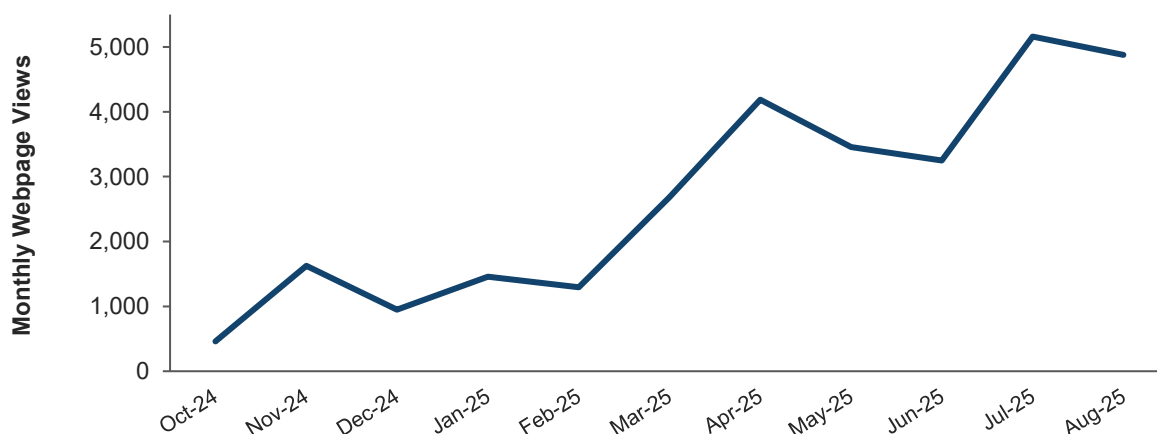
Table B2 for figures). The ten countries from which migrant-focused pages received the greatest number of visits from are all outside of the EU.

Pages on the migrant platform focused on studying in Scotland, visas, finding employment and general advice on moving to Scotland received the greatest level of traffic to date (see [Annex A, Table B1](#)). The page for booking an advice appointment with CAS received an average of 179 views per month from April 2024 to October 2024. After the full service launch, this average increased to 821 views between November 2024 and August 2025.

### Employer and investor-focused platform

The [platform](#) aimed specifically at employers and investors launched in November 2024. As of August 2025, this site had received 29,398 views, with monthly views steadily increasing over time, and peaking in July 2025 at 5,160.

Figure 3. Monthly Views (October 2024 – August 2025) for SMS' Employer and Investor-focused Platform



The employer and investor page on the [Skilled Worker Visa](#) received significantly more views (an average of 887 per month) than others, with other popular pages including the entrant discount for the skilled worker visa and visa routes for hiring international workers (see Annex A, Table B3 for further details on page views). A page which allows individuals to book appointments with Seraphus lawyers received an average of 79 views per month during the interim launch of the service, which rose to an average of 260 views per month after the full launch of the service in November 2024. The majority of visitors (67%) to the site were from the UK, although a significant proportion (20%) were from the United States (see Annex A, Table B4). These figures are in line with expected outcomes for the service, given that this platform is intended to cater to employers based in Scotland and to investors based abroad, demonstrating evidence of successful implementation.

### Overall performance of digital platforms

Feedback from stakeholders evidenced positive experiences of the digital platforms, particularly highlighting the clear and helpful advice they provide. One stakeholder, whose role involved supporting international students at a university, reflected on how information on immigration policies and procedures are often 'hidden' and 'confusing' and therefore appreciated having a resource of the SMS digital platform which they found to be accessible and could signpost international students to.

One stakeholder provided feedback on their perception of website content updates. While SMS has a structured process in place for ensuring that the service's online content always reflects the latest changes to UK Government immigration policy, this stakeholder commented that they would like to see online content updated more quickly to align with changes in immigration policy. As such, it may be beneficial for the service to more clearly indicate that online content reflects the most recent changes in policy, or to give an indication of when online content was last reviewed.

Considering both platforms, evidence from focus groups with CAS and Seraphus lawyers included recommendations on how the digital service could be improved upon, including developing case studies to feature on the digital platform. Advisers suggested case studies of international students gaining employment in Scotland or of how employers' and investors' skills gaps could be filled through tapping into global talent pools at Scottish universities. This recommendation from adviser focus groups reflects a broader implementation learning on the fact that showcasing tangible, relatable examples may help improve user engagement with the service, clarify its value, and support uptake, particularly among international students, and employers and investors unfamiliar with the immigration system. Further to this, stakeholder feedback recommended knowledge exchange between SMS and Scottish universities, which could help inform online content and advice around common misconceptions shared by migrants and employers.

Overall, analysis of web analytics data suggests that the online content provided by SMS has reached a large international audience, and helped direct traffic towards adviser appointments with CAS and Seraphus. Furthermore, evidence suggests that the Study in Scotland marketing campaign substantially boosted international awareness of SMS.

### **Accessibility of digital service**

As a digital service funded by the Scottish Government, SMS was required to meet [Digital Scotland Service Standard \(DSSS\) criteria](#). Among other outcomes, the DSSS criteria aim to ensure SG digital services meet user needs, are sustainable, and accessible. Prior to the launch of the service, SMS underwent and passed

three DSSS assessments, confirming it had been developed using a user-centred approach and could demonstrate it would offer a secure and reliable service. In line with DSSS criteria 5, '[Make sure everyone can use the service](#)', SMS was required to demonstrate the accessibility of the service. The DSSS assessment of SMS confirmed that:

- the design and development of the service, and linked digital platform, have been informed by a comprehensive understanding of how people would engage with the service
- all aspects of the service were inclusive
- the service has been considerate of people with a range of skills and different levels of confidence in using technology
- the service has been informed by user needs research with a diverse range of individuals, including individuals with disabilities
- the service had set up measurable targets for accessibility
- the service had carried out, and improved the service, following accessibility testing with real service users

An accessibility audit was carried out by a third-party supplier shortly before the full-service launch in October 2024. The purpose of the audit was to ascertain how SMS performed relative to the WCAG 2.2 Level AA criteria, the minimum required accessibility standard for public sector websites<sup>4</sup>. SMS online platforms achieved a 'pass' score in relation to 76% of the criteria. The auditor identified 16 issues and 5 observations. Of the 16 issues, 5 were marked as high-severity findings. All high-severity issues were fixed prior to full-service launch. The lower priority issues have been gradually addressed by the SMS project team in line with available digital resource, with 2 issues remaining as of September 2025. In line with best practice, another accessibility audit will be carried out during the 2026/27 financial year to ensure any new accessibility issues which have emerged during the intervening period are identified and resolved.

The reading age of SMS content has also been monitored from the Beta phase and throughout the service's live operations. The Scottish Government's content design guidelines<sup>5</sup> recommend a reading age of 9-11 years but this was deemed unfeasible to meet for SMS because of the nature of the legal content SMS conveys (for example, the names of various visas, in themselves, do not correspond to a reading age of 9-11 years). A target of 12 years was therefore agreed as representing the lowest reading age possible while retaining the necessary legal nuances. Records indicate that, since the launch of the interim service in March 2024, this average target was maintained until June 2025, where changes in content raised the average reading age to 14 years old. Following a

review of this content, adjustments are being made to individual content pages to restore the reading age to 12 years.

Comments from migrant users relating to the usability and accessibility of the migrant-focused platform were limited to three pieces of feedback but was consistently positive. Respondents noted that the website was well-structured, and the information was easy to understand. The accessibility of the migrant-focused platform was also noted by some stakeholders. One stakeholder highlighted the platform's accessibility as one of its strengths and stated that they felt able to signpost international students to it. Interviews with two employers highlighted that they both felt the employer and investor-focused platform was easy to navigate and looked professional.

Findings discussed in this section indicate that overall, an accessible digital service, consisting of two platforms, has been delivered as intended. Considerable efforts have been made to ensure that the SMS digital platforms have been designed to meet user needs and have been successful in reaching a large international audience. In addition to the above, an on-page feedback tool has recently been introduced to both SMS platforms, allowing users to provide feedback on specific webpages. While on-page feedback data was not available at the time this evaluation was carried out, in the future, this data will allow the SMS project team to identify pages where content could be improved from an accessibility perspective and make appropriate changes.

## **Advice and support to migrants, employers, and investors**

A further key output of the service, as articulated in the theory of change, is the provision of advice and support to migrants through one-to-one appointments, and the provision of advice and support to employers and investors through the one-to-one and one-to-many appointments and webinars. The impact of these and the experiences of users are explored in detail in the following chapter. This section includes high-level descriptive statistics, but for further detail see chapter 4.

### **Advice and support to migrants**

SMS provides advice through CAS appointments to current and prospective migrants. The need for eligibility criteria for one-to-one services was not identified during the policy scoping and development phase. However, eligibility criteria for migrants, employers, and investors were developed during the design and delivery stage of the service in order to manage demand. The eligibility criteria were based on four principles:

- Eligibility criteria should be clear and transparent
- Eligibility criteria should be set at an optimum level to manage demand

- The service must not duplicate existing services
- The service must use its limited budget effectively and efficiently to have the greatest impact on service users and Scotland's economy

During the interim service, one-to-one advice appointments for migrants were open to:

- People who have moved to Scotland within the past six months
- International students in their final year at a Scottish university or college who would like to stay in Scotland after graduating

With the full service launch, one-to-one advice appointments for migrants became available to:

- People abroad who want to work in Scotland and have a job offer
- People abroad who want to join a close family member in Scotland
- People who have moved to Scotland and have arrived within the last 24 months
- People in Scotland who have limited leave to remain or enter the UK

The above eligibility criteria were introduced by the service to manage demand while initial delivery challenges were addressed. This change illustrates how service design decisions were adapted during implementation to ensure sustainable service delivery.

Between March 2024 and August 2025, 1,131 recent and prospective migrants contacted the service to book an advice appointment with CAS, either through the online booking tool or through offline methods (e.g. attending CAS drop-in sessions and attending a follow-up appointment in person). From these bookings, 71% (n=804) of appointments proceeded, and in the remainder of cases, migrants did not turn up for scheduled appointments, or else appointments were cancelled by service providers, due to those booking appointments not meeting the eligibility criteria for the service. 79% of appointments were with post-move migrants (meaning that they were already living in Scotland) and the majority of appointments (65%) were held with migrants who were aged between 25 and 44. In total, 92 nationalities were represented among those attending appointments. The service delivered an average of 16 appointments per month between the launch of the interim service (March 2024) and October 2024, increasing to an average of 70 per month after the launch of the full service (November 2024) and August 2025. The number of appointments per month peaked in June 2025 (107) and July 2025 (99). While the vast majority (90%) of migrants had one appointment with the service, 5% had two appointments and < 1% had three (with one notable exception of one user attending four appointments). There was no evidence to suggest that the subject of the support sought at a first appointment was linked to the number of

additional appointments an individual attended. These figures suggest that the service has been able to scale up delivery over time and respond to increasing demand, particularly following the launch of the full service. The cancellation rate also indicates that eligibility criteria played a necessary role in maintaining service focus.

Analysis focusing on how migrants had found out about advice appointments indicated that 39% had found out about these through an online search or on Scotland.org. Others found out about the service through social media or after being referred by another service. One person said they accessed the service after it was promoted in a letter by the Home Office. Service data indicates that many international students and graduates seek support from SMS to find employment in Scotland after graduation, predominantly desiring to use the skilled worker route. The number of international graduates seeking work appears to substantially outstrip the supply of sponsored jobs available. Stakeholders who submitted feedback also noted that many employers appear unaware that there are a large number of international graduates already in Scotland on Graduate visas who could help them meet their skills gaps without requiring sponsorship. Whilst SMS is not an employability service that can match or facilitate contact between graduates and employers who have suitable vacancies, the service has expanded the '[finding a job after you graduate](#)' page to signpost students and graduates to useful resources. Additionally, four webinars have been delivered to employers on the topic of employing and recruiting international graduates. This indicates the service is responding to a clear demand from international students and graduates, but limited employer awareness and the lack of job availability present challenges.

Focus group discussions with CAS advisers described providing advice to a diverse range of migrants requesting advice and support on subjects such as:

- understanding UK immigration policy,
- identifying an appropriate visa route,
- supporting dependents to move to Scotland,
- gaining employment in Scotland
- and, in the case of international students, changing to a new type of visa.

CAS advisers noted the importance of the face-to-face provision for vulnerable service users. CAS advisers also indicated that there had been a gradual shift in the type of advice and support requested since the service launched, with migrants increasingly requesting more holistic advice, such as support linked to housing and schooling for dependents, rather than support linked to specific visas (which was more common in earlier appointments). While this insight is drawn from small scale qualitative research, this shift in user needs suggests that the service is being used

not only for immigration advice but also as a broader support mechanism for settlement, in line with the longer-term outcomes of the service articulated in the SMS theory of change.

Stakeholder feedback showed appreciation of the service for delivering advice appointments to a broad range of migrants. This feedback, some of which was provided by universities and career services, described the decision to expand eligibility criteria to offer appointments to international graduates as important, given that this is the time in which international students are more likely to be in need of immigration support. Another university praised the service for the holistic support that it provided. However, one university indicated that the service was unable to meet some students' needs. As will be discussed throughout in the impact chapter of this report, it is possible that in some cases the service will be unable to meet needs due to the support required falling outside of the scope of the service or due to external factors (e.g. UK Government policy) influencing an individual's particular circumstances and constraining the support SMS is able to offer in aid of its outcomes.

Focus group discussions on the delivery experiences of CAS advisers identified suggestions for potential service improvements. Some CAS advisers noted they felt it challenging to stay informed on the latest UK Government immigration policies, given frequent changes since the service launched. Similarly, advisers also felt that CAS resources did not contain all the information required to answer migrants' questions, and that they were required to seek additional information from the SMS websites and the UK Government's online content on immigration policy.

Opportunities for strengthening service delivery in response to these considerations were also suggested by advisers. For example, advisers recommended the development of a centralised knowledge hub to consolidate guidance and reduce reliance on external sources. One adviser also indicated that it would be helpful to have more information on migrants (e.g. the type of visa they have or their degree if they are an international student) ahead of appointments, to ensure the delivery of informed and tailored advice. While advisers are already requesting this information in advance, it would be beneficial to explore routes for improving the information available to advisers ahead of appointments, including how to improve the response rate to requests from advisers. Other advisers were less sure about this recommendation, feeling the information provided in advance by users tended to be different to what was then shared in appointments. Any actions taken to improve access to information prior to appointments would therefore also have to consider how to ensure this was accurate and relevant to the appointment.

In addition to the above, the expertise of advisers was also discussed. CAS advisers are accredited by the Immigration Advice Authority, and can be accredited

at Level 1 or Level 2, with Level 2 advisers qualified to give advice on more complex situations. Focus group evidence indicated that advisers felt there was a need for more Level 2 advisers, to ensure enough capacity to support undocumented migrants and migrants who have overstayed their visas or leave. It is worth noting that 18 additional CAS advisers are currently undertaking training to be certified to Level 2 as part of continuous improvement activities to the service, and are expected to be qualified in between 6-12 months.

These findings suggest that there are opportunities to strengthen the knowledge of advisers and capacity of the service to support more complex user needs. Acting on these opportunities identified by advisers could improve operational efficiency and enhance the reliability of advice provided across appointments.

Overall, the insights discussed in this section suggest that the service has been broadly successful in delivering advice to a diverse user base. Focus group evidence also suggests that there are areas where resources and processes could be strengthened to better support advisers, meet user needs, and ensure effective and efficient delivery of the service.

### **Advice and support to employers and investors**

Between April 2024 and August 2025, a total of 175 one-to-one advice appointments were booked with Seraphus, with 83% (n=146) of appointments proceeding. These appointments were attended by 82 employers, and 29 investors, with 27% of employers and 12% of investors attending second or third appointments with advisors.

During this period, Seraphus provided advice appointments to an average of 6 employers and investors each month between the interim launch of the service, and October 2024, increasing to 11 per month between the full launch of the service (November 2024) and August 2025. The largest number of appointments held with employers and investors in a single month was 15, in March 2025. Despite the steady delivery of appointments, the number of bookings from employers and investors has increased more conservatively compared to migrant users since the full launch of the service. This lower-than-anticipated uptake may reflect perceived barriers such as the cost and resource burden associated with navigating the UK immigration system. This is related to the external factors highlighted in the methodology which may constrain the success of SMS.

In addition to the one-to-one appointments, SMS also offers one-to-many webinars to employer and investor users. These webinars aim to provide more in-depth content and advice for employers and investors than is available on the website and they offer the opportunity for employers and investors to ask questions. The

service has delivered an average of one webinar per month since June 2024, and amongst other topics, these sessions have focused on employing international graduates, the sponsorship license process, the skilled worker visa, and hiring temporary workers. Recordings of each of these webinars are hosted on the Scotland's Migration Service for Employers and Investors platform. From June 2024 to August 2025, 749 employers and investors attended webinars hosted by SMS. Furthermore, between January and September 2025, recordings of the webinars (hosted on SMS' platform for employers and investors) were viewed 352 times in total. The most well attended webinars focused on the Sponsor Management System (61 attendees) and Sponsor licence compliance (57 attendees). Attendees are asked to complete post-webinar surveys to indicate their satisfaction with the content provided. While only 19 surveys were completed, these were associated with a 100% satisfaction rate. The focus group discussion with Seraphus advisers noted that where attendees of webinars asked complicated questions during webinars in the associated chat function, they were encouraged to book a one-on-one appointment with the service.

Seraphus lawyers reported tailoring advice based on the size of the organisations seeking support. Smaller organisations typically required step-by-step guidance through the immigration system, whereas larger employers sought support for strategic planning and understanding the implications of UK Government policy changes on recruitment practices. This tailored approach was viewed as essential to meeting the varied needs of service users. Advisers also indicated that since the launch of the service there had been a gradual shift in those who attended appointments. While following the interim launch of the service the majority of appointments were small and medium sized organisations, over time there had been an increase in appointments with public sector organisations including NHS boards and local authorities. Seraphus lawyers believed that this shift had occurred partly as a result of the webinars delivered, which had improved awareness of the service amongst organisations of this size. Despite generally positive feedback about the webinars, advisers observed that many appointment attendees were unaware of the webinars, suggesting scope to improve promotion and awareness. Stakeholders also highlighted the dual function of webinars, both as informative sessions and as a means of demonstrating to employers the feasibility of hiring international talent.

Qualitative evidence demonstrated that Seraphus has taken proactive steps to strengthen service delivery based on user and stakeholder feedback. In February 2025, two employers used feedback surveys to indicate that they faced barriers to accessing advice appointments, due to the service not offering appointments through Microsoft Teams software. As such, from March 2025 onwards, Seraphus introduced the option to speak to advisers through Microsoft Teams, and since 40

employers have attended appointments through this channel. Seraphus lawyers also indicated that based on feedback from stakeholders (including representatives from universities), they had developed a resource on common visa routes, which they suggested would be helpful for both universities and the employers they work with when supporting international students.

Seraphus lawyers also identified further ideas for continuous improvement for the service such as giving it a more unified service identity across user groups:

“I think if we were designing the service again, it would be important to consider the service having its own profile as a consistent and comprehensive service for employers and individuals.”

Another suggestion was that the service could reach more employers and investors through a stronger social media presence and using more digestible content formats including video reels, short how-to-guides, and short clips. Advisers suggested this could be paired with targeted outreach to smaller businesses who may be unaware of the service.

Stakeholders also suggested that there were opportunities for improvement. For example, one stakeholder indicated that it would be beneficial to align the content of webinars with the needs of private sector employers, and another was less positive on the advice and support available to service users, indicating that there was a lack of ‘real-life’ insight into the immigration process from a business perspective.

Input from employer and investor users also included a recommendation from an employer that an SMS ‘helpline’ would be ‘ideal’ as an addition to the service. However, the employer acknowledged that this may be an unrealistic expectation of a free service and recognised that Seraphus lawyers need time to prepare in advance and would therefore not be able to provide the same level of advice for helpline callers as they would in appointments. Another employer expressed a desire for an increase in the available appointments per year due to the complexity of the immigration scenarios they face. When asked about improvements for the service, a further employer suggested an idea to change the duration of SMS appointments, suggesting that appointments could be arranged as six 30-minute appointments rather than three 1-hour appointments.

## **Summary**

The evidence considered in this chapter indicates that SMS has largely been delivered as intended, with core components of the service implemented in line with its theory of change. The SMS digital platforms have reached a wide international audience and were developed using a user-centred approach, meeting accessibility

standards and adapting to user needs. Advice and support to migrants, employers, and investors has been delivered through individual appointments and webinars, with evidence of tailored advice and responsiveness to feedback. While the service has demonstrated implementation fidelity and responsiveness based on the evidenced considered here, limited user feedback and data availability constrained the ability to assess consistency of user experience and continuous improvement.

This evaluation has identified significant adaptations made during the delivery of the service, which have included engaging a broader user base than initially anticipated and accommodating divergent user needs (e.g. through the introduction of two digital platforms rather than one). The need to respond to regular changes in the UK Government immigration system rules has also driven ongoing changes to online content to respond to evolving user needs.

While feedback from stakeholders was broadly positive and commended the service as valuable resource offering clear and helpful advice, a small number of users indicated having less positive experiences with the service. These users suggested that some CAS advisers are not adequately prepared to answer questions on more complex subjects. This mirrors comments from CAS advisers, who highlighted in focus groups that they would like to have access to more information on immigration policies and matters, and to receive accurate information about appointment attendees in advance, to ensure they provide appropriate support.

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<sup>1</sup>There is a known issue with the SMS web analytics dashboard in which there is a discrepancy between the total page views reported for all SMS pages and the sum of individual page views across different parts of the platform. Figures should therefore be considered an estimate rather than an exact indication of the level of traffic which SMS websites have received. At different times, bots have also influenced web traffic figures to a greater and lesser extent.

<sup>2</sup> This includes a number of pages on [Scotland.org](#) and [Scotland's Migration Service for Employers and Investors](#) website

<sup>3</sup> Prior to the launch of the full service in November 2024, SMS webpages included only a small number of pages hosted on scotland.org, which focused on providing more general advice on visa and immigration, studying in Scotland, living in Scotland, and business in Scotland.

<sup>4</sup> [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) - Service Manual](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Readability - Service Manual](#)

# 5

**EQ2: To what Extent is  
SMS Achieving its Intended  
Outcomes?**

## 5. EQ2: To what extent is SMS achieving its intended outcomes?

This chapter assesses early evidence in relation to EQ2 – to what extent SMS is achieving its intended outcomes. It also considers the following sub-questions:

- To what extent are different groups of migrants experiencing and being impacted by the service in different ways?
- Is there evidence to suggest that SMS makes it easier for migrants to move to Scotland and settle into their communities?
- Do the services provided help employers use the immigration system more effectively and efficiently? Does the service assist employers in meeting their skills and labour needs?
- To what extent do experiences of the service vary according to the type of employer using the service?

The [data limitations](#) set out in chapter 3 mean it is not possible to fully answer the above questions, and not possible to consider long-term impact given the full service had not yet been operational for longer than a year at the time of evaluation. However, this chapter is able to provide preliminary evidence on the extent to which the service has provided advice and support which meets migrants' needs.

Analysis presented in this chapter draws from appointment records, key performance indicators, web analytics data, as well as quantitative accounts of migrant and employer experiences. These sources have been described in more detail in [Chapter 3](#) of this report. As [previously noted](#), the data on service engagement presented in SMS' quarterly data publications may differ to the data presented in this early insights evaluation due to changes in available data.

### **Delivery of one-to-one advice appointments for migrants**

Analysis from appointments records examining the characteristics of migrants attending CAS appointments is summarised in [Table 2](#). Missing data, in particular for the age, sex and ethnicity of appointment attendees, made it difficult to assess the diversity of the user population and in turn how experiences of the service may have differed across different types of service user.

As shown in Table 2, at the time of their appointment, the majority (79%) of migrant users were considered 'post-movers' (i.e. currently living in Scotland), and over two-thirds of appointments were with users aged between 25 and 44. Appointments were booked by individuals with a wide range of nationalities, representing 92

countries, with a particularly high number of individuals whose nationality was Nigerian (20%), Indian (13%) or American (13%).

Table 3. Characteristics of 753 migrants attending CAS advice appointments

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Number (%)</b>
<b>Migration Status</b>	
Post-move	592 (79%)
Pre-move	136 (18%)
Other <sup>1</sup>	25 (3%)
<b>Age (bands in numerical order)</b>	
16-24	80 (11%)
25-34	319 (42%)
35-44	173 (23%)
45-59	99 (13%)
60+	18 (2%)
Prefer Not to Say	11 (1%)
Not Captured	53 (7%)
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	341 (45%)
Male	305 (41%)
Prefer Not to Say	10 (1%)
Not Captured	97 (13%)
<b>Nationality</b>	
Nigerian	150 (20%)
Indian	100 (13%)
American	96 (13%)
British <sup>2</sup>	32 (4%)
Pakistani	31(4%)
Canadian	25 (3%)
Other <sup>3</sup>	319 (42%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
White	105 (14%)
African	71 (9%)
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British	62 (8%)
Other Ethnic Group (incl. Caribbean, Black, Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups)	29 (4%)
Prefer not to answer	31 (4%)
Not Captured	446 (59%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>753 (100%)</b>

## Appointment attendees' experiences of SMS

### Key Performance Indicators

Using the small number (n= 24) of user feedback surveys completed by migrants directly after attending appointments, monthly KPI scores were calculated for the service from January 2025 onwards, with KPIs typically based on 2-3 user feedback surveys per month. <sup>4</sup> Given this small size (representing around 3% of users), the following findings are limited in both in reliability and meaningfulness and should be considered with caution. In particular, it should be noted that the small number of user feedback surveys submitted each month meant that KPI scores were susceptible to being significantly skewed by one particularly positive or negative user feedback form. Conclusions based on the following data cannot be generalised to the wider user base.

The average monthly scores for KPIs are presented in Table 3 and details of how KPIs were calculated is provided in [Annex B](#).

Table 4. Performance of Migrant KPIs (based on responses to 24 feedback surveys)

KPI	Monthly Scores		
	Average	Min	Max
<b>% of users who...</b>			
reported their needs were met through SMS	68%	16%	93%
used the digital platform who reported finding the digital platform easy to navigate according to the category of information sought	76%	50%	100%
used the digital platform who reported finding it easy to understand the content provided, by category of information sought	79%	50%	100%
used the appointment service who find it easy to understand the advice provided	81%	50%	100%

The monitoring and evaluation strategy for the service specified that the service would be considered to operate as intended if each KPI was associated with a monthly score of 80% or greater. As shown in Table 3, only one KPI (% of users who found it easy to understand the advice provided) exceeded this benchmark, though two others (users of the digital platform who found it easy to understand the content provided, and users of the digital platform who reported finding the digital platform easy to navigate) were close to meeting this target.

## Qualitative accounts of migrants' experiences of SMS

### *Initial engagement with SMS and booking appointments*

While the majority of appointment attendees booked their appointments through SMS migrant platform, around 20% of migrants arrived at appointments having previously walked into a CAS bureau, or by contacting CAS through a central email address or phone number. Evidence from the qualitative research indicated that some migrants who approached CAS in this way for migration advice experienced significant delays in speaking to an adviser. For example, one individual interviewed commented that:

“[The] service in general...wasn't what I expected... At the beginning, the longevity of the waiting list, 8 working weeks to get an answer – not easy. Especially people who need an answer in a few days...by the time [CAS] got back to me I'd already spoken to solicitor”

These waiting times were not associated with accessing the service through the online SMS appointment booking page. As such, it may be beneficial to consider how migrants who approach CAS in person or via a central CAS email address or phone number for migration advice could be supported more quickly, as some users prefer face-to-face contact. This is particularly important as 'walk-in' users are likely to be more vulnerable or have more complex needs than SMS users who access the service through the online booking tool.

### *Quality of advice and support*

A number of migrant users provided positive responses to open text questions in user feedback surveys, indicating that CAS advisers were knowledgeable, patient, and provided clear advice. One respondent who had booked an appointment to discuss their options after their study visa expired noted:

“Got very useful resources to help explore my visa options upon completion of my Master's”

Another respondent who was considering moving to Scotland, noted how the ease of use and helpfulness of the service was representative of their broader experiences of planning a move to Scotland:

“I am very used to the efficiency and ease of doing pretty much anything in Scotland and I was not surprised by how simple and helpful this process was for me.”

Two respondents mentioned that they were still waiting for follow-up information that an adviser was meant to provide post-appointment, and that this information was needed to consider their future options or to progress with a visa application.

A small number of those who were interviewed or filled out open-text questions in user feedback surveys indicated that they would have benefited from signposting towards other organisations (e.g. embassies) which could provide them with other surveys of support.

### *Impact on migrants' ability to move to Scotland and settle into communities*

Qualitative analysis found that advisers had been able to successfully support migrants with different needs, including those who were interested in relocating to Scotland, individuals looking to extend their visa, and those looking to change their current visa. In completing a feedback form on their experiences three months after their appointment, one service user wrote:

“[The adviser] I spoke to was very knowledgeable and that made all the difference, because I felt confident in making the switch from my current visa to my new one.”

There was also some evidence of service users who reported being able to act immediately on advice and applied to extend a family member's the same day they received a follow-up email. For example, one service user commented:

“The service was amazing, and I felt really comfortable with the process of changing my Visa after the advice I received.”

Beyond this, the evaluation also found evidence of potential of broader personal impact of the service on users' wellbeing. One service user commented that they hoped their appointment would alleviate the stress their family was experiencing in extending a visa:

“We were experiencing difficulties with extending my mother's [visa]. Our hope was to find clear guidance and support to resolve the situation and make the process less stressful.”

Similarly, two service users commented that beyond finding the advice they received useful, they also felt that it had had an impact on their mental health and wellbeing, while another indicated they found the advice provided reassuring:

“Leave to remain is a big deal. I've been here 10 years and my life is here, so I want to make sure I get everything right. It's rather stressful and the process isn't always clear. I'm definitely less stressed and more confident now.”

“I was having quite bad panic attacks prior to my appointment. This had disrupted my daily life. Although my problem was not resolved, the appointment was helpful in speaking to a professional”

“I always get very concerned if I would be doing the right process, with the right documents. Talking to someone that knows the process inside out is incredibly helpful and reassuring.”

In a small number of cases, users did not report having positive experiences with the service. For example, one individual commented in a feedback form:

“The adviser was not informed and didn’t have much knowledge on the immigration services. [The adviser] had limited knowledge and mostly gave wrong information on the subject matter. Advisers need to broaden their knowledge and do personal research to be able to give the accurate and useful information needed at all times.”

In some cases, less positive experiences of the service were tied to external factors which neither CAS advisers nor the Scottish Government could control. For example, one user expressed frustration at the support they requested on securing a visa for their dependent, and felt disappointed that advisers could not help, due to current UK-wide visa restrictions:

“I had hard feelings because I’m reaching out to the government – through SMS – if I reach out to Scottish Government, surely they can help me and hear my issue? I had high hopes – SMS being linked to Scottish Government made me think they would do something.”

This quote is illustrative of one of the external factors constraining the success of the service noted in [chapter 2](#), as immigration legislation is reserved to the UK Government. This finding may be indicative of a lack of awareness among some users of what powers are within the Scottish Government’s legal gift. Relatedly, some migrants indicated that while appointments had been helpful, it had not made it easier to move to or settle in Scotland:

“I was already aware, that it would not be very easy to settle in Scotland. The appointment confirmed that.”

Similarly, interviews with most of the migrants who had recently arrived in Scotland indicated that after their appointments they continued to have concerns linked to financial challenges, high salary thresholds for visa sponsorship and the costs associated with the immigration health surcharge (IHS)<sup>5</sup>.

Despite these barriers, most interview participants expressed a strong desire to stay in Scotland long term and some participants noted that their engagement with SMS had reinforced their decision to move to or settle in Scotland. Participants cited the kindness of people in Scotland, their positive experiences with local services, and the opportunities for their families as their main motivators for wanting to stay. One participant commented:

“Scotland has been a fresh start for me, one which I do not take for granted and am actively working towards contributing to the society to attempt to resettle here.”

While there were only limited details available on the specific next steps which migrants had taken after receiving support, notably, each of the five migrants who provided feedback 3-6 months after attending SMS appointments indicated that the service had helped them relocate to Scotland or settle into their community after relocating. While this is a small number of users, this is early evidence that that SMS has contributed to its longer-term outcomes of supporting migrants to move to Scotland and settle into communities.

Across those providing feedback, awareness that SMS was a Scottish Government service varied among users, though interview participants who were aware of this believed it added credibility to the service. One participant noted that the Scottish Government delivering such a service made them feel supported in their decision to settle in Scotland.

## **Summary**

Across the evidence reviewed, there is preliminary evidence to suggest that overall, migrants had a positive experience of the service and found it to meet their needs. Furthermore, this early insights evaluation has found evidence that the service has supported at least five migrants to move to or settle in Scotland. Given the limited sample size of this evaluation, the true figure of migrants supported to move to or settle in Scotland may be much larger. It is also notable that the service itself was considered to have reinforced migrants' positive feelings towards Scotland, with one participant in particular noting the fact it was a Scottish Government service made them feel supported in their decision settle in Scotland.

## **Delivery of One-to-One Advice Appointments for Employers and Investors**

Table 4 presents an overview of the location, industry/sector and size of organisations who attended appointments with Seraphus. While one-to-one appointments with employers are primarily intended to support employers based in Scotland, and investor appointments are intended to support investors from abroad,

as shown in Table 4, analysis indicated that the service held appointments with a small number of employers from outside of Scotland, and a small number of investors from within Scotland. These may be cases where investors had representatives in Scotland who attended appointments on their behalf, or where appointments were attended by representatives for employers primarily based outside of the UK, but which were already operating in Scotland.

In total, 146 one-to-one appointments were delivered to 82 employers and 29 investors between April 2024 and August 2025, with several employers and investors having multiple appointments. 44% of employers were based in Glasgow and Edinburgh, with 48% distributed across a wide range of locations in Scotland, and 7 employers based outside of Scotland. Analysis indicated that a greater number of appointments were held with small employers (with < 20 employees), than medium or large employers.

Table 5. Characteristics of Employers (n = 82) and Investors (n = 29) attending Seraphus advice appointments

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Number (%)</b>
<b>Location of Employers</b>	
Scotland	75 (91%)
Glasgow	21 (26%)
Edinburgh	15 (18%)
Other	39 (48%)
United States	3 (4%)
Other*	4 (6%)
<b>Employers by Size of Organisation</b>	
< 20 Employees	67 (60%)
20 – 200 Employees	27 (24%)
> 200 Employees	17 (15%)
<b>Location of Investors</b>	
United States	9 (31%)
Scotland	9 (31%)
Pakistan	2 (7%)
Other*	9 (31%)
<b>Industry of Employers and Investors**</b>	
Information and Communication***	22 (20%)
Professional Scientific and Technical Activities****	17 (15%)
Public Administration and Defence; Compulsory Social Security	9 (8%)
Manufacturing	10 (9%)
Human Health and Social Work Activities	10 (9%)
Other	43 (39%)

**Total**

**111 (100%)**

\*Represents countries from which 1 employer or investor attended an appointment with the service;

\*\* Self-reported industries categories included in Seraphus records have been grouped here in line with [ONS industry classifications 16a](#), with more detail on the sub-industries linked to these classifications available [here](#);

\*\*\* includes individuals working in IT and telecommunications;

\*\*\*\* includes individuals working in law, accounting and research and development.

## Appointment attendees' experiences of SMS

### Key Performance Indicators

Table 5 shows the average monthly KPI performance scores, which captured the extent to which employers and investors considered the service to be accessible and have met their needs. These KPIs are based on a 37 user feedback surveys from employers and investors.<sup>4</sup> While these feedback surveys were completed by around a quarter of employers and investors who had a one-to-one appointment with the service, some caution should still be taken in extrapolating findings and conclusions reported here to the wider user base. From the evidence available, KPI performance has so far been stronger for employers and investors compared to migrants.

Table 6. Monthly Performance of Employer/Investor KPIs (based on responses to 37 feedback surveys)

KPI	Monthly Scores		
	Average	Min	Max
% of users who... reported their needs were met through SMS	97%	89%	100%
used the digital platform who reported finding the digital platform easy to navigate according to the category of information sought	91%	80%	100%
used the digital platform who reported finding it easy to understand the content provided, by category of information sought	88%	71%	100%
used the appointment service who find it easy to understand the advice provided	92%	50%	100%

Evidence in Table 5 indicates that employers who attended appointments with Seraphus felt that their needs were met, with only 2 out of 37 respondents indicating that the service was unable to meet their needs. Monthly KPI scores also indicate that overall, service users found it easy to navigate SMS' online platform, to understand the content on the platform and to understand the advice provided in

appointments. The lowest monthly score for a KPI was in March 2025, when only 50% of 10 users completing a user feedback survey found the information provided in their appointments easy to understand.

As with migrant KPIs, the monitoring and evaluation strategy for SMS specified that the service would be considered to operate as intended, if KPIs met a monthly benchmark of 80%. Table 5 shows that, on average, the employer and investor aspect of the service is meeting this benchmark.

### Qualitative accounts of employer and investor experiences of SMS

Further evidence on employers' and investors' experiences of SMS was provided through responses to open text questions in user feedback surveys. More in-depth feedback was provided by two employers, who were interviewed to capture their perceptions of the service and the impact it had on their ability to use the immigration system to meet their needs.

Both employers interviewed represented NHS health boards in Scotland and had heard about the service through the NHS Centre for Workforce Supply which advertised both the webinar and appointment service to NHS boards across Scotland. Both also attended webinars before booking an appointment with Seraphus to discuss the complexities of their cases. Initially, these employers contacted Scotland's Migration Service for advice on how to identify relevant occupation codes for visa applications, the salary thresholds linked to the Skilled Worker Visa, and support on navigating the Sponsorship Management System.

Findings from both user feedback surveys and interviews are summarised thematically below.

#### *Quality of advice and support*

Responses to open text questions in user feedback surveys were highly complimentary of the service, with a number of employers describing the advice they received as 'informative', 'clear and concise' and 'reassuring'. Furthermore, this feedback was consistent across users with different needs, including those looking to learn more about sponsorship licenses or starting a new business in Scotland. Two employers responding to user feedback surveys commented:

"Their advice was clear and very helpful. It is so difficult to get advice on this and it made such a difference talking to someone who gave proper advice rather than trying find things out from websites"

"[the adviser was] knowledgeable, helpful, and patient. All of my questions were answered, and then some."

Prior to attending a one-to-one appointment, one of the employers interviewed had attended a webinar on the Sponsor Management System, and indicated that while they had experience engaging with the system, they had learned a lot from the session. This individual also indicated that they found it easy to find the information they needed on SMS' employer and investor platform.

### *Impact of support on employers*

One respondent to the user feedback survey specifically praised the advisor they spoke to, indicating that the service had met their needs. This user wanted to learn more about supporting an employee switch to a different type of visa and commented:

“The service and advice provided by [the adviser] was perfect. [The adviser] took the time to understand our query, explain the Home Office guidance and enhance my knowledge to support with similar situations if encountered within our organisation.”

There was also evidence to suggest that the appointments helped employers feel more confident in recruiting internationally and complying with both sponsorship requirements and immigration law. More specifically, one employer responding to the user feedback form commented that:

“The appointment allowed me to ask specific questions that provided better understanding of aspects of the process. This was really helpful when submitting the skilled worker application.”

While both employers who were interviewed described having a positive experience with the service, this was not necessarily associated with positive outcomes. For example, one indicated that they were ultimately unable to recruit as intended, which they attributed to difficulties securing housing in a rural area for a prospective employee. However, both interviewed employers indicated that the support they received would be used to inform similar situations and scenarios in the future, and one had incorporated the advice provided into internal resources linked to international recruitment. One of the employers interviewed indicated that the only other way to have acquired this support was through paid legal advice, which was not an option in their situation, and mentioned that they planned to share the advice they received with others in the same industry.

From all of the feedback reviewed, one of the most significant outcomes was described by an inward investor who attended a one-to-one appointment:

“The consultation brought clarity to my plans and I registered a business in Scotland less than a month after the consultation, and the business is very

promising. I will soon be reaching out again for consultation towards a sponsorship licence.”

This experience demonstrates positive early evidence of SMS supporting investment into Scotland. As is discussed in chapter 6, this is a potential high-value source of additional economic activity.

Overall, evidence from both interviews and user feedback surveys suggest that SMS has been successful in providing high quality and valuable support to employers, with the small number of employers included in the analysis for this evaluation describing broadly positive experiences.

## **Summary**

There is early evidence to suggest overall positive experiences for both migrant and employer/investor groups, with needs being met. As of August 2025, the service had delivered 804 one-to-one appointments to 753 migrants, with CAS providing advice on a range of topics linked to visas, immigration, and reception needs. The service has also reached a significant number of employers and investors in Scotland and abroad in the same period. 82 employers and 29 investors attended 146 appointments with Seraphus and over 300 employers have attended a SMS webinar.

Qualitative evidence suggests that the service has helped at least a small number of both migrant and employer and investor users to navigate complex problems linked to the immigration system. This has included providing advice that has helped some migrants apply for or extend visas. Overall, both user groups had positive experiences of the service and its advisers, and there were at least five examples of the service supporting migrants to move to or settle in Scotland. The service itself was noted to support migrants' positive feelings towards Scotland, with one participant in particular noting the fact it was a Scottish Government service made them feel supported in their decision settle in Scotland.

Qualitative evidence also illustrated how SMS was reported by migrant users to positively impact their wellbeing and mental health. Early qualitative evidence also indicates that the service helped at least two employers recruit and retain international talent, and one investor to register a business in Scotland.

There were also examples of less positive experiences, including occasions where migrant users felt CAS advisers were not knowledgeable enough, or situations where external factors such as UK Government immigration legislation affected the success of the service in meeting users' needs.

It has not been possible to fully investigate the experiences of users and what impact the service has had. This is largely due to the limited data available. As

discussed throughout this section, as evidence linked to the impact of the service is based on data and feedback from a small number of users, caution should be taken in extrapolating findings described here to the broader user base. The service has also not been operational long enough to assess its contribution to its longer-term outcomes in relation to relocation and settlement of migrants in Scotland. A follow-up evaluation is recommended to establish whether the findings of this evaluation are representative of SMS users as a whole as well as to investigate the longer-term impact of the service.

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<sup>1</sup> Represents cases where British nationals attended appointments on behalf of a spouse/dependent or migrants who had moved to Scotland more than two years ago.

<sup>2</sup> In most cases these individuals were looking for more general advice, not specifically linked to migration and were referred to other departments in CAS.

<sup>3</sup> Represents nationalities from which 25 or fewer individuals contacted the service

<sup>4</sup> SMS KPI statistics are generated on a monthly basis, using data from user feedback surveys completed directly after advice appointments. As such, KPIs are not informed by feedback surveys submitted by users 3-6 months after appointments take place.

<sup>5</sup> The IHS is a mandatory fee that most UK visa applicants need to pay which grants the visa holder access to the NHS.

# 6

**EQ3: To what Extent does Scotland's Migration Service deliver Value for Money?**

## 6. EQ3: To what extent does SMS deliver value for money?

While the service has evolved over time, since the launch of the full service in November 2024, the service supports the economic activity of migrants, employers and investors, specifically:

- Pre-movers considering relocation to Scotland for work or family reasons, seeking guidance on visa options and immigration procedures;
- Post-movers requiring support with visa extensions, renewals and changes to immigration rules;
- Employers addressing skill shortages and seeking advice on hiring or retaining international workers;
- Investors exploring immigration pathways to establish or expand operations in Scotland.

The operating model is described in detail in [Chapter 2](#). For this indicative Value for Money assessment, we draw on survey responses from migrants and employers to quantify the employment supported by SMS. We then apply assumptions about average migrant salaries to calculate an indicative gross value added (GVA) to the economy from employment income based on available evidence. Finally, we compare this estimate of benefit to the service's costs to date to produce an illustrative benefit-to-cost ratio, where a ratio of 1.0 or above indicates that the service may be delivering value for money.

We do not consider the impact of displacement of domestic workers in this analysis. However, we judge the risk of displacement to be low, as evidence suggests that employers are primarily employing migrant labour to address skill shortages.<sup>1</sup>

We do not quantify economic spillovers or investor impacts due to insufficient data but note this as a significant potential upside factor. We also do not quantify or monetise the social benefits arising from SMS service provision, though future analysis could consider these as part of a more comprehensive evaluation. We explore the data limitations in [Chapter 3](#) of this report.

### **Migrant, employer and investor use of SMS**

As described in this report, the service provides two tiers of support to migrants: a digital platform providing up-to-date and accurate immigration information, and a one-to-one service delivered by Citizens Advice Scotland providing more tailored support. Employers and investors can access three tiers of support: information on

a digital platform, one-to-many resources including webinars, and one-to-one appointments delivered by Seraphus.

Users engaged with the service for employment-related support across the digital platform, webinar and one-to-one service offerings.

### **Digital platform engagement**

- Migrants: Between April 2024 and August 2025 there were 208,262 views of the SMS webpages dedicated to visa and immigration, an average of 12,251 views per month.
- Employers and investors: From October 2024 to August 2025, the Skilled Workers Visa section of the employer and investment website received 8,871 views, an average of 887 views per month. The majority of views were from UK IP addresses.

### **Webinar engagement**

- From June 2024 to August 2025, 749 employers and investors attended the webinar service run by Seraphus. There was on average one webinar a month covering topics such as sponsorship, overseas companies expanding to Scotland, and the e-Visa system overview. The most well-attended webinars focused on the Sponsor Management System (61 attendees) and Sponsor license compliance (57 attendees). All webinar attendees were satisfied with the service provided.

### **One-to-one service engagement**

- Migrants: 753 people attended one-to-one service appointments between April 2024 and August 2025. The most common age bracket was 25-34, the majority were female and 79% were post-movers. While migrant use of the service was often multi-faceted, analysis of user data indicates that around half of the 753 people supported had appointments regarding employment-related issues such as worker visa access, switching and renewal.
- Employers and investors: Of 111 service users between April 2024 and August 2025, 82 were employers and 29 were investors. The most common category for employers was the information and communication sector (including individuals working in IT and telecommunications) with professional, scientific and technical sector (including those working in law, accounting, research and development) second. The majority of investors were based in Scotland and the US.

The service impact is explored in more detail in [Chapter 5](#) of this report.

## **Economic Activity Supported**

### **Migrant employment supported**

While direct data on employment outcomes is not available, follow-up survey responses for one-to-one appointments provide partial insight into users' perceived success. Of the 24 migrant respondents, 18 (75%) reported that their needs were completely met. 'Needs met' reflects users' perceptions of whether the advice helped them and does not directly confirm employment outcomes. Because 'needs met' does not distinguish between types of support received, this proxy may both understate some employment outcomes and also capture some outcomes that are unrelated to employment. It is therefore used in this analysis as an indicative proxy in the absence of direct outcome data. Given the low response rate (24 out of 753 migrant service users, around 3%), this proxy does not provide a robust estimate of total employment outcomes and is likely to understate the number of positive employment outcomes. However, because around half of migrant service use related to employment, these responses provide an indicative signal of the potential scale of employment-related support delivered.

### **Employer and investor economic activity supported**

Of 82 employers who used SMS, 29 responded to the follow-up survey (35%). Of those, 28 (97%) reported that their needs were completely met. In the absence of systematic data on hires and retention, we make the conservative assumption that each employer whose needs were completely met may have recruited or retained one migrant worker. If the 97% success rate observed amongst the survey respondents applies to all 82 employers then 79 employers may have been supported to employ at least one migrant.

Of 29 investors who used SMS, eight responded to the immediate follow-up survey, a response rate of 28%. All eight respondents to the survey said that their needs were completely met by the service. Additionally, one investor reported in a feedback form 3 months after their appointment that SMS supported them to register a business in Scotland. If the service can support investment in the Scottish economy this a potential source of high value-added to the economy. To enable inclusion in future evaluations, service providers should aim to gather comprehensive data on investment outcomes, as outlined below.

### **Total migrant employment supported**

Our analysis focuses on users who accessed one-to-one advice, as we lack comparable feedback for website or webinar users. It should be noted that digital

platform and webinar use may be delivering value that is currently not being captured.

Data from follow-up surveys of one-to-one appointments suggests that SMS may have supported the employment of at least 18 migrants and that 28 employers may have been supported to employ or retain at least one migrant worker, a combined contribution of 46 migrant employment outcomes. These should be interpreted as indicative rather than confirmed employment results, as this analysis relies on self-reported 'needs completely met' responses as a proxy for successful employment outcome.

The true employment supported figure is likely higher due to very low survey response rates. If we apply the respondent success rates to the total employment-related user base, then 282 migrant employees may have been supported and 79 employers may have been supported to employ at least one migrant, a total of 362 employment outcomes.

However, caution is needed: because of the low number of respondents, the success rates from the sample may not accurately represent the average success rate of all employment-related appointments. It is also possible that some migrants and employers may have had success without the existence of SMS, and a successful outcome cannot be solely contributed to the existence of SMS, though this is not possible to determine from the data. The limitations of the data are discussed in further detail in [Chapter 3](#) of this report.

### **Value added by supported migrant employment**

In the absence of data relating to the salary of service users, we tested some average salary assumptions to estimate the overall GVA contribution of the employment income supported by the service.

To inform the average salary assumption for our value for money evaluation, we considered the minimum salary thresholds for the most popular worker visa types. Migrants can obtain several types of worker visa including the Skilled Worker visa, the Health and Care Worker Visa and others.<sup>1</sup> Home Office Data for the UK shows that in the year to June 2025 there were 287,000 work visas granted, of which 172,000 were core 'Worker' visas, including 83,000 Skilled Worker visas and 62,000 Health and Care worker visas.<sup>2</sup>

The minimum salary threshold for the Skilled Worker visa has evolved over time. From April 2024 to June 2025 the minimum salary threshold for the Skilled Worker

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<sup>1</sup> [Finding the right visa - Scotland.org | Scotland.org](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Why do people come to the UK - Work? - GOV.UK](#)

Visa was £38,700 or the job’s ‘going rate’, whichever was higher. This increased to £41,700 in July 2025.<sup>3</sup>

The Health and Care visa has a minimum salary threshold of £25,000, however some jobs need to be earning at least £31,300.<sup>4</sup>

If the 46 migrant employees we base our analysis on earned the updated minimum salary threshold for the Skilled Worker visa of £41,700, then the estimated GVA contribution is £1.9 million. Meanwhile, if the average migrant was employed on the minimum Health and Care worker visa salary of £25,000, then the GVA contribution is £1.1 million.

In reality, the migrant employees would likely have an average salary above the minimum thresholds for visa eligibility and this analysis is a conservative illustrative estimate of the GVA that could have been added to the economy based on returned surveys asking if needs were met by the service. To make a future evaluation more robust, in addition to data on employment outcomes, service providers should aim to gather data on the visa type and salary of those employed, and the degree to which the service facilitated those outcomes.

## Costs

The service is estimated to have cost £2.3 million to set up and run so far. These costs are split into programme costs, which relate mostly to contracts with the operational suppliers and digital supplier, and staff costs for Scottish Government personnel working full-time on Scotland’s Migration Service.

Costs rose in 2024/25, coinciding with the full rollout of the service in November 2024, as delivery scaled up.

Costs are forecast to increase further in 2025/26 and 2026/27, but at a decreasing rate, reflecting the transition from initial setup and expansion toward ongoing delivery and continuous improvement.

Table 7 . Cost of SMS service provision

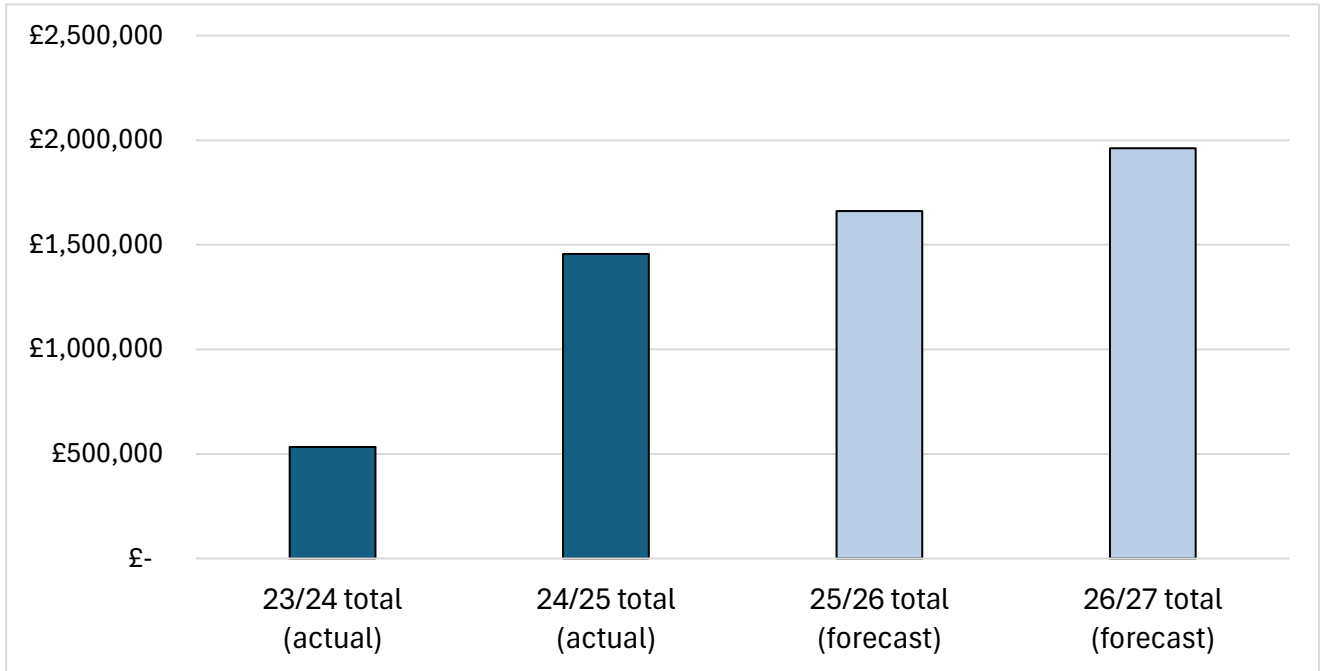
Financial year	Amount (£ thousands)
Programme 23/24 (actuals)	319
Staff 23/24 (actuals)	214
<b>23/24 total (actual)</b>	<b>533</b>
Programme 24/25 (actuals)	997
Staff 24/25 (actuals)	459
<b>24/25 total (actual)</b>	<b>1,456</b>
25/26 total (to date)	267

<sup>3</sup> [Skilled Worker visa changes \(July 2025\) | Scotland.org](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Health and Care Worker visa: Your job - GOV.UK](#)

<b>Total (to date)</b>	<b>2,256</b>
Programme 25/26 (forecast)	1,277
Staff 25/26 (forecast)	383
<b>25/26 total (forecast)</b>	<b>1,769</b>
Programme 26/27 (forecast)	1,463
Staff 26/27 (forecast)	498
<b>26/27 total (forecast)</b>	<b>1,962</b>
<b>Total (actual and forecast)<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>5,612</b>

Figure 4. SMS cost per year



### Indicative Value for money analysis

An initial assessment of value for money of the service can be made by comparing the illustrative estimates of the GVA to the economy from employment income, compared to the cost to date of £2.3 million. Assuming an average salary of £41,700 for the 46 individuals that user survey data indicates were supported in employment then the estimated GVA is £1.9 million and the BCR is 0.85, meaning the GVA contributed by the service covers 85% of the cost. If the average salary was the minimum salary threshold for the Health and Social Care Visa of £25,000 then the estimated GVA is £1.1 million and the BCR is 0.51, meaning the GVA contributed by the service covers 51% of the cost.

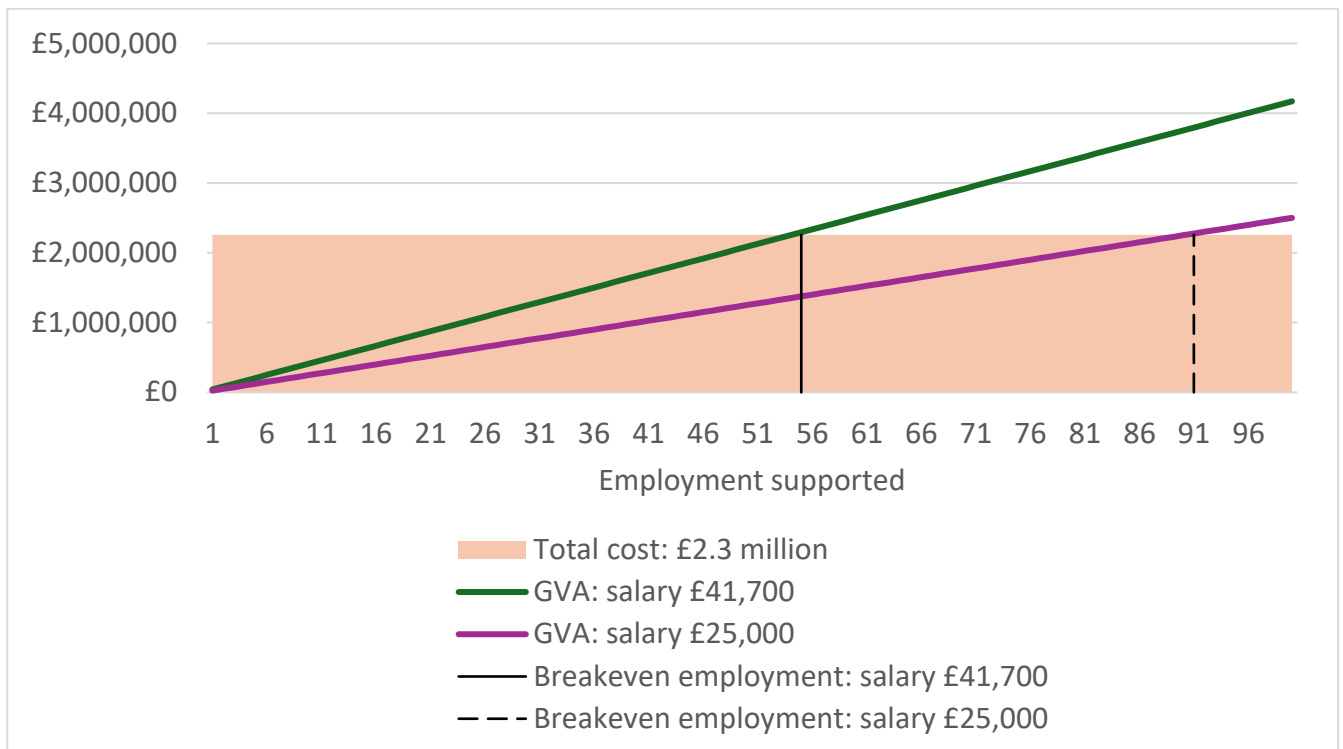
<sup>5</sup> Forecast figures are subject to uncertainty and should be treated as indicative. This is because elements of the spend are demand-led, staff costs are subject to annual reviews, and the project is managed in line with Agile ‘test and learn’ development cycles. Forecasts are only provided up until the end of the 26/27 financial year because a decision has not yet been made regarding whether the service will continue operating in subsequent financial years.

Our GVA contribution estimates are based only on employment income, lacking the data needed to quantify the contribution from investment, or wider economic spillovers. We also base our estimate only on migrant and employer survey respondents, and the survey response rate was low (3% for migrants, 35% for employers).

On the basis of outcomes indicated by a proxy measure for successful employment from follow-up surveys only, the estimated benefit-cost ratio (BCR) is below 1.0 (0.51–0.85), implying that the monetised employment benefits captured in the available survey data do not fully offset costs to date. However, our estimate of migrant employment income is highly conservative for two reasons: (i) it applies minimum visa salary thresholds in the absence of salary data; and (ii) it assumes that users who did not respond to follow-up surveys generated no employment outcomes at all. Given the very low migrant response rate in particular, it is plausible that additional employment outcomes occurred but were not captured in the survey data, which would increase the BCR. Due to lack of data, we also omit potentially high-value investment and there are also a number of potential non-monetised benefits; these are highlighted in more detail below.

Sensitivity analysis shows that under this modelling framework, to break even at a salary of £41,700 the service would need to have supported the employment of 55 individuals, while at a salary of £25,000 the service would need to have supported the employment of 91 individuals. Meanwhile, assuming that the employment of 46 migrants employees was supported, for the service to be associated with a benefit-cost ratio of at least 1.0 then the average salary would need to be at least £49,050.

Figure 5. Break-even employment under different wage assumption



While follow-up surveys suggest that 46 employment outcomes may have been supported by SMS, this is based on a small number of survey respondents: 29 out of 111 employers (35%) and 24 out of 753 migrants (3%). Moreover, sensitivity analysis illustrates how a relatively small number of additional unobserved outcomes would be required for the service to achieve a BCR of 1 conservative wage assumptions.

Assuming an average salary of £41,700 then an additional 9 people would need to have been employed because of the service but the migrant or employer did not respond to the follow up survey; this equates to a success rate for employment-related non-respondents of just over 2%. Meanwhile, assuming a lower average salary of £25,000, for the service to break even then an additional 45 people would need to have been employed because of the service but the migrant or employer did not respond to the follow up survey; this equates to a success rate for employment-related non-respondents of just over 11%.

As above, if we apply the service success rates of migrants and employers who responded to the survey to the total employment-related user base then up to 362 employment outcomes may have been supported, resulting in much higher monetised benefits and a larger BCR. We have also assumed only one migrant was supported in employment per employer, while some large employers may have employed multiple migrants. However, caution is needed: because of the low number of respondents, the success rates from the sample may not accurately represent the average success rate of all employment-related appointments. We

also do not have the data to assess the additionality of employment supported by the service.

It is also possible that the 46 migrant employees we have based our analysis on could have had the average salary of at least £49,050 needed for the employment income supported by the service to cover its cost.

Furthermore, investment impacts could represent a high-value additional source of economic benefit, but they cannot be quantified with the current data. All eight investor respondents reported that their needs were completely met, and one investor reported registering a business in Scotland following an SMS appointment:

“The consultation brought clarity to my plans and I registered a business in Scotland less than a month after the consultation, and the business is very promising.”

This anecdotal example of potential investment activity provides early indicative evidence of potential investment-related outcomes, but the scale and associated economic impact are unknown and are not included in the monetised VfM estimates presented here.

There are also multiple sources of potential non-monetised social benefits such as improved wellbeing and social inclusion that fall out with the scope of this analysis. In addition to economic outcomes, qualitative evidence suggests SMS may deliver social value. Users reported reduced stress, increased confidence, and improved understanding of immigration processes. These outcomes contribute to wellbeing and social inclusion, which are important components of public value and align with the service’s Theory of Change (see Figure 1). Further detail on social impacts is provided in the Impact Evaluation. Any investment associated with business activity supported by SMS could, on its own, offset the service costs through additional jobs and investment. However, due to limited data, the scale of the investment cannot be quantified, and investment impacts have not been included in this analysis.

Overall, while the available monetised evidence does not demonstrate that monetised benefits of SMS outweigh costs to date, sensitivity analysis indicates that under our modelling framework, only a small number of additional unobserved employment outcomes would be required for break-even under conservative assumptions. On this basis, and noting that break-even would require only a 2–11% employment success rate among non-respondents under conservative assumptions, the analysis suggests that the service may be delivering value for money, subject to the significant data limitations noted. Economic benefits may increase in future years if awareness and uptake grow, although this will depend on user behaviour, external constraints, and the service’s ability to support successful outcomes. To enable a fuller analysis of the value for money of the service, we

recommend more comprehensive data collection on employment and investment outcomes from service use, and the degree to which the service facilitated those outcomes.

### **Limitations and recommendations**

The assessment this evaluation is able to make on the service's indicative value for money is limited by the data available. The analysis is therefore subject to several caveats including:

- Low survey response: Employment impact estimates are based on 61 follow-up survey responses (24 migrants, 29 employers, 8 investors) out of 753 migrants, 82 employers and 29 investors.
- Illustrative assumptions: GVA and BCR calculations assume minimum visa salary thresholds and one migrant per employer. Actual salaries and employment numbers may differ.
- Exclusions: Analysis does not account for social benefits, wider economic spillovers, or displacement effects (judged low risk).
- Additionality: In the absence of data on employment outcomes and the degree to which the service facilitated those outcomes, it is not possible to quantify the additional impact of the service.
- Forecast uncertainty: Cost forecasts for 2025/26 and beyond are indicative and subject to change.

To strengthen future service value-for-money evaluations, it would be valuable for service providers to systematically collect follow-up data from migrants and employers on employment outcomes, earnings, investment and crucially, the role of SMS in facilitating these outcomes.

Specifically, for migrants and employers it would be beneficial to systematically gather data on:

- Employment outcome
- Visa type
- Salary
- Number of migrants employed
- The role of SMS in delivering this outcome

And for investors:

- Investment outcome

- Magnitude of investment
- Number of jobs created
- The role of SMS in delivering this outcome

For KPI 1, in addition to the degree to which user needs were met, it would be beneficial to categorise this by what the need was, so that the success of service provision related to employment and investment can be assessed.

While this evaluation focuses on one-to-one service appointments due to the availability of follow-up data, it is possible that the digital platform and webinar services have also contributed to employment and investment outcomes. These channels reached a large number of users, over 1.4 million migrant website views and 308 webinar attendees, with high engagement and satisfaction rates. Given the relevance of the content (e.g. visa guidance, sponsorship, investment pathways), it is possible that some users acted on this information to make employment or investment decisions.

To better understand and quantify the impact of these service offerings, service providers should issue follow-up surveys for digital and webinar users to determine whether the information provided would support employment or investment decisions and ideally, the nature and number of those outcomes (e.g. jobs secured, businesses registered). Capturing this data would ensure that the contribution of all service components is recognised.

## **Summary**

Throughout its development and delivery, SMS has incurred costs across more than three years. The interim evaluation covers the time period of March 2024-August 2025. However, within that period the full expanded service has only been in place since November 2024. Therefore total SMS costs map disproportionately against the delivery period. While establishing the interim and expanded versions of SMS, upfront costs occurred in line with profiling. Those costs have not been repeated, will not require to be repeated during the remainder of current contracts, and would not require to be repeated if the service was to be re-procured for the period beyond March 2027. Therefore, the overall impact of those areas of expenditure on service cost effectiveness would reduce over time. Thus, building on the positive initial outcomes from the interim and expanded service, in future we would expect to see an increasing net contribution to the Scottish economy.

There are two main channels of potential economic benefits from the scheme. Firstly there is the contribution made by additional employment related outcomes for those supported by the service. Secondly there is the potential impact of additional investment should investors look to locate in Scotland or increase

existing investment in Scotland following engaging with the service. Such investments, if leading to the creation of additional employment and/or new capital investment in Scotland have the potential to make a significant contribution in terms of economic benefits.

Indicative value for money modelling was carried out using data from user feedback surveys, to generate illustrative estimates of employment-related economic activity supported by the service. In the absence of data on employment outcomes, this analysis was based upon the proportion of service users who attended advice appointments and indicated in feedback surveys that the service had “completely met” their needs. Using the limited evidence available, this illustrative analysis indicated that between April 2024 and August 2025, the estimated benefit-cost ratio of the service was below break even. However, relatively small numbers of additional unobserved employment outcomes would have been sufficient for SMS to break even under the conservative modelling framework employed.

This finding should be treated as a conservative estimate for a number of reasons. Firstly, analysis was based upon data from a small number of user surveys, and did not consider the outcomes of users who did not return a user feedback survey. As such, the potential employment supported as a result of the service may have been understated. Secondly, while SMS provides services to individuals, employers and investors, the timing of the evaluation means that analysis focused on the employment outcomes of individuals completing user feedback surveys. As such, economic benefits specific to employers and investors were not considered as part of this economic analysis. Lastly, this analysis did not account for the wider social benefits of the service (e.g. improved wellbeing of migrants and increased confidence in navigating the immigration system), which also contribute to benefits.

Taken together, these findings suggest the service may be delivering value for money, though this conclusion remains highly uncertain. Looking ahead, the value of SMS may be expected to grow as awareness and uptake increase. Strengthened and more systematic outcome tracking, particularly on employment, earnings, investment outcomes and the role of SMS in facilitating these outcomes, would enable a more robust and conclusive assessment of value for money in future evaluations.

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<sup>1</sup> [Migration Advisory Committee Research Paper: skills shortages and employers of migrant workers \(accessible\) - GOV.UK](#)

# 7

## **Evaluation Conclusions and Recommendations**

## 7. Evaluation Conclusions and Recommendations

This early insights evaluation has considered three main evaluation questions, focusing on assessing the process, impact, and value for money of Scotland's Migration Service:

- To what extent has SMS been delivered as intended?
- To what extent is SMS contributing to its intended outcomes?
- To what extent is SMS delivering value for money?

This chapter summarises the key findings and conclusions discussed throughout this report, and makes recommendations for service improvement and future evaluation. All findings should be considered cautiously and in light of the data limitations highlighted in the [Limitations](#) section of this report. Further research is needed to draw robust conclusions in relation to the service performance and impact. This is explored in further depth below.

### Implementation and process

This early insights evaluation assessed the extent to which SMS has been delivered as intended, using the SMS theory of change as a framework. The evaluation found that core components of the service, including the digital platforms and tailored advice appointments to migrants, employers, and investors, were implemented largely as intended. The digital platform delivery featured an implementation deviation based on user research which indicated two tailored digital platforms rather than one universal platform would better meet diverging user needs. The Scotland's Migration Service websites have had 1.4 million views over the space of 17 months (March 2024 and August 2025). The migration-related pages are particularly popular with a million views of the "Study in Scotland" page alone. Evidence suggests that the Study in Scotland marketing campaign run by Brand Scotland substantially boosted international awareness of SMS. Both the employer and migrant focused sites have directed users to book appointments with the relevant service.

Opportunities for strengthening delivery were also identified, including limited adviser capacity for complex cases, ensuring up-to-date immigration knowledge, and the need for improved resources and data collection. Stakeholder and adviser feedback pointed to opportunities for strengthening service delivery, such as expanding appointment availability, enhancing training, and developing a centralised knowledge hub. Overall, the evaluation found that SMS had demonstrated implementation fidelity and responsiveness to user needs, and

identified suggestions for further improvements to ensure continued consistent quality and effectiveness across all service components.

## **Impact on migrants**

804 one-to-one appointments were held with migrants over the first 17 months of the service with a wide range of advice provided, and the majority of appointments were with migrants who were already living in Scotland (79%). 65% of appointments were with migrants aged between 25 and 44, and slightly more women attended appointments (45%) than men (41%). Appointments were attended by a wide range of nationalities, representing 92 countries, with a notable portion of users being Nigerian (20%), American (13%), or Indian (13%). We were not able to establish whether different groups of migrants are experiencing or being impacted by the service in different ways, as there was insufficient data to do so. Future evaluations should therefore seek to investigate how experiences may differ according to socio-demographic characteristics, including any differences between the post- and pre-mover groups. The evaluation was also not able to robustly establish whether SMS makes it easier for migrants to move to Scotland and settle into their communities, one of the service's key desired outcomes. This is due to the lack of available data and the fact the full service had been operational for less than a year at the time of evaluation. There was early evidence of at least five migrants reporting SMS had supported them to relocate or settle in Scotland from feedback data. Interview evidence also pointed to users' needs being met, and most migrant service users responding to the feedback survey indicated that the service met their needs.<sup>1</sup> Further evidence also highlighted the positive impact attending an appointment had on migrant service users' wellbeing, confidence, and knowledge of the immigration system. The service itself was noted to support migrants' positive feelings towards Scotland, with one participant in particular noting the fact it was a Scottish Government service made them feel supported in their decision settle in Scotland.

There is therefore some evidence that SMS has contributed to its desired outcomes, meeting migrants' needs and helping migrants to move to Scotland and settle into communities.

There were also examples of negative experiences with the service, including one appointment where the adviser was felt to not be adequately knowledgeable. Other negative experiences were linked to ways in which external factors are constraining the service's contribution to its intended outcomes. Notably, elements of UK immigration legislation were referenced by a number of participants as barriers to long-term settlement and international recruitment and had influenced how positively they experienced the support provided by SMS. Recent policy changes

outlined in the Home Office's Immigration White Paper and subsequent changes to immigration rules have served to make the immigration system more restrictive by making fewer people eligible to use immigration routes.<sup>6</sup> This may risk making the potential choice of migrating to Scotland less accessible or attractive to a prospective migrant, as well as deterring use of the system by employers and investors.

SMS operates within a complex and challenging policy environment. The service has demonstrably responded to these challenges, and the frequent and substantial proposed and enacted changes to the immigration system which have taken place during the period of the service's delivery. Given the sensitivities and impact surrounding changes to the UK immigration system, Scottish Government recognises that SMS will need to continue to navigate these changes in as close to real time as possible, as it has sought to during the current delivery phase.

## **Impact on employers and investors**

In total, 749 employers and investors attended SMS webinars from June 2024 to August 2025, with 82 employers and 29 investors attending one-to-one appointments between April 2024 and August 2025. Of the employers who attended appointments, most had fewer than 20 employees (60%), with almost a quarter (24%) having between 20 and 200 employees, and 15% had over 200 employees.

There is some incomplete early evidence to demonstrate that SMS has helped employers to use the immigration system more effectively and efficiently. There is also some evidence to suggest that the service assisted some employers in meeting their skills and labour needs. More employers and investors are engaging with the service as it develops, suggesting that an increasing number of employers are supported to use the immigration system to meet their needs. At least one appointment has led to a positive outcome with an investor reporting that they successfully incorporated their business in Scotland. Feedback from the user survey was generally positive with respondents noting that the service provided them with the information they needed to deal with similar situations in the future and use the immigration system to meet their needs. Only two employers and no investors were interviewed as part of this evaluation. Both employers were NHS Scotland Health Boards who spoke positively about their experiences with the service. They indicated they felt confident recruiting internationally and complying with both sponsorship requirements and immigration law following their

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper>

engagement with SMS. One employer reported that the service helped them make informed decisions linked to the recruitment of two individuals.

## **Indicative Value for Money**

This early insights evaluation indicates that Scotland's Migration Service has generated economic benefits, though the full scale of these benefits cannot be robustly quantified with the current data. These findings should be understood in the context of limitations in measuring impact, particularly the absence of systematic data on employment and investment outcomes, and the role of the service in delivering these outcomes, which constrain the conclusions of the value for money assessment.

The value for money assessment presented in Chapter 6 estimates an illustrative benefit-cost ratio of 0.51–0.85, based solely on a proxy measure for successful employment outcome from a small number of returned follow-up surveys and applying minimum visa salary thresholds. This suggests that the monetised employment benefits captured in the available data are lower than the costs.

However, this indicative estimate should be interpreted as illustrative and a lower bound. Follow-up survey response rates, particularly among migrants, were very low, and sensitivity analysis indicates that under our modelling framework relatively small numbers of additional unobserved employment outcomes would be sufficient for the service to achieve a BCR of one under conservative salary assumptions. We also do not monetise wider economic spillovers from employment-related activity. It is therefore plausible that the economic contribution of the service from employment income covers the cost of the service to date, although this cannot be confirmed with the data gathered.

In addition to employment impacts, early qualitative evidence suggests that SMS may also be supporting investment activity, with one investor reporting the registration of a business in Scotland following engagement with the service. Due to limited data, the scale and economic impact of any investment supported by SMS cannot be quantified and are not included in the monetised indicative value for money assessment.

Wider social benefits, including improved wellbeing, reduced stress, and increased confidence navigating the immigration system, were also reported by service users. These outcomes align with the service's strategic objectives and contribute to benefits but are not monetised in this assessment.

Overall, while the available monetised evidence does not demonstrate that the monetised benefits of SMS outweigh the costs to date, sensitivity analysis indicates that under our modelling framework, only a small number of additional unobserved

employment outcomes would be required for the service to break even. Taken together with non-monetised potential investment impacts, economic spillovers and wider social benefits, the balance of available evidence provides tentative conclusions that SMS may be delivering value for money.

Looking ahead, the value of SMS may be expected to grow as awareness and uptake increase. Strengthened outcome tracking, particularly on employment, earnings, investment, and the role of SMS in facilitating these outcomes, will be essential to enable a fuller assessment of value for money in future evaluations.

## **Recommendations**

### **Digital content improvements**

Feedback from one stakeholder suggests that it may be beneficial to more clearly signpost that SMS' online content is consistently aligned with the latest changes in UK Government immigration policy, to increase confidence among users that the content is up to date. Advisers also recommended adding case studies, such as international students securing employment in Scotland or employers addressing skills gaps through global talent, to enhance relevance and engagement.

### **Marketing and visibility**

Advisers suggested branding SMS more strongly as a Scottish Government service could help expand its reach, and both advisers and stakeholders commented on the importance of increasing the social media presence of the service. Seraphus advisers suggested using more digestible content formats including video reels, short how-to-guides, and short clips to widen the reach of SMS.

### **Training and resources for advisers**

Insights from migrant users highlighted instances where advisers were felt to have knowledge gaps and would have benefitted from further training in relevant immigration matters. Similarly, CAS advisers who participated in the evaluation focus groups noted the importance of providing more level 1 and level 2 immigration training to respond to anticipated increased demand from users. As part of the continuous improvement of the SMS service, a further 18 CAS advisers are currently undertaking training to be certified as Level 2 advisers. This training is expected to take between 6 and 12 months to complete.

CAS advisers also suggested the following could improve delivery efficiency and output quality:

- creation of a centralised knowledge hub with up-to-date guidance;
- creation of template materials on common visa routes to minimise time spent on follow-up emails;

- and accessing more information about migrants ahead of appointments (although some CAS advisers disagreed with how useful this would be in practice, as information provided in advance of appointments as not always accurate or relevant).

### **Availability of appointments and advice**

Both migrant and employer users provided suggestions for improving availability of appointments and advice. For migrants, this included expanding the number of appointments offered to individual users as the maximum of three per year was felt to be insufficient for more complex cases (although it should be noted that only 1% of migrant users had three appointments, with 93% only requiring one appointment). It may be beneficial to consider how migrants who approach CAS in person or via a central CAS email address or phone number for migration advice could be supported more quickly, particularly as ‘walk-in’ users are likely to be more vulnerable or have more complex needs than SMS users who access the service through the online booking tool. One employer expressed a desire for an increase in the available appointments per year due to the complexity of the immigration scenarios they face. Another employer suggested SMS should consider developing a ‘helpline’ employers and investors could phone for advice, in addition to the available phone and online appointments. This employer did acknowledge this may be an unrealistic ask of a free service, and similarly noted that advisers would not have any time to prepare for these helpline calls which could limit advice. Another employer suggested that Seraphus appointments could be arranged as six 30-minute slots rather than three 1-hour appointments.

### **External factors**

This recommendation relates to recognising and communicating how external factors, such as market complexity and the UK Government legal and policy environment, shape the service’s ability to succeed and achieve its intended outcomes. SMS is viewed as a relatively low-budget intervention within both a sensitive domestic political context and a highly complex global migration market. While it has been possible to gather some evidence regarding the practical and personal value of the service to its users, it is more difficult to understand the macroeconomic impact of the service while isolating the effect of external factors. It has also not been possible for the service to provide tailored service offerings for subgroups of users or provide informative data related to subgroup service usage to stakeholders. These limitations, related to both the service’s scale and the context the service exists within, should be clearly articulated to decision-makers and stakeholders to manage expectations and inform decision-making, including the ministerial decision on whether the service should continue beyond March

2027. It is important that decision-makers and stakeholders fully understand the limitations and constraints of what a service of this kind can deliver, particularly when relatively small in scale.

### **Address service gap in relation to job opportunities for international graduates**

Evidence from the evaluation suggests that one of the challenges for SMS in meeting users' needs is supporting international graduates to find skilled work in Scotland with an organisation holding a sponsor licence. Stakeholder feedback flagged that demand from international students for jobs far exceeds the supply of relevant roles. The service should consider if further marketing and promotion of the service to Scotland-based employers, with an emphasis on the potential benefits of obtaining a sponsor licence, could mitigate this barrier.

### **Enhanced data collection**

This evaluation drew primarily on monitoring and performance data, which was largely incomplete and consisted of small sample sizes. The service should consider how to improve data collection both through the appointment data and the feedback survey. The limited availability and quality of such data have impacted the ability to understand the impact of the service and the experience of users. Improved data collection is crucial to ensure the continuous improvement of the service, enabling it to adapt to meet the needs of migrant and employer users and deliver its outcomes.

The small number of responses to the user feedback surveys has impacted the reliability of KPI figures, largely rendering these unrepresentative of the performance of the service, and further limited the ability to draw robust conclusions from the open text responses. Service providers should consider how to maximise response rates, which may involve consideration of reminder frequency, survey length, and incentives. If the questionnaire is updated, this should remain consistent over time to enable meaningful analysis. Similarly, consideration should be given to how user characteristics can be more consistently captured during the collection of appointment data. This is particularly important for the migrant service users where missing data has impacted the ability of this evaluation to draw conclusions on the impact of the service on different groups.

To improve future Value for Money assessments, SMS should prioritise more comprehensive data collection on employment and investment outcomes. Increasing feedback survey response rates as above and refining questions to focus more directly on economic outcomes would significantly improve the robustness of benefit-cost estimates. These enhancements would reduce

uncertainty in modelling and support more accurate evaluations of the service's contribution to Scotland's economy.

Further analysis and use of evidence could support policy development and resultant strategic service delivery for SMS. This could include filling evidence gaps in relation to which sectors and regions of Scotland have unfilled vacancies. Similarly, a better understanding of which parts of the world have an excess number of workers in relevant fields and who might stand a realistic prospect of moving to Scotland would also be desirable to inform targeting of promotional activities.

## **Follow-up Evaluation**

While this early insights evaluation has generated valuable insights into service delivery and user experiences, it has not been able to robustly assess the impact of SMS, particularly on its longer-term outcomes. A follow-up evaluation is therefore required to assess impact of the service and the achievement of longer-term outcomes, as articulated in the SMS theory of change. This should be conducted after at least two to three years of full service operation, allowing sufficient time for early evidence of intended long-term outcomes to emerge. This follow-up evaluation should examine the extent to which the service has supported migrants to relocate to Scotland and settle into communities, as well as assess whether it has contributed to reducing skills shortages in Scotland's economy. A mixed methods approach is recommended, incorporating longitudinal quantitative analysis of administrative data alongside in-depth qualitative research with migrants and employers and investors, including the development of case studies. A follow-up evaluation should also include an economic assessment, such as a cost-benefit analysis that considers both financial and social benefits. This approach would enable a proportionate and robust assessment of impact and inform future policy decisions on the service design and investment. In line with this recommendation, a future evaluation of SMS is planned.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the percentage is currently below the KPI target of 80%. The feedback survey sample also represents 3% of users which limits its representativeness.

# 8

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## 8. References

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# Annexes A & B

# Annex A: Supplementary Data Tables

Table B1. Views and user engagement of the five most visited pages providing content and advice for migrants (March 2024 – August 2025).

Page Subject	Total Views	Average Views per month
Study in Scotland	1,052,753	61,927
Visa and immigration	208,262	12,251
Move to Scotland	89,230	8,923
Finding the right visa	71,455	7,146
Finding a job	41,860	4,186

Table B2. Location of Visitors to migrant-focused SMS pages (March 2024 – August 2025)

Country	Total Sessions
India	463,502
United States	286,551
Indonesia	218,517
Pakistan	193,910
Vietnam	167,647
Other	542,838
Total	1,872,965

Table B3. Views and user engagement of the five most visited pages providing content and advice for employers and investors (October 2024 to August 2025)

Page Subject	Total Views	Average Views per month
Skilled Workers Visa	8,871	887
Home Page	3,622	362
Book an appointment with Seraphus	1,436	144
New entrant discount for the Skilled Worker Visa	961	96
Visa routes for hiring international workers	831	83

Table B4. Top 5 countries accessing pages aimed at employers/investors (October 2024 to August 2025)

<b>Country</b>	<b>Total sessions</b>	<b>% of total sessions</b>
United Kingdom	20,928	57%
United States	6,847	19%
Nigeria	931	3%
India	773	2%
Poland	669	2%
Other	6,541	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,689</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Annex B: Method for Calculating KPIs

Each of the 8 KPIs are calculated from the feedback survey which is shared with migrants and employers who recently accessed the service. Each KPI is based on the responses to one to three questions from this survey. The relationship between feedback survey questions and KPIs is shown in Table C1.

Table C1. Relationship between KPIs and feedback survey questions.

KPI	Feedback Questions
'% of employers / migrants who reported their needs were met through Scotland's Migration Service'	'Having an appointment with Scotland's Migration Service has given me confidence that I can solve my problem'  'Having an appointment with Scotland's Migration Service has improved my knowledge of where to find support if needed'  'At the appointment with Scotland's Migration Service, did you get the advice that you needed?'
'% of employers / migrants using digital platform who report finding the digital platform easy to navigate according to the category of information sought'	'How easy was it to access the appointment service?'  'How easy was it to find the information you were looking for on Scotland's Migration Service website?'
'% of employers / migrants using the digital platform who find it easy to understand the content provided, by category of information sought'	'How easy was it to understand the content on the Scotland's Migration Service websites?'
'% of employers / migrants using the appointment service who find it easy to understand the advice provided, by category of information sought'	'How easy was it to understand the advice provided to you by the advisers you met with?'

The answers to all these questions are presented on a 5-point scale which are analogous to the range: Very Good, Good, Neutral, Bad, Very Bad. The first two questions represent a positive outcome, and the last three options represent a neutral or negative outcome.

A Success Quotient is then created for each KPI. Further details of how success quotients are calculated from feedback survey results is included in Table C2.

Table C2. Calculation of Success Quotient from feedback survey questions.

<b>Number of Questions impacting a single KPI.</b>	<b>Success Quotient Value</b>
<b>One</b>	If answer is positive - SQ: 1 If answer is negative or neutral - SQ: 0
<b>Two</b>	If both answers positive - SQ: 1 If either option positive - SQ: 0.5 If both answers negative or neutral - SQ: 0
<b>Three</b>	If all three answers positive - SQ: 1 If two answers are positive - SQ: 0.66 If only one answer is positive – SQ: 0.33 If all three answers negative or neutral - SQ: 0

The total KPI is then calculated by dividing the success quotient by the total number of respondents to that question.

## How to access the background or source data

The following statement(s) indicate the availability of the data which underlie the results of this publication (tick all that apply):

- Anonymised microdata (individual-level) are stored externally at <insert link to external archive website and give reference number for dataset> and availability is subject to their access procedures.
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- Aggregate data are provided within this publication or its annexes.
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