



Department of Health & Social Care

Steve Brine MP
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
House of Commons

Rt. Hon. Victoria Atkins MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

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22 March 2024

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your correspondence of 9 January regarding changes to legal immigration rules for social care workers. I am writing to respond to your request for further information on the analysis my department has undertaken, and the support we are providing the sector to ensure adequate provision of care.

I would first like to give some context to the estimated 152,000 vacancies in social care in December 2023 that you referenced in your letter. Skills for Care have since published indicative monthly vacancy rate estimates using unweighted data which suggest vacancies have subsequently continued to fall. Specifically, their estimate of the vacancy rate in the independent sector has fallen from 9.9% in March 2023 to 8.0% in January 2024.

Furthermore, vacancies can include posts that are temporarily vacant due to churn, as well as reflecting providers' ambitions to grow their business and their market share. While high rates are a potential cause for concern, we do not consider them a good measure of the number of additional jobs required to meet care needs. This improving picture is also consistent with internal data that we collect from providers and with what we hear anecdotally.

Assessing the impact of legal migration changes

The Home Office published an assessment of impacts on 21st December 2023, which was developed jointly with analysts in my department. In doing so, we considered evidence from a range of sources including the Home Office's management information, data we collect from providers, the KCL Visa Study and our own sector engagement to arrive at a consensus on assumptions and methodology.

Our view is that social care worker volumes could remain resilient to removing eligibility for new inflows of care and senior care workers to bring dependants. This is in the context of a strong global labour supply where providers have reported sustained high interest in advertised posts from overseas, possible changes in migrant behaviour in response and that a proportion of recruits are estimated to already come without dependants. Moreover, this will only apply to the potential dependants of main applicants who arrive after implementation of the policy.

As set out in the published assessment, we attempted to match employers who had sponsored visas for care worker or senior care workers to the Care Quality Commission's public register. We assessed that requiring social care employers in England to be CQC registered in order to sponsor visas could reduce the number of care workers and senior care workers recruited from overseas by 22%. This effect will be concentrated entirely in non-regulated services, with no impact on CQC-regulated providers.

The estimated impacts in the publication are illustrative, with uncertainties in both data and modelling assumptions.

The most recent publication of the Home Office Migration Statistics shows that there was a 41% reduction in visa grants for care workers and senior care workers in quarter four (October to December 2023) compared to the quarter three. Given the immigration changes were only announced in December, and implemented in March this year it is unlikely this will be driving that reduction. Whilst it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions on causality, we expect this has resulted from UKVI utilising their existing checks on care providers which want to recruit overseas workers to ensure there will be appropriate work for them once they arrive.

We will closely monitor the impact of these measures over time as the changes are implemented and the Home Office will be preparing a full impact assessment on the Legal Migration package later this year.

Support to the sector to ensure adequate provision of care

The Government recognises the important role international recruitment has played – and will continue to play in the medium term – in ensuring the sector has sufficient capacity to provide adequate levels of care. Care workers and senior care workers (along with wider health and care visa holders and occupations on national pay-scales) were exempted from the specific general threshold rise of £38,700, to ensure the health and social care sectors can continue to recruit the staff they need.

More broadly, to support the adult social care sector, the Government has now made available up to £8.6 billion in additional funding over this financial year and next to support adult social care and discharge. This funding is enabling local authorities to buy more care packages, help people leave hospital on time, improve workforce recruitment and retention, and reduce waiting times for care. As part of this we have made a total of nearly £2 billion available over two years through the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund (MSIF) and the MSIF Workforce Fund. This additional funding for social care is part of a wider increase in local government funding that will see Core Spending Power increase by up to 7.5% in cash terms in 2024-25, an above-inflation increase.

We are also providing central support to encourage people to join the sector, through paid campaign activity and work with the Department of Work and Pensions to promote care as a career. The latest phase of the Adult Social Care 'Made with Care' recruitment campaign launched on 9th October 2023 on catch up TV, social media, radio and online. This year's campaign which runs until March 2024, builds on the success of last year, which saw over 244,000 candidates search for a social care job on the website after seeing the campaign.

In addition, on 10th January 2024, the Department announced a package of measures that will emphasise care work as a career, helping to recruit and retain talent by providing new, accredited qualifications, digital training, and funded apprenticeships. These plans include:

- The launch of the Care Workforce Pathway: For the first time, there will be a national career structure for the adult social care workforce, covering the breadth and complexity of care.
- Over £50 million of funding for a new level 2 Care Certificate qualification.
- An investment of over £20 million for apprenticeships: Local authorities and adult social care providers will be able to use the money towards training and supervising hundreds of new social work and nurse apprentices.
- Subsidised training places: A £5 million uplift to the Workforce Development Fund that will expand access to learning and development, creating opportunities for the workforce to become experts in their field or progress into new roles.

- A new digital leadership qualification: This will help equip social care leaders and managers with the confidence and capability to lead the implementation and use of technology in the delivery of care.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'V' and a long, sweeping tail.

RT HON VICTORIA ATKINS MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE