

Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

Kevin Foster MP
Minister for Future Borders and Immigration
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
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14 April 2020

Dear Kevin Foster MP,

Visa extensions for frontline workers in social care

I am writing further to the announcement made by the Home Secretary on 31 March that 2,800 migrant doctors, nurses and paramedics whose visas are due to expire before 1 October will automatically have their visas extended, free of charge, for one year, and that they will be exempt from the Immigration Health Surcharge. The Home Affairs Select Committee strongly supports this measure. We all owe a debt of gratitude to those risking their lives during this pandemic.

As you know, workers in social care are also on the frontline of the national effort to combat coronavirus, working very long hours in extremely difficult conditions and putting themselves at risk to save lives. The Health Secretary recognised the contribution being made by the social care workforce in an open letter of 28 March, in which he wrote that “you, along with colleagues across the health and social care system, are on the front line caring for and supporting people in incredibly challenging circumstances” and that “we are committed to doing whatever is needed; that promise applies just as much to social care as it does for the NHS”.

Concerns have been raised, however, about the true scale of the impact of Coronavirus in care homes and the extent of the pressures being placed on staff. The number of deaths recorded in care homes is very sadly expected to have risen considerably in recent days and, at the same time, there have been reports of shortages of PPE, a lack of testing and incredibly challenging working conditions for care home staff.

As of September 2019, the adult social care workforce includes 134,000 staff with non-EU nationality, with 109,000 of those employed in direct care.¹ Some of those individuals will have visas due to expire before 1 October and will be subject to many of the same intense pressures facing NHS workers.

At a Committee meeting on 14 April, it was agreed that I would write to you on behalf of the Committee to request that the automatic and free visa extension being applied to NHS frontline workers be expanded to include frontline workers in the social care sector. Given the pressures and personal risks many care workers are facing to aid the national effort to combat Coronavirus, the Committee believes that they should also be included in the changes applying to NHS workers, so that they do not have to go through a costly and burdensome visa process at the same time.

I would be grateful for your response by Friday 17 April.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvette Cooper', written in a cursive style.

Yvette Cooper MP

¹ <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector/State-of-Report-2019.pdf>