New laws to cut migration and tackle care worker visa abuse

Reforms to restrict care workers from bringing family members are now in force, while care providers are required to register if they are sponsoring migrants.

New rules to radically cut net migration and tackle visa abuse are now in force as part of the government’s plan to bring down unsustainable levels of legal migration.

Care workers will now be restricted from bringing dependants, after a disproportionate 120,000 dependants accompanied 100,000 workers on the route last year.

Care providers in England acting as sponsors for migrants will also be required to register with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) – the industry regulator for Health and Social Care – in order to crack down on worker exploitation and abuse within the sector.

It forms part of a wider package of measures, which is being implemented as soon as possible, which means a total of 300,000 people who were eligible to come to the UK last year would now not be able to do so.

Home Secretary, James Cleverly MP, said:

Care workers make an incredible contribution to our society, taking care of our loved ones in times of need. But we cannot justify inaction in the face of clear abuse, manipulation of our immigration system and unsustainable migration numbers.

It is neither right nor fair to allow this unacceptable situation to continue. We promised the British people action, and we will not rest until we have delivered on our commitment to bring numbers down substantially.

Our plan is robust but fair – protecting British workers while ensuring the very best international talent can work and study here, to add value to our society and grow the economy.

There is clear evidence that care workers have been offered visas under false pretences, travelling thousands of miles for jobs that simply don’t exist or to be paid far below the minimum wage required for their work, exploiting them while undercutting British workers.

These changes come into force as the government is set to lay rules in Parliament later this week (14 March) to prevent the continued undercutting of British workers, which includes raising the salary threshold that a skilled worker must meet in order to get a visa and removing the 20% ‘going-rate’ discount for migrant workers in shortage occupations.

Minister for Social Care, Helen Whately MP, said:

International care workers make an invaluable contribution caring for our loved ones, but international recruitment and more immigration are not long-term solutions to our social care needs. These rules provide a more ethical and sustainable approach.

We are boosting our homegrown workforce by reforming social care careers. These include the first ever national career path for care workers and a new care qualification.

Our reforms will grow the domestic workforce and build on our success over the last year that saw more people working in social care, fewer vacancies and lower staff turnover.

The Home Secretary will also, today, commission a review of the graduate route for international students to prevent abuse, protect the integrity and quality of UK higher education, and ensure it works in the best interests of the UK.

He will ask the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to ensure that demand for the graduate route, through which a total of 175,872 visas have been granted since it was established, is fit for purpose and focused on attracting the best and brightest to the UK.

This follows concerns raised after analysis by the MAC revealed that the number of international postgraduate students attending institutions with the lowest UCAS entry requirements has increased by over 250% between 2018 and 2022.

This follows reforms to student visas which came into force at the start of January, ending the ability of nearly all postgraduate students to bring dependants to the UK. The government expects to see a drastic fall in student dependant applications this year, with early indications already of this downward trend.

In further changes, the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) will be abolished, to be replaced with a new Immigration Salary List on 4 April. This follows a recommendation from the independent MAC, which has also advised the government on which occupations should be temporarily added to the new list initially.

The government has been clear that roles should only be included where they are skilled and in shortage, and that no sector should be permanently reliant on immigration. Inclusion on the list must not serve to reduce pay and undermine the recruitment of British workers.

From 4 April, the minimum salary required for those arriving on the Skilled Worker visa will increase from £26,200 to £38,700 – a 48% increase. This will further drive down numbers, reduce pressure on public services and prevent the undercutting of British workers by employers who look to recruit cheap labour from overseas. The government’s robust approach will prioritise the most talented and highly-skilled people from abroad who will add value and contribute significantly to growth of the economy, whilst encouraging employers to invest in training, upskilling, and recruiting domestic workers.

The minimum income requirement for family visas will also rise, starting at £29,000 from 11 April. By early 2025 this will be increased to £38,700, helping to ensure dependants brought to the UK are supported financially.

The government has been clear that immigration is not the long-term answer to social care needs and care providers should hire more British workers. The Department for Health and Social Care is leading a programme of work to grow and support the domestic social care workforce. This includes better training, clearer career paths and improved job prospects through a new accredited qualification.

The Department for Work and Pensions is taking decisive action in one of the biggest employment interventions in a generation through its £2.5 billion Back to Work plan, which will help 1.1 million people who are long-term unemployed or long-term sick or disabled break down barriers to work.