

Immigration rules relaxed for care workers amid staff shortages

Immigration rules have been temporarily relaxed for care workers in a bid to recruit and keep staff.

[Care workers](#) have been added to the shortage occupation list for 12 months, which will allow migrants to get work visas to fill jobs where there are [shortages](#).

Migrant workers will be able to move in with dependents, including partners and children, and the visa offers a path to settlement in the UK, the Department of Health and Social Care said.

The government previously said care workers would have to be paid at least £20,480 a year to qualify.

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This is higher than the current “going rate” for senior care worker jobs, which the government says is £16,900.

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Many care workers in the UK are paid the minimum wage, which employers say makes retaining staff a challenge.

About a quarter (24%) of the social care workforce in England is employed on zero-hour contracts, with the figure rising to 42% in London, which is a factor in people leaving their jobs, according to Skills for Care.

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There are about 105,000 vacancies and about 34% of people leave their jobs each year.

‘Severe and increasing difficulties’ with recruitment

The decision to add care workers to the shortage occupation list was first announced on Christmas Eve following a recommendation by the Migration Advisory Committee.

The committee said this was needed “immediately” to temper “severe and increasing difficulties” with recruitment and retention in the sector.

Last year, Health Secretary Sajid Javid said the measure would “ensure short-term sustainability” as he urged care workers to get vaccinated – a legal requirement.

The government brought in a requirement for care home staff to be vaccinated, which raised concerns about even more people leaving the sector.

Omicron cases have also played a role in increasing staff absences.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said: “The care sector is experiencing unprecedented challenges prompted by the pandemic and the changes we’ve made to the health and care visa will bolster the workforce and help alleviate some of the pressures currently being experienced.”

The change is a victory for campaigners, who accused the government of ignoring the role care workers have played during the coronavirus pandemic by excluding them from its new immigration system.