



Home Office

Home Secretary

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BY EMAIL ONLY

Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP
Chair, Home Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letters of 14 April to the Immigration Minister and 21 April 2020 to me, regarding visa extensions for care workers and the announced NHS visa extension offer. I have taken the Committee's questions in turn and look forward to discussing with you later today.

Could you confirm whether the offer of automatic fee-free visa extensions will apply to NHS staff on all kinds of visas or just to those on Tier 2 visas?

The offer applies to any NHS doctor, nurse or paramedic who is subject to immigration control, not just sponsored migrant workers on a Tier 2 (General) or Tier 5 visa, whose visa will expire before 1 October 2020 and where the NHS Trust confirms they want to continue to employ an individual.

To help them work uninterrupted on battling COVID-19 and supporting the NHS, we have extended the automatic visa extension offer to a range of health professionals in the NHS and the Independent Health Sector, including midwives, social workers and medical radiographers.

Will the one-year visa extension apply to all NHS staff (including support staff such as porters and cleaners, and students who are now working in NHS frontline services)? Will it also include agency or 'bank' staff currently working for the NHS?

The Government recognises the huge importance of the health and social care sector, who are providing vital services following the coronavirus outbreak. That is why we announced automatic visa extensions to NHS frontline workers, doctors, paramedics and nurses and their families.

We recognise that all NHS staff are contributing to this tremendous effort, and the Government is continuing to consider our options carefully and provide a wide range of support to those supporting our efforts against COVID-19.

Will the offers of visa extensions, to NHS staff and to those whose visas are expiring before the end of May, be confirmed by statutory instrument? If not, what will be the legal basis for these extensions?

As Home Secretary I am able to exercise discretion to extend immigration leave in exceptional circumstances such as these. We are working with NHS Trusts to identify those who are working in an appropriate role and who need their leave to be extended in this way, due to visas expiring before 1 October 2020.

Will those to whom visa extensions apply be contacted directly by the Home Office or will they need to make applications?

UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) are in the process of contacting NHS Trusts, asking them to identify who should benefit from this offer. To date, UKVI has contacted 270 UK NHS trusts and asked them to supply details of eligible individuals. The offer is for any NHS doctor, nurse or paramedic subject to UK immigration control.

Will formal guidance on the visa extensions policies be published?

As well as communicating directly with UK NHS Trusts, we are ensuring all information about changes to the immigration system in this fast-moving environment are published on a dedicated page on gov.uk. It can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents>

What provisions are in place for non-UK family members of an NHS worker who dies of Covid-19? Will they be subject to further applications or fees to remain in the UK?

We hope the number of people who find themselves in this position is very small and our thoughts go out to the families and friends of all medical professionals who have passed away fighting to keep us safe. We continue to monitor the situation carefully and consider our response.

I can confirm that any dependants in this very sad position will be granted immediate indefinite leave to remain, without a requirement to pay a fee.

In your letter of 14 April, you asked about the potential for the visas of frontline social care workers to be extended, like we have done for certain NHS frontline workers.

The disparate nature of the social care sector makes it a unique challenge when making specific immigration offers. We keep policy under review and are continuing to consider what more we can do to support frontline workers. The Government is providing support to the sector in a number of different ways, including providing additional funding for adults and children's social care.

Social workers who are employed by NHS Trusts (or NHS commissioned independent healthcare providers), working in one of the defined occupations, will benefit from the automatic visa extension offer where visas are due to expire before 1 October 2020.

The Department of Health and Social Care is working alongside stakeholders in the sector to ensure the workforce has the right number of people to meet increasing

demands, with the right skills, knowledge and behaviours to deliver quality, compassionate care, and has recently launched a national recruitment campaign.

DHSC is also providing local councils with access to an additional £1.5 billion for adults and children's social care in 2020-21, to help meet rising demand and stabilise the social care system.

We are determined to give the social care sector the support it needs to respond to coronavirus and continue to work closely with Public Health England to monitor the impact on care homes.

We have published extensive guidance for care homes on admitting and caring for people during the outbreak and have announced £2.9 billion to help local authorities respond to pressures in key services, such as adult social care, and enhance the NHS discharge service, allowing patients to return home safely.

The EU Settlement Scheme means that all EU citizens, and their family members, currently working in social care can stay in the UK and continue to do so, and we have encouraged this.

I look forward to discussing the work of the department's response to this pandemic with you later today.

With all your wishes


Rt Hon Priti Patel MP