

Immigration Update – June 25

White Paper

The UK Government published its immigration White Paper, 'Restoring Control Over the Immigration System' on 12 May 2025 which introduces plans for reforms across the immigration system. One of the key changes is the closure of visas for care workers.

Background

Historically the skill and salary thresholds associated with skilled worker visas meant sponsorship was not something care providers could rely on to address staff shortages. However, in February 2022 the rules were amended to allow care workers and senior care workers to be sponsored. This was a change welcomed by the sector and many care providers now find that their workforce has a large proportion of sponsored staff.

In March 2024 the rules were amended to restrict care workers bringing dependants, making the route less attractive to many migrants. Then in April this year changes were introduced requiring employers to try to recruit from the displaced pool of workers before being able to recruit from overseas.

An end to sponsorship?

The White Paper goes much further than the previous tightening up of the rules and talks about closing social care visas for new applicants from abroad and appears to suggest a move back to the position prior to February 2022. Care providers will see a significant reduction in access to overseas workers and will be required to instead attract staff from within the UK.

The Government says it will work to tackle historic issues relating to pay and poor terms of employment for care roles so that roles become more attractive to the settled workforce and employers are less reliant on overseas workers. However, there are clearly challenges with this. Many care providers are unable to increase salaries and are losing staff to the NHS or organisations in different sectors such as supermarkets.

Settlement

The White Paper also sets out plans for a longer route to settlement. Currently, migrants can apply for indefinite leave to remain after five years in the UK but this will be extended to ten years, with the possibility of a reduction if certain conditions are met.

What about existing staff?

There is reference to a transitional period for those already in the UK which will last until 2028. During the transition, visa extensions and switching will be permitted but this will be kept under review. The White Paper is silent as to how the changes to settlement eligibility will impact on individuals who are already in the UK.

What can care providers do?

There are currently no specific timeframes for the changes and the plans are subject to a consultation process so at this point much is still unknown. However, it is clear sponsorship is going to be difficult if not impossible in the future and care providers should consider the following:

- Review the current workforce and consider the level of reliance on sponsorship
- Plan ahead for recruitment so as to use the sponsorship route while it is still available
- Keep in mind expiry dates of current visas in case extensions or switching are needed before the transitional period ends in 2028
- Start planning how to attract individuals from the settled workforce
- Consider other ways to fill care roles in the future such as using agency staff.
- Communicate with existing staff to provide assurance where possible as these changes will cause concern for migrants who may feel insecure or unwelcome.