

International Recruitment

Bulletin 43
27th February 2026



Erica Lockhart MBE, Chair

Background

SESCA, in partnership with Southeast ADASS, is leading the 2024/26 International Recruitment project in the southeast, funded by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), to support ASC providers, with two main goals:

- **Assist Displaced Migrant Care Workers** affected by sponsor licence revocation to secure new roles with approved providers.
- **Support Providers:** Enable access to displaced workers and provide financial support and guidance around best practice.

Funding Update for 2026/27

We have been advised that the SESCO Displaced Worker Recruitment Scheme is expected to continue into 2026/27, subject to formal confirmation by the Department of Health & Social Care.

While continuation is anticipated, the level of funding available is likely to be lower.

Once formal guidance is issued, our governance team will review the funding package and confirm delivery arrangements.

Further details will be shared as soon as they are available.

Important: Grant Claim Deadline – 20 March 2026

Outstanding grant claims must be submitted by 20 March 2026.

[CLICK HERE FOR FULL DETAILS](#)

Earned Settlement – Consultation Closed, But Engagement Must Not Stop

The Government's consultation on the proposed "Earned Settlement" reforms closed on 12 February 2026. **However, engagement must not stop.**

Our Consultation Response

Our consultation response makes clear that extending the Health and Care visa settlement route for care workers to 15 years risks destabilising an already fragile adult social care system. With 385,000 international workers currently filling critical roles, 111,000 vacancies still recorded in 2024/25, and demand projected to require 470,000 additional posts by 2040, the policy would likely drive workers out of the sector — or out of the UK altogether. It also creates structural imbalance with the NHS, where some roles may benefit from shorter settlement routes, incentivising movement away from social care and increasing hospital pressures.

Given social care's £77.8bn annual economic contribution, its essential role in hospital discharge and community support, and the wider impact on unpaid carers and workforce participation, SESCOA argues that **settlement reform is not merely an immigration issue but a systemic economic and societal risk**. Our full consultation response can be accessed [here](#).

What We Are Asking Providers to Do

Political engagement now moves into a critical phase. We are asking providers to:

- Write to your local constituency MP – particularly Labour MPs — to explain the local workforce impact and press for safeguards for social care. Your staff and service users are all constituents whose voices matter in this debate.
- Request face-to-face or virtual meetings to explain the local impact on services, workforce stability and vulnerable people
- Copy SESCOA into any responses you receive so we can coordinate regional intelligence

Template Letter for MPs and Council Leaders

To support you, we have published a template letter that can be adapted and sent to MPs and local council leaders.

The template letter and full briefing materials are available [here](#).

Real Stories Matter

Personal testimony is one of the most powerful tools in influencing policymakers.

We are seeking:

- Employers willing to explain the operational impact of these proposals
- Sponsored overseas workers willing to share (confidentially if preferred) how changes to settlement routes would affect their lives

If you are willing to share your experience, please contact us at: hello@sesca.org.uk

A Defining Moment for Social Care

We urge all providers to remain engaged.

SESCA will continue to provide timely updates as the Government moves towards a final decision.

SESCA Policy Briefing Examines Future of Health & Care Worker Visa Route

We have published a policy briefing, ***The Health and Care Worker Visa Route – Policy and Context***, examining the shifts in international recruitment policy between 2022 and 2025.

Drawing on Home Office visa statistics and Skills for Care workforce data, analysed by SESCOA, the briefing tracks trends in international recruitment and assesses the impact of tightening immigration rules on workforce stability. It highlights the steep fall in new visa grants for care roles, increased compliance pressures, and growing divergence between NHS and non-NHS recruitment capacity.

The paper also considers the Government's proposed "Earned Settlement" reforms and explains why these may further destabilise the social care workforce at a time of sustained vacancies and rising demand.

[Read the full policy briefing here](#)

Record £30bn Surplus – Yet Southeast Social Care Still Left Exposed

SESCA has responded to the latest ONS *Public Sector Finances* figures, which show a record £30.4 billion public sector surplus in January 2026.

While borrowing has eased compared to recent years, Eddy McDowall, Treasurer of SESCOA and Chief Executive of the Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers, warned that fiscal pressures remain significant and that the upcoming Spring Forecast presents a clear choice for Government about where financial pressure falls.

SESCA is urging the Chancellor to protect real-terms social care funding, provide multi-year certainty for councils, and fully fund workforce pay and capacity pressures — rather than allowing adult social care to absorb further strain.

The Alliance maintains that adult social care should be treated as critical national infrastructure, requiring stable, long-term investment.

[Read the full story here](#)

Displaced Worker Recruitment Scheme Evaluation

An independent evaluation has confirmed the substantial regional impact of the SESCO Displaced Worker Recruitment Scheme during a period of major immigration change and sustained workforce pressure in adult social care.

Based on comprehensive data including interviews with 200+ displaced workers and 80+ employers, the evaluation assessed employment outcomes, compliance confidence and the effectiveness of SESCO's support model.

Key Impact

Data to December 2025; direct matches updated February 2026.

- **1,000+** providers applied (70%+ of licensed providers)
- **500+** providers assured and registered
- **150+** providers recruited displaced workers
- **2,000+** valid worker applications
- **1,300+** workers screened and pooled
- **450+** displaced workers supported into new sponsored employment

More than two-thirds of directly matched workers said they would have been unlikely to secure sponsorship without SESCO.

"Being connected to SESCO has helped to boost my confidence level at getting a job."

Providers reported stronger recruitment outcomes:

"The pre-screening is reliable and saves sifting through what is often an overwhelming number of applicants."

"The grants mitigate the cost — without them we would have pulled back."

Information, Advice & Guidance

Alongside recruitment, the scheme delivered:

- 50+ worker training programmes (900+ attendances)
- 16 provider workshops & helpline sessions (1,000+ attendances)
- Ongoing guidance and a bulletin reaching 2,500+ stakeholders

"...I always read the IR updates — they are very important in keeping abreast of what is happening." (Provider)

"The English language training has been very good. I feel I am a better communicator as a result." (Displaced Care Worker)

Funding Confirmed for 2026/27

The evaluation concludes the scheme has retained skilled overseas care workers, strengthened compliant sponsorship and supported workforce stability across the Southeast.

As above, funding has now been confirmed for extension into 2026/27, with further details to follow.

We thank the providers, workers and partners whose collaboration has made this possible — a strong example of integrated partnership working across the region.

April 2026 NMW Increase Impact on Sponsored Staff

From 1 April 2026, the National Minimum Wage for over-21s rises to £12.71 per hour (up from £12.21). While the Home Office has yet to confirm the revised minimum salary threshold for Health and Care Worker visa holders, this is expected to increase from £12.82 to approximately £13.50 per hour (confirmation anticipated March 2026).

Providers should review recruitment plans, sponsorship timelines and pay structures now, particularly where differing rates between sponsored and non-sponsored staff may affect budgets, workforce morale and pay alignment. Further guidance will follow once the official sponsored rate is confirmed.

84 Providers Attend Latest International Recruitment Webinar

We were pleased to welcome 84 adult social care providers to our International Recruitment Webinar on 12 February 2026, reflecting continued demand for clarity around sponsorship compliance and evolving immigration rules.

Delivered by immigration specialist Edward O'Brien (Lester Aldridge Solicitors) alongside Erica Lockhart MBE (SESCA Chair), the session covered recent and proposed Immigration Rule changes, compliance and enforcement trends and preparing for Home Office visits. The key message was clear: scrutiny is tightening, timelines are increasing, and sponsors must be operationally prepared.

[Slides from the session are available to download here.](#)

Legal Helpline – Now Live!

FREE Legal Advice from Leading Immigration Specialists

Our FREE legal helpline is now live.

Providers are entitled to a Free 30-minute, no obligation, phone consultation with an immigration specialist at Lester Aldridge Solicitors.

Phone lines are open from 9am-5pm, Mon-Fri (with an answer phone operating outside these hours).



You can also email Lester Aldridge using the dedicated address below.

Phone: 01202 786126

Email: sescahelp@LA-Law.com

The service is open to all CQC-registered adult social care providers operating in the South-East.

Displaced Worker Recruitment Scheme

Supporting Providers to Recruit In-Country Migrant Care Workers



Over 450 Displaced Care Workers Placed into New Employment Already!

Receive £6,000 Funding per Care Worker

How it Works...

We have a large pool of experienced and committed migrant care staff across the South-East – **including car drivers** – who are available immediately.

We'll introduce you to pre-vetted candidates for interview.

For every successful hire, you'll receive **up to £6,000 in funding** to support your recruitment costs.



Don't Miss Out – Apply Now!

For instructions on how to apply, including our grant funding terms:

[**APPLY HERE**](#)