

International Recruitment

Bulletin 44
31st March 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.

Project Update

We would like to recognise the exceptional efforts of colleagues across the project and regional hubs in managing a significant surge of 2025/26 grant applications submitted ahead of the recent deadline.

At the time of writing, **over 500 displaced care workers** have now been supported into new sponsored employment through the scheme — a clear reflection of the impact being delivered across the region.

Grant Processing Update

As a reminder, 2025/26 grant funding is structured in two stages:

- Part 1 (£3,000 per worker) payable once a Certificate of Sponsorship has been assigned for a worker recruited through the scheme
- Part 2 (up to £3,000 per worker) payable after 8 weeks' sustained employment, subject to eligibility and verification checks

We are currently processing the final Part 1 grant payments for matches made before 20 March 2026. Currently, Part 2 grants are not being processed. Once all Part 1 payments have been completed, eligible providers will be invited to apply for the second part of the grant.

Looking Ahead to 2026/27

Whilst the SESCO Displaced Worker Recruitment Scheme looks set to continue into 2026/27, we are awaiting formal guidance from the Department of Health & Social Care.

We hope to provide a clearer update towards the end of April.

Ongoing Scheme Activity

- Providers can still apply to join the scheme, and assurance reviews are continuing
- Assured providers can continue to recruit from our existing pool of displaced workers
- Workers can still apply to the scheme; however, new applicants will not be added to the active pool until future arrangements are confirmed

No Increase to Sponsored Worker Minimum Salary Threshold Despite NMW Increase

From 1 April 2026, the National Minimum Wage for over-21s rises to £12.71 per hour (up from £12.21).

Further to our previous update, there will be no increase to the minimum salary threshold for Health and Care Worker visa holders from April 2026. The rate will remain at **£12.82 per hour**, sitting just above the new National Minimum Wage.

This is positive news for providers, avoiding additional cost pressures and payroll adjustments for sponsored staff. It is, however, unusual for the sponsored rate not to increase alongside the National Minimum Wage, and an increase later within the current financial year cannot be ruled out.

We will monitor and update as soon as any changes are confirmed.

Health & Care Worker Visa and Sponsor Licence Fees Increasing from April 2026

The Home Office has confirmed that visa fees — including Sponsor Licence fees — will increase by 6.5% from 8 April 2026. This applies across all visa routes, including the Health and Care Worker visa, as well as dependants, students and graduate visas.

Updated Costs (from 8 April 2026)

Health & Care Worker Visa

- Up to 3 years: £304 → £324 (+£20)
- Over 3 years: £590 → £628 (+£38)

Applies to both main applicants and dependants

Sponsor Licence Fees

- Large sponsor: £1,579 → £1,682 (+£103)
- Small sponsor: £574 → £611 (+£37)

Other Related Fees

- Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS): £525 (no change)
- Immigration Skills Charge (ISC):
 - £480 (small organisations/charities)
 - £1,320 (larger organisations) — per worker, per year
- Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS): Not applicable to Health & Care visa holders and dependants
- Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) Application Fee: £3,029 → £3,226

Key Points for Providers

- Employers must pay CoS and sponsorship-related costs
- Workers typically pay visa application fees (unless covered by the employer)
- Applications submitted before 8 April 2026 will be processed at the current fee, even if decided later

For further information, visit the [UK Visas and Immigration \(UKVI\) website](#).

Earned Settlement Reforms – Update



The proposed Earned Settlement reforms represent the most significant immigration policy developments facing adult social care, with far-reaching implications for the thousands of internationally recruited professionals currently working across our sector.

Under the proposals, the pathway to indefinite leave to remain for sponsored workers could be extended well beyond the current 5-year route — potentially up to 15 years — and made subject to more stringent conditions. Full details are available **on our website**.

The consultation on these proposals closed in February. An update had been anticipated in April; however, with more than 200,000 responses submitted, it is likely that the Government's response — and confirmation of the final direction of travel — may now take longer than initially expected.

We know that many providers and stakeholders across the sector engaged actively with the consultation, clearly setting out the potential risks to workforce stability and continuity of care. We remain hopeful that this feedback will be carefully considered and that a more balanced and proportionate approach will be taken.

We will continue to monitor developments closely and provide further updates as soon as more information becomes available.

UKVI Crackdown on Care Sponsor Licences: What Providers Need to Know



As previously reported, we're witnessing a sharp rise in UKVI sponsor licence revocations. The compliance environment is becoming far stricter, driven by:

- **Intelligence-led monitoring:** UKVI is using HMRC payroll data, SMS activity and cross-government data matching to identify issues remotely
- **Reduced tolerance for breaches:** Errors such as late reporting, incomplete HR records or weak right-to-work checks are now leading directly to suspension or revocation
- **Mandatory revocation:** A 2025 Court of Appeal ruling confirms licences can be revoked without consideration of business or workforce impact
- **Stronger enforcement:** Civil penalties have increased and enforcement activity has expanded

Why Adult Social Care is Under Scrutiny

Focus has intensified due to risks around underpayment, roles not matching CoS, potential third-party labour supply arrangements, and the vulnerability of sponsored workers.

Common Risks

- **Salary non-compliance:** pay falling below required thresholds once unpaid hours, travel time or deductions are factored in
- **Role mismatch / “genuine vacancy” concerns:** job duties not aligning with what was stated on the Certificate of Sponsorship
- **Poor right-to-work processes:** missing, inconsistent or incorrectly conducted checks
- **Failure to report changes:** delays or omissions in updating SMS for changes to role, salary, hours or work location
- **Weak HR systems:** incomplete personnel files, lack of audit trail, poor absence and attendance monitoring
- **Prohibited cost recovery:** recouping recruitment or sponsorship costs from workers (particularly for CoS issued from 31 December 2024)
- **Third-party supply risks:** arrangements that resemble labour provision rather than direct employment

Consequences

Immediate licence revocation leads to loss of all sponsored workers (typically curtailed to 60 days) and inability to recruit internationally.

Recommendations

In light of the increased level of enforcement, providers should ensure the following:

- **Strong governance and oversight:** appoint a senior compliance lead and undertake regular internal audits aligned to UKVI requirements
- **Accurate payroll and role alignment:** reconcile payroll data against Certificates of Sponsorship, ensuring salaries, job roles and contractual terms are fully compliant
- **Robust right-to-work and visa management:** carry out compliant checks and maintain clear systems for tracking visa status and expiry dates
- **Timely and accurate reporting:** update the Sponsor Management System promptly for any changes, with a clear and auditable record of all actions
- **Compliant recruitment practices:** ensure no prohibited costs are passed to workers and avoid any arrangements that could be interpreted as third-party labour supply

This article summarises a news post published on the SESCO website on 3 March 2026.

The full news post is available [here](#).

With thanks to Sabina Kauser, Corporate Immigration Partner at Ward Hadaway, for her valuable insight.

Legal Helpline – Extended!

FREE Legal Advice from Leading Immigration Specialists

Due to popular demand, we have extended our FREE legal helpline service.

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.

SESCA Conference 2026 – Save the Date



We are excited to announce that the
SESCA Conference 2026 will take place on:

Wednesday 24th June 2026

Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher

A strong programme is in development, with expert speakers covering key issues shaping the adult social care sector, together with a diverse range of exhibitors.

**Further details, including booking arrangements,
will be announced shortly.**