

“No Dependents Allowed, Only Skilled Workers”—the British Government said”. The impact of the new immigration policy (i.e., the five-point plan) on businesses and HR in a post-Brexit era: the implications for future talent in the UK Health and Social Care Sector.

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The Home Secretary, James Cleverly, announced on December 4, 2023, a five-point plan to curb the abuse of the immigration system, which he said was “far too high.” “Enough is enough.” “Immigration policy must be fair, legal, and sustainable.” Mr. Cleverly said.

The announcement of the five-point plan by the Home Secretary sent shockwaves through businesses and HR departments across the country, particularly in the health and social care sector. With the new immigration policy explicitly stating that no dependents would be allowed, and only skilled workers would be permitted, concerns were raised about the future talent pool in this crucial sector. The implications of this policy change for the UK’s ability to attract and retain skilled healthcare professionals became a pressing concern and a topic for intense discussion and analysis for both employers and those relying on these services. This realisation sparked a wave of concern and debate, with stakeholders questioning the long-term viability of the sector and the quality of care that could be provided.

The changes will include raising the minimum salary needed for skilled overseas workers from £26,200 to £38,700, preventing dependents from entering the UK, and making it far harder for employers to bring in overseas staff, including in the NHS and social care sector. Together, this plan will mean that around 300,000 people who were eligible to come to the UK last year will not be able to do so in the future. The government said it will tighten the Health and Care Visa, which has seen a significant number of visas granted to care workers and their dependents. Again, care providers in England will now only be able to sponsor migrant workers if they are undertaking activities regulated by the Care Quality Commission.

In addition to the new salary requirements, the government said the five-point plan would be:

- 1) To ban care workers bringing family dependents to the UK.

2) To end companies being able to pay workers 20% less than the going rate for jobs on a shortage occupation list. Thus, the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) will be replaced with a new Immigration Salary List (ISL), with a significant reduction in the number of qualifying roles.

3) To increase the annual charge foreign workers, pay to use the NHS from £624 to £1,035.

4) To raise the minimum income for family visas to £38,700 from £18,600 next spring (April 2024) to ensure [British and settled] people only bring dependents whom they can “support financially.” After widespread negative reactions to the plan, the Home Office announced a soft U-turn and said that the £38,700 earnings threshold for new family visas will not, as originally announced, apply from April 2024. The initial threshold will rise to £29,000, with a phased increase to £34,500 later this year and then to £38,700 in early 2025.

5) To ask the government’s migration adviser to review the graduate visa route to “prevent abuse.”

The new immigration policy announced by the British Government is expected to have a significant impact on businesses and HR in the post-Brexit era. With the aim of reducing the number of migrant workers and their dependents entering the UK, it poses challenges for employers, and business leaders, particularly in the NHS and social care sector. These industries heavily rely on overseas staff to meet the demands of an ageing population and shortages of domestic talent. The implications of this policy could result in significant talent shortages and potential strains on the social care sector, affecting the quality and accessibility of healthcare services, particularly the ability to recruit and retain qualified professionals. The sector’s future prospects for attracting a diverse and skilled workforce are now uncertain, raising the need for alternative strategies and investments in domestic talent development. It remains to be seen how the government plans to address these challenges and ensure a sustainable and fair immigration system in the post-Brexit era.

With Brexit issues looming, businesses and HR are already facing uncertainties, and the new immigration policy adds to the challenges they will have to navigate in a post-Brexit era. Without a steady influx of overseas staff, the healthcare industry may struggle to keep up with the growing demands of an ageing population. As countries compete for the same pool of skilled workers, the cost of attracting and retaining qualified professionals will likely increase. The potential talent shortages could lead to longer wait times for patients seeking care and a decrease in the overall quality of healthcare services.

This move aims to ensure that only skilled and qualified care workers are brought into the country, guaranteeing high-quality care for those in need. However, the restriction will exacerbate the existing shortage of staff in the NHS and social care sector, putting additional strain on an already stretched health care system, and tightening immigration rules will only make it more difficult to fill these positions. The shortage of healthcare professionals in underserved areas will worsen as a result of

tightening immigration rules. Attracting and retaining talent from abroad is crucial to bridging the staffing gap and ensuring adequate care for all. Immigration is something that has been shown to save sectors in the past; immigration saved the NHS post-World War 2. In a similar way now, immigration is saving the social care sector – <https://www.caremanagementmatters.co.uk/care-sector-reacts-to-immigration-measures/>. There is a need to highlight the importance of recognising the invaluable contributions that migrant workers have made to the healthcare sector. A more inclusive and diverse approach should be taken to attract and retain international talent, which is crucial for providing culturally competent care to a diverse patient population.

The emphasis on only allowing highly skilled workers overlooks the important contributions made by support staff and those in lower-skilled healthcare roles. These individuals play a crucial role in providing essential care and support, and restricting their entry into the country could lead to further strain on the already burdened system. Many of these individuals bring unique skills, knowledge, fresh ideas, innovation and perspectives that enhance the overall quality of care provided. By limiting their access to opportunities within the healthcare sector, the UK risk losing out on their expertise and potentially compromising patient outcomes. The healthcare industry relies on a diverse workforce to effectively serve a multicultural population. Restricting immigration could hinder efforts to create a more inclusive and culturally competent healthcare system. Therefore, policymakers must carefully consider the potential consequences of tightening immigration rules and prioritise strategies that support both domestic workforce development and the integration of foreign healthcare professionals. Again, the lack of qualified professionals in the healthcare industry may discourage young talent from pursuing careers in this field, further exacerbating the shortage.

Rather than tightening immigration rules, efforts should be made to ensure fair treatment, support, and opportunities for all healthcare professionals, regardless of their background or country of origin. The focus should be on addressing the root causes of the shortage, such as increasing funding for the NHS and care sector, enhancing pay scales, providing better working hours and conditions, investing in training and development for domestic talents and workers, and offering incentives such as career progression opportunities and incentivizing young individuals to pursue careers in the healthcare sector, which can make these jobs more attractive to both domestic and international candidates, ensuring that there are enough qualified professionals to meet the needs of the population, and ensuring the long-term sustainability and quality of healthcare services for all. By offering scholarships and training programmes, for example, the healthcare sector can invest in developing a skilled workforce domestically, reducing its reliance on foreign professionals. Tightening immigration rules could have unintended consequences, such as discouraging foreign healthcare workers who are already in the country from staying and contributing to the system. This could further exacerbate the staffing crisis and hinder the delivery of quality care. Hence, striking a balance between immigration restrictions and proactive measures to address the workforce shortage is essential to maintaining the quality of care in the healthcare system.

One way the healthcare and social care sector can address the workforce shortage is by investing in and partnering with educational institutions to create specialised education and training programmes that develop skilled professionals domestically. By providing opportunities for individuals to acquire the necessary skills and qualifications, the sector can reduce its reliance on

foreign professionals. Additionally, by offering scholarships and internships, the sector can attract and nurture talented individuals who are passionate about healthcare. In addition to investing in a skilled workforce domestically, the healthcare sector can also focus on initiatives to attract and retain foreign professionals. This can include streamlining the visa and right to work processes for healthcare workers, offering incentives such as sponsorship or career advancement opportunities, and providing cultural and language support. This can help retain skilled professionals in the industry.

By taking these proactive measures, the sector can reduce its reliance on foreign professionals while ensuring that the healthcare system is adequately staffed and capable of delivering high-quality care. However, it is crucial to strike a balance between tightening immigration rules and implementing proactive measures. By finding this balance between immigration restrictions and proactive measures, the healthcare system can ensure that it has a diverse and qualified workforce to continue delivering high-quality care to its patients. Therefore, it is vital to consider both approaches to ensure the maintenance of high-quality care in the healthcare system.

With dependents being limited by the new changes, the British Government is making it harder for businesses and HR leaders in the health and social care sectors to recruit foreign workers. If the government now wants to move away from international recruitment as the solution to curbing the abuse of the immigration system and fixing the health and social care workforce crisis, it must act swiftly and invest in improving pay, benefits and conditions, training, and development to drive domestic recruitment.

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