

Westminster Hall debate on e-petition 118060 relating to the income threshold for non-EU citizens settling in the UK

With a membership of more than 430,000 registered nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students, health care assistants and nurse cadets, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the voice of nursing across the UK and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world. RCN members work in a variety of hospital and community settings in the NHS and the independent sector. The RCN promotes patient and nursing interests on a wide range of issues by working closely with the Government, the UK parliaments and other national and European political institutions, trade unions, professional bodies and voluntary organisations.

Key summary

- x Changes to the income threshold for indefinite leave to remain for non-European Economic Area (non-EEA) citizens would have a detrimental impact on nurses from outside Europe. It is essential that the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) keep nursing on Shortage Occupation List (SOL) until a long term solution is found.
- x We recognise that maintaining nursing on the SOL is only a short term solution, a long term plan where the UK becomes self-sufficient in terms of producing the right number of graduate nurses and retaining experienced staff, is absolutely necessary.
- x Before the Home Office decision to put nursing on the SOL, the RCN calculated that up to 3,365 nurses in the UK would have potentially been affected by the £35,000 requirement at an estimated cost of £20.19 million to the NHS.

-EEA admissions¹ ±a 300 per cent increase on the previous twelve months. This clearly demonstrates the critical and necessary contribution nurses from outside of Europe make to the health care workforce.

- x There is already a severe shortage of nurses in the NHS and elsewhere. Failing to retain non-EEA nurses will further add to the current shortages in the nursing workforce and potentially compromise the quality of care for patients.
- x To earn £35,000 a year, a nurse would have to be in the middle to upper band 7 on the Agenda for Change pay scale. The vast majority of nurses who are recruited from

Nursing staff recruited from overseas, both from the EEA and non-EEA, make up a significant proportion of the nursing workforce. Research conducted by the RCN found that there was a steep percentage rise in non-EEA admissions to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register in 2015. In the first ten months of 2015, there were more than 1,268 new non-EEA admissions⁴ ±a 300 per cent increase on the previous twelve months. This suggests that providers are increasingly looking to fill the vacancy gap with non-EEA recruited nurses.

Impact of the income threshold

Any non-EEA nurse who enters the UK workforce while the profession is on the SOL or is already sponsored to work in the UK at that time, is exempt from the income threshold. Were the MAC to decide to remove nursing from the SOL, we would return to a situation of potentially thousands of nurses being at risk of having to vacate the UK health system and leave the UK after five years when they inevitably cannot meet the minimum salary requirements. As a consequence, potentially large numbers of experienced, and established non-EEA nurses would have to start leaving the UK by 2021. This is storing up significant challenges for the future.

The cost implications of the threshold

Before the Home Office decision to put nursing on the SOL, the RCN calculated that up to 3,365 nurses in the UK would have potentially been affected by the £35,000 threshold at an estimated cost to the NHS of £20.19million⁵ in recruitment costs.

If nursing is removed from the SOL, the figures for future years are potentially even more worrying, particularly if overseas recruitment continues to rise as a result of a shortage of home-grown nurses and a crackdown on agency nurse spending.

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