

A proposed new UK visa could attract South African doctors and nurses – Business Tech 2 December 2019

The UK Government has announced that it intends to create a fast-track route for migrants in the health service.

Immigration consultants Breytenbachs said that the new fast-track visa has been dubbed the 'NHS visa' as it aims to attract more migrants to work in the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK.

The UK Government hopes that this new visa will offset a possible fall in NHS workers from the UK, due to Brexit, it said.

“The NHS visa will allow the UK Government to control immigration, while at the same time ensuring that there is not a skills shortage in the health service.

About 153,000 of 1.2 million health workers are non-British, and critics have said the end of freedom of movement for EU citizens after Brexit would deprive the NHS, one of the world's largest employers, of a vital pool of workers, Reuters reported.

“The visa will cost £464 (R8,800). The cost is half the normal visa fee. The visa process will also be fast-tracked, and persons can expect decisions on their visas within two weeks.

“Applicants for the NHS visa will be liable to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge, which is £400 (R7,500) per year. It is, however, not clear yet, whether the NHS visa will operate outside the Tier 2 immigration route,” it said.

Other visas

The NHS visa comes in the aftermath of some other exciting announcements for the UK immigration landscape, said Breytenbachs.

“In the second half of 2019, the UK Government has announced its intention to create a new fast-track visa for individuals with skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

“They also intend to create a new immigration route for overseas graduates, which will enable them to stay for two years after their studies.”

It comes at a time when healthcare professionals in South Africa have expressed concerns about the incoming National Health Insurance.

Concerns include how it will be funded, the quality of care, and the future of private medical aid schemes in the country.

Trade Union Solidarity recently published a report showing that as many as one in five healthcare workers have already taken steps to emigrate, and a further 41% would consider emigrating when the NHI is implemented.