

**Fran Heathcote**  
**General Secretary**

10 April 2025

The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP

Prime Minister

10 Downing Street

London

SW1A 2AA

**Sent by post and email**

Dear Prime Minister,

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union is the largest Civil Service trade union representing over 200,000 members across the service, of which over 50,000 work in the largest government department, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

We are writing to you regarding an urgent issue with the Skilled Workers Visa and PCS members working for the DWP.

In April 2024, you will be aware, the previous Conservative Government made changes to the UK Home Office immigration rules, and in particular to the Skilled Worker Visa sponsorship salary thresholds. These changes have resulted in what we believe may be an unintended consequence for hundreds of DWP workers, that is having a devastating impact on them and their families as they find themselves in extremely distressing situations, worrying about their jobs and their families' future in the UK.

Due to both the very low levels of pay in the Department, and an anomaly in the calculation of hours worked, PCS members, who have previously worked on Graduate Visas, following completion of university degree courses are now denied opportunity to access a Skilled Worker Visa and remain working in DWP. We have already seen highly productive staff dismissed from work and put under threat of deportation. The overwhelming majority here are African or Asian colleagues.

Pay in DWP is so far behind other government departments, our EOIs (Executive Officers) outside of central London do not earn enough to qualify for the Skilled Worker Visa as they do not meet the salary threshold of £15.88 per hour. We believe this unintended consequence has arisen as the Skilled Worker Visa: Extend your visa -

GOV.UK policy allows for a lower going rate for Civil Servants when extending a Skilled Worker Visa that has been held for twelve months or more (guidance states "if you got your first certificate of sponsorship before 4 April 2024"). This lower going rate is clearly there to allow experienced staff that are already working as Civil Servants, to remain, yet this lower rate does not cover our graduates here, although they are already proven skilled workers. Guidance also allows for the 'new entrant' salary threshold £30,960 or 70% of the 'going rate' for your job if you are currently holding a Graduate Visa but again, the anomaly lies in DWP paying staff for lunch breaks, 42 hours for 37 hours worked.

PCS has proposed that DWP consider the introduction of a non-standard contract so that DWP may implement a contract variation for current employees allowing for the salary requirements under Skilled Worker Visa Scheme to be satisfied. DWP have refused to take such a course of action stating this would amount to "circumnavigating Home Office Guidance". PCS are of the understanding that a contract variation is legitimate and would pass any legal test. The National Audit Office (Supporting people to work through jobcentres) states that "DWP has not had enough work coaches to meet the expected demand for jobcentre support in the past three years, with shortfalls in five of its seven regions in 2023-24", quoting a shortfall of 2,100. PCS believe this to be a conservative estimate, with the real shortfall much higher. It is therefore incredible that as DWP is facing a staffing crisis, Government's own rules are forcing five hundred or more experienced, highly qualified university educated staff that are delivering services to the most vulnerable people in the UK, out of the Department. Hundreds of its own staff that Government, DWP and other colleagues can ill afford to lose.

Recent Government announcements have focused on helping people back into work and increased commitments to support the unemployed, this cannot be delivered without experienced staff and announcements about supporting people back into work, are at odds with the treatment of these members.

Even under the threat of Home Office guidance, our members remain committed to delivering public service for DWP, they want to continue with their careers in the Civil Service. We have gathered testimonies from members, one of whom attended a parliamentary event on 26th March as a Civil Servant, that has within weeks been refused a Skilled Worker visa, been dismissed from work, and is to be forced to leave the UK.

We would ask that you please read the following from Farouk Ahmed:

*"I am writing this statement not as a statistic or a name on a form, but as a person, a grateful guest who came to the United Kingdom with hope, purpose, and a heart full of ambition to contribute positively to this great nation. I humbly ask that you take a moment to hear my story.*

*On March 28, 2025, my visa FLOTTR application was refused. That day, my world fell silent. I had worked hard, followed every rule, contributed to society, and built a life here. Now, I face the unimaginable task of leaving behind the place I have come to love, the place I proudly call home.*

*I arrived in the UK to pursue a Master of Science in Business Analytics at the University of Stirling. That journey was not just academic it was a significant financial and emotional investment. I paid over £22,000 in tuition alone, funded entirely through personal sacrifice and family support. I never took a penny from the government. I came not to take, but to give.*

*And give, I did.*

*After completing my studies, I sought ways to meaningfully contribute to society. I found that purpose working in public service, first in customer service roles, and later, in one of the most critical and sensitive areas of the Department for Work and Pensions: the Child Maintenance Service.*

*As an Enforcement Case Manager, I dedicate each day to fighting for children across the UK, children who are often forgotten when a parent refuses to pay their share. My role involves holding non-compliant paying parents accountable, recovering arrears, and ensuring children receive the financial support they are rightfully owed. These aren't just numbers to me they are children who deserve stability, dignity, and a fair chance at life.*

*I've helped secure thousands in unpaid support. I've built partnerships, challenged injustice, and improved processes to make our work more effective. I've done all of this with pride because I believed in the values of fairness and compassion that the UK represents.*

*But I am more than my work. I built a life here. I made friends who became family. I paid taxes, rent, and bills. I supported the economy through my spending and supported my community with integrity. I never broke the law. I have always respected this country, its people, and its processes.*

*Now, I am being told to leave.*

*This decision not only ends my service in the UK it puts my family at risk. My elderly parents in Nigeria depend on me financially to cover their medical care. They are unwell and vulnerable, and without my support, I fear for their wellbeing. At the same time, I carry personal debt from the cost of my education and daily living. Without a job, I face financial devastation and the guilt of being unable to care for my parents or repay what I owe.*



*I write this not to beg, but to be heard.*

*I am a law-abiding, hardworking individual who has made a tangible impact in the lives of British families. I came here through the front door, contributed to the public sector, and asked for nothing in return but the chance to continue building the life I've started.*

*I understand the need for immigration controls and fairness. But I ask where is the fairness in asking someone who contributes, serves, and follows every rule to leave everything behind?*

*Let compassion and reason guide this country's decisions. Let the people who serve it remain and continue to do good. I still believe in the UK. I came to study in the UK that welcomed me, the UK I've given everything to.*

*Thank you for your time, and for hearing not just my words, but the heart behind them.*

*Farouk Ahmed"*

Farouk is one of many of the human beings behind the statistics that, but for being in a low paying Department, and being paid for lunch breaks, would still be working in the DWP.

Prime Minister, we are asking for your urgent intervention in this matter, in an attempt to prevent a wholly unnecessary and cruel escalation for these individuals and their families.

If a solution cannot be found, then the government risks undermining its stated aims of supporting people into work and providing opportunities to its citizens to progress in their working lives.

We look forward to your urgent attention in this matter, and would be happy to meet with yourself or the appropriate minister to try to resolve the situation these dedicated Civil Servants find themselves in.

Yours Sincerely,



**Fran Heathcote**  
PCS General Secretary



**Angela Grant**  
PCS DWP President