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Sent via email

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BASW Diaspora Social Workers Special Interest Group (SIG) Statement on Proposed Increases to Renewal, Restoration, and Scrutiny Fees

The BASW Diaspora Social Workers Special Interest Group (SIG) represents the voices of social workers who have qualified outside the UK, alongside those from diaspora backgrounds within the country. We speak on behalf of several diaspora-led social work associations from across the globe, united in our commitment to advocating for equity, fairness, and ethical practice in UK social work. <https://basw.co.uk/support/groups-and-networks/special-interest-groups/diaspora-special-interest-group>

With over 122,000 registered social workers in the UK, approximately 10% are internationally qualified, many of whom are diaspora social workers making invaluable contributions to the sector, particularly in areas facing acute workforce shortages. We are deeply concerned by the proposed increases in annual renewal fees, restoration fees, and particularly the scrutiny fee for overseas applicants.

Disproportionate Financial Impact

The proposed 33% rise in annual renewal fees comes at a time when social work salaries have declined in real terms. Social workers across the UK are already grappling with a cost-of-living crisis, and these fee hikes will only deepen the financial strain on an already stretched workforce.

The increase in restoration fees is equally troubling. It risks deterring experienced professionals, many of whom left the register for personal reasons or temporary career breaks, from returning to the profession, at a time when their expertise is urgently needed.

However, the most alarming proposal is the more than 35% increase in the scrutiny fee for overseas applicants. This hike disproportionately affects social workers from low- and middle-income countries, many of whom aspire to contribute their skills and experience to the UK workforce.

To illustrate:

- In India, the proposed fee increase would equate to two to three months of a social worker's salary.
- In Ghana, it could be up to three months' salary.

For these professionals, this fee is not just a financial burden, it is a barrier. It undermines the very social work values of equity, fairness, and social justice that the profession upholds. It is ethically indefensible to ask aspiring social workers from poorer nations to shoulder the burden of balancing regulatory costs in the UK.

A Question of Justice and Sustainability

There is no transparent rationale provided for the drastic increase in the scrutiny fee. Given the growing number of previously assessed international qualifications, the scrutiny process should now be more efficient and cost-effective, not more expensive.

In addition to scrutiny fees, overseas social workers already face high visa costs, relocation expenses, qualification assessments, and unpaid work placements, often alongside requirements for UK experience that are difficult to fulfil. These cumulative demands make them more vulnerable to exploitation and financial hardship. Adding a steep fee increase only widens this inequality.

A Risk to the Workforce and Service Users

The UK is in the midst of a workforce crisis. Skills for Care reported over 131,000 vacancies in 2023/24 across the social care sector. Overseas social workers are not just filling gaps, they are enriching the profession with diverse perspectives, cultural competence, and resilience. Penalising them with exorbitant fees undermines both workforce sustainability and service quality.

Our Call to Action

We urge Social Work England to reconsider this fee increase and to explore more equitable, sustainable alternatives, such as:

- Phased fee adjustments over time
- Subsidies for applicants in hard-to-recruit areas
- Employer-supported registration or fee-waiver schemes

It is vital that we do not lose sight of our professional values and commitment to inclusivity and fairness. Supporting overseas applicants is not only the right thing to do, it is essential to the continued strength and diversity of the UK's social work profession.

As a BASW Diaspora SIG we have been advocating and creating possibilities for not just justice for overseas social workers in the UK, but also providing vital support to them. We have also created recruitment and retention standards for overseas social workers, which have previously been endorsed by Social Work England and we implore for you to continue supporting the standards to ensure positive experiences for social worker from overseas. Here is a link:

https://basw.co.uk/sites/default/files/2023-09/induction_standards_final.pdf

We appreciate the opportunity to raise these concerns and hope that Social Work England will engage in meaningful dialogue to co-develop a more just and inclusive approach.

We look forward to hearing from you.

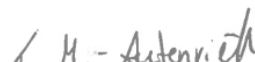
Kind regards,

Co-chair Priya David



and

Co-Chair Susanne Machin-Autenrieth



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