

LAS Trust is warning it faces a ‘mass exodus’ of its Australian Paramedics because of concerns over their visa status when they return home on leave in the coming months.

Heather Lawrence, London Ambulance Service Trust Chair, [cautioned the Board on Tuesday](#) that there is a “small window of opportunity which is closing by the day”, to address the issue facing its Australian Paramedics and urged other Executives to raise the issue with the Government.

She said: “This isn’t a Trust issue. Because [this is to do with visas], it’s Home Office or the Foreign Office. It’s up there and it needs to be at that [Board level] because we will have a mass exodus... It really needs to be an urgent action [for the Trust].”

Australian Paramedics wishing to return home would need to quarantine at both ends of the journey, once travelling abroad from the UK for holidays becomes legal again.

[Under current rules](#), travellers entering Australia must quarantine at a designated facility for 14 days, while people entering England from abroad must quarantine for 10. [According to visa rules](#), employers need to stop sponsoring a worker who takes more than four weeks’ unpaid leave in a year.

LAS told *HSJ* it has roughly 500 Australian paramedics, which comprises about a quarter of all Paramedics in the service.

Trust leaders are concerned the rules would very likely affect workers’ UK visa sponsorship. John Martin, [who became the LAS’ new chief paramedic and quality officer earlier this month](#), told the meeting that workers would need a new visa when they came back from leave.

LAS Chief Executive, Garrett Emmerson, said: “I think that, if we need to engage on the visa issue we have, or we have previously had, avenues into the Foreign Office, or wherever it is, to agree issues on visas.

“We ought to be escalating those as quickly as possible, but we’ll take it away.”

Ms Lawrence, who urged Mr Emmerson to put the issue on his Agenda, asked him to take it up with the Department of Health and Social Care as well because it is a “Covid response issue of extraordinary circumstances”.

She added: “We need to be giving that message to people before they have booked their flights.”

Ms Lawrence added that, while the Trust always expected some of its Australian staff to leave, Covid had exaggerated the issue as some workers who may have been more inclined to stay in the UK after meeting a partner would not have done so.

"That's probably more difficult in Covid... because they have been isolating if they hadn't already got one, so I think, you know, we could assume that more are going to go," she said.

HSJ approached the Home Office for comment on Tuesday afternoon.
