

# Migrants to plug gaps at care homes

Long-term asylum seekers allowed to ease staffing emergency under scheme agreed by Home Secretary

By Charles Hymas  
HOME AFFAIRS EDITOR

ASYLUM seekers who have waited more than a year for a decision on their case can now work in care homes to help ease the recruitment crisis under a rule change sanctioned by Priti Patel, the Home Secretary.

Up to 32,000 asylum seekers who have been waiting more than 12 months for a decision were added to the Government's shortage occupation list.

Industry chiefs and government advisers said the asylum seekers could play a vital part in plugging gaps in the

hard-pressed care sector where there are an estimated 140,000 vacancies, accounting for 10 per cent of the workforce.

Although the government's rule change is ostensibly designed to enable the sector to recruit foreign workers, many of the vacant care jobs are not eligible for the necessary visas because they fall below the minimum salary allowed of £20,480. Asylum seekers do not require visas as they are already in the UK and, unlike other shortage occupations like butchers, welders and laboratory technicians, care workers do not require specialist training.

Prof Martin Green, chief executive of Care England, said it could have a major impact as social care facilities was under "huge pressure" with historic shortages of staff made worse by workers off sick with omicron or quarantining.

"We are in a space where we would

welcome any opportunities to find new talent for social care. We have a real staff crisis," he said.

The relaxation of visa rules for foreign workers was helpful but many would have to be paid more for the same job than staff in post for as long as five years, he added. "That's going to cause major problems. I don't think the Government has understood the level of funding," he said. Using asylum seekers to tackle labour shortages has been urged by the Government's Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), which recommended ministers should go further and allow them to enter the jobs market after six months, rather than 12 months.

The MAC said it not only had an economic benefit but there was also evidence it had a "large positive impact" on asylum seekers' job prospects, if their applications were successful, and helped them integrate better. Last September

Dominic Raab, the Justice Secretary, said he would be "open-minded" about allowing asylum seekers to work to help tackle the UK's job shortages. Rob McNeil, Deputy Director of Oxford University's Migration Observatory, said that until now the shortage occupation

*'Instead of surrendering to the immigration lobby, the Government should have [paid care workers more]'*

list was "close to meaningless" for asylum seekers as it focused on specific qualifications such as graphics programmers or technicians for nuclear power stations.

"Care work is a different proposition because although it is difficult work, it requires little specialist training, so is

accessible for more people," he said. "It's not possible to say at this stage how many people might take up this option, but it's certainly possible that at least for some asylum seekers who have waited without a decision for over a year, this development will widen the options for work."

Tom Pursglove, the immigration minister, said: "The changes announced in regards the care sector are a temporary measure to help the sector respond to unprecedented challenges brought on by the pandemic."

Ben Greening, executive director of Migration Watch, said: "Instead of surrendering yet again to the immigration lobby, the Government should have ensured higher pay and better terms for care workers. It should have made these jobs more attractive, including for UK jobseekers. Instead, it has thrown this opportunity away."

## No jail for BBC veteran, 76, over child sex images

By Daily Telegraph Reporter

A RETIRED BBC producer who downloaded hundreds of indecent images of children has been spared jail after a judge decided a prison sentence would be "particularly challenging".

Victor Melleney, 76, who worked on shows including *Question Time* and *Panorama*, stored 832 indecent images of children on a range of devices that were discovered at his Kensington home and a property in Shepherd's Bush in 2018.

He had admitted he was addicted to legal pornography but said he had no interest in indecent images of children. But National Crime Agency officers found "damning evidence" to the contrary on a portable hard drive they found in his dressing gown pocket.

Kingston Crown Court heard that 612 of the 832 illegal images were found on the drive, but Melleney claimed he had no idea how they came to be there. The officers also found illegally held guns belonging to him. He admitted four charges of possession of prohibited weapons for discharge of noxious gas, namely three tasers and CS gas spray, at an earlier hearing.

The jury acquitted Melleney of intentionally downloading the child pornography but convicted him of possessing indecent images of children.

Sentencing him to 20 months in prison for the images offence and two months for the gun offences, suspended for two years, Judge Simon Bryan QC said: "You are of poor health due to a heart condition. A prison sentence would be particularly challenging."

"I bear in mind there has been a considerable impact on your friends and family."

"You will have to live with the disgrace and ignominy that you have brought on yourself."

Melleney must also remain on the sex offenders' register for 10 years.



Victor Melleney, 76, a former BBC producer, leaves Kingston-upon-Thames Crown Court after being convicted of possessing indecent images of children and firearms offences

## Truss eyes Protocol deal after 'constructive' EU talks

By Joe Barnes and James Crisp

LIZ TRUSS and her EU counterpart have pledged to hold "intense negotiations" to fix the Northern Ireland Protocol in the first joint statement on Brexit talks in a year.

In an effort to end frosty relations with Brussels, the Foreign Secretary dropped her predecessor's confrontational negotiating style, as she hosted Maros Sefcovic, the European Commission vice-president, at Chevening House, her official residence in Kent.

The pair agreed to accelerate efforts

to find solutions to the long-running dispute over Northern Ireland's post-Brexit trade rules and reset the wider UK-EU relationship.

"I think there is a deal to be done. We have had constructive talks over the last day. Of course there is more work to do, and that is why we are intensifying the discussions," said Ms Truss.

In a rare joint statement, she and Mr Sefcovic announced that UK and EU officials would make a fresh attempt next week to iron out the issues before they meet again on Jan 24.

The Government argues that the pro-

col, which keeps the province locked to EU Single Market rules to prevent a hard border, is having a chilling effect on trade. In October, the EU offered to remove checks to ease the burden.

Ms Truss told Mr Sefcovic that she believes reaching a deal to further limit the number of customs controls in the Irish Sea could pave the way for better co-operation on the geopolitical challenges posed by Russia and China.

Mr Sefcovic agreed that the relationship reset should be determined by the UK and EU's shared belief in freedom and democracy. "We share a desire for a

positive relationship underpinned by a shared belief in freedom and democracy," they said in the joint statement, the first since February last year.

Ms Truss's approach is in contrast to that of her predecessor, Lord Frost, who had a strained relationship with Mr Sefcovic before he stepped down as Brexit minister.

Brussels repeatedly accused him of diminishing mutual trust between the two sides.

In a departure from that antagonistic style, the Foreign Secretary played down the Government's previous

threats to trigger Article 16 to unilaterally suspend trade checks in the Irish Sea.

EU figures praised the UK's more positive approach to the talks.

Simon Coveney, Ireland's foreign minister, said: "I think it is a good thing that the Brexit issues and the protocol issues are back in the Foreign Office in London rather than in a separate unit led by Lord Frost."

Despite the positive mood, major differences remain between the two sides over the future implementation of the protocol.



### Cruise past

The Buick driven by Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman in the 1988 film *Rain Man* is up for auction. The 1949 Roadmaster Convertible, which was later bought by Hoffman, is expected to fetch between £100,000 to £182,000 at Bonhams in Scottsdale, Arizona, on Jan 27.

## Pesticide given a reprieve to combat threat of aphid virus

By Olivia Rudgard  
ENVIRONMENT CORRESPONDENT

FARMERS can again use a previously banned pesticide that harms bees – despite a government goal to halt species loss.

Sugar beet farmers will be allowed to use thiamethoxam, a type of neonicotinoid known to harm bees' reproductive systems and navigation abilities, after an application by British Sugar.

The "emergency" permission will enable farmers to target aphids that spread beet yellows virus. Farmers were also granted permission last year but the cold winter killed off an unusually high number of aphids so it was not needed.

Farmers will be forbidden from growing flowering plants for 32 months after any use, in an effort to protect bees, but – announcing the decision – George Eustice, the Environment Secretary, said that even with the restriction it was "not possible to rule out completely a degree of risk to bees".

Sandra Bell, of Friends of the Earth, said: "Allowing a bee-harming pesticide into our fields is totally at odds with ministers' so-called green ambitions, not to mention directly against the recommendation of their own scientists."

"This decision comes just two

months after the government enshrined in law a target to halt species loss by 2030."

Matt Shardlow, chief executive of insect charity Buglife, said: "Neonicotinoids approved under the current pesticide approval process devastated populations of wild bees and heavily polluted rivers. "It is shameful that no action has been taken to ensure that bee- and wildlife-destroying pesticides are properly assessed as being pollina-

*'Allowing bee-harming pesticides into our fields is totally at odds with so-called green ambitions'*

tor safe before they are approved or derogated for use. The Government had the chance to do that in the Environment Bill, and failed to do so."

A Defra spokesman said: "This decision has not been taken lightly and is based on robust scientific assessment. We evaluate the risks very carefully and only grant temporary emergency authorisations for restricted pesticides in special circumstances when strict requirements are met. Last year the threshold was not met so the authorisation was never exercised."

### NEWS BULLETIN

#### National parks could restrict off-road driving

"Green lane" off-road driving faces a crackdown in national parks. Recreational drivers and bikers can use unclassified roads in areas including the Lake District, but the practice has attracted criticism from locals who say it leads to damage and anti-social behaviour.

In a new report, the Government said it had become "increasingly aware of damage and disturbance caused by excessive use of off-road motor vehicles on some unsealed routes".

It said it was considering tightening rules on the use of the roads in England, which could include giving national parks more leeway to regulate people driving on them.

#### TV lawyer is jailed for contempt of court

A media lawyer has been jailed for refusing to hand over documents when her firm of solicitors was shut down after allegations of dishonesty.

Sophie Khan regularly appeared on TV and radio to give expert advice on the police use of Tasers. The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) closed her firm in Leicester and suspended her from practising in August as it investigated allegations of dishonesty.

She had refused to hand over client files despite two court orders requiring her to do so and was this week jailed for six months for contempt of court.

Janes Solicitors, which represents Ms Khan, said it was considering all options, including an appeal.

#### Buy now, pay later used more by older customers

Older people are more likely to use buy now, pay later (BNPL) schemes to purchase items they cannot afford than young people, research has found.

A survey of 2,100 people by the financial literacy charity, the Centre for Financial Capability, found that 23 per cent of over 65s who have used BNPL did so as they were not able to afford the full price at the time. This compared to just 18 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds who used BNPL.

The charity warned that many people using BNPL, which often appears as an option on online checkouts, did not realise they are a form of credit that can incur penalty charges and damage credit ratings if payments are missed.

#### Serial killer Tobin taken to hospital from prison

Serial killer Peter Tobin has been taken to hospital from the prison where he is serving three life sentences.

Tobin was taken to the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh from HMP Edinburgh on Thursday after becoming unwell.

He is serving a life sentence for raping and murdering Angelika Kluk, 23, a Polish student, and hiding her body in a Glasgow church in 2006.

Tobin, in his mid-70s, is also serving life terms for the 1991 murders of 15-year-old schoolgirl Vicky Hamilton and 18-year-old Dinah McNicol.

A spokesman for the Scottish Prison Service said: "We cannot comment on individual prisoners."

#### Partner of disgraced MP could give evidence

The partner of disgraced MP Claudia Webbe may be called to give evidence for the first time as she tries to overturn her harassment conviction, a court has heard.

The 56-year-old former Labour MP for Leicester East was handed a suspended 10-week jail term, after being found guilty in November of harassing Michelle Merritt, a friend of her boyfriend Lester Thomas.

A review hearing yesterday, ahead of an appeal against the conviction and sentence on March 9, heard that Mr Thomas could be called as a witness, with body-worn camera footage from police officers who responded to the incident expected to be played if he is.

#### HM Coastguard marks 200 years of service

Coastguards around the country are marking the 200th anniversary of the service dedicated to saving lives at sea.

Established on Jan 15 1822, Her Majesty's Coastguard now has 3,500 volunteers in 310 teams across the UK, which are supported by 10 search-and-rescue helicopters. To mark the milestone, 200 throw-lines – part of the standard life-saving kit – will be cast by coastguards around the country.

Robert Courts, the maritime minister, said: "Congratulations, HM Coastguard, on their 200-year anniversary. I am immensely proud and humbled by the continued dedication and professionalism from the staff and volunteers."

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## Teenager grabbed off the street and raped by two masked men

By Izzy Lyons CRIME CORRESPONDENT

A TEENAGER was grabbed by two masked men while walking down an alleyway and raped, police have said.

The 18-year-old woman was attacked in Peckham, south-east London, on Thursday evening.

She was walking down the alleyway near Peckham Rye station, shortly after 10.20pm, when she was approached

from behind by two males who took her to Holly Grove and raped her, the Metropolitan Police said. The woman is being supported by specialist officers.

The force has launched a manhunt and issued an appeal for witnesses.

Det Supt Clair Kelland said: "The investigation into this incident is fast-paced and ongoing, and involves an extensive crime scene. We would like to speak to anyone who was in the area of

Peckham Rye station between 10pm and 11pm last night who saw anything that might assist our investigation."

Locals said the area had recently seen a "spike in danger". Pablo Serrano, 22, a waiter who works near the station, said: "My boss has always been worried about the girls at the restaurant going home late at night, but with the pandemic the groups hanging around the station have got worse."