

**Client:** Immigration Advice Service (IAS)

**Brief:** To write a speculative opinion-based article targeted at Access and Mobility Professional on behalf of IAS. The aim was to have the article accepted and published by the target publication, in order to build authority and secure a link back to IAS.

**Published:** <https://www.accessandmobilityprofessional.com/opinion-coronavirus-stresses-need-for-care-worker-visa-and-not-care-robots/>

***\*Please note that the opinion expressed in this article is IAS', not my own\****

### **Coronavirus stresses need for care worker visa and not 'care robots'**

*The Covid-19 outbreak is a time for care worker visas and not care robots. This is according to Hannah Giles, a features writer for the [Immigration Advice Service](#) which has offices across the UK, Ireland and the US. For a piece submitted to AMP, here's what Giles wrote:*

*"Although demands on the care sector are rapidly increasing – especially as the coronavirus pandemic takes its hold in the UK – vital staff are abandoning the profession at abnormal speed with some estimating as many as 1,100 leave the sector every 24 hours.*

However, here to throw a spanner in the system at a time when it needs the most support is the proposed post-Brexit immigration plan – and the Government's bizarre solution to invest in 'care robots' to ameliorate workforce vacancies instead.

It is no secret that the UK's care sector is overburdened, underfunded and significantly understaffed. One report by The Health Foundation uncovered that there is a shortage of around 122,000 care workers to date, yet the sector will require an additional 580,000 care workers by 2035 to cater to the ageing population.

However, few are compelled to take up a job in the sector due to its high reliance on zero-hour contracts and minimum wage pay of £8.10 per hour, bringing in an average of a £16,000 salary.

As a result, care has become reliant on two groups to keep afloat: unpaid carers looking after their loved ones and migrant workers fuelled by Free Movement.

Carers UK estimate six million adults are ensnared in unpaid caring responsibilities in the UK while overseas workers make up 17% of the entire workforce in England – which rises to 40% in the capital.

However, now that frictionless mobility is set to end by the end of this year and the most stringent points-based immigration plan in modern British history shuffled in to replace it, concerns are ramping up that the rug will be pulled from underneath the sector in a matter of months – and at a time when more staff are needed than ever before to attend to the Covid-19 pandemic.

To put it bluntly, care workers simply don't qualify for a Work Visa under the proposed rules. The 70 points necessary comprises a compulsory 50 points, including a sponsored job offer, English speaking skills and employment at the appropriate skill level. The remaining 20 points are divided between having certain qualifications and/or a salary of at least £23,040.

The only alternative to gain these points would be if an applicant could fulfil a job on the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) – which care work currently isn't featured on – and even then, carers would need to earn at least £20,480 to qualify.

Yet rather than address the gaping inequalities that is harming the social care workforce, the Home Office has left the sector with the slim pickings of its 2020 Budget Plan.

Although some of the £5 billion of emergency funding for the NHS is reserved for social care, critics find the sum bitterly falls short of the extreme measures required to patch up the sector and shield it through these pressing times.

To add insult to injury, the Government has pledged £34 million for the development of 'care robots' to "revolutionise the care system" – a move that has been slammed for failing to appreciate the tactile touch of human care that is considered a basic necessity when handling the disabled and elderly.

Ignorant to the inevitable workforce shortages and the ill-equipped models of artificial intelligence, the Home Office said simply that "employers will need to adjust" to this automated world that is absent of staff.

If the coronavirus tragedy has taught us anything, it's that investment and an immediate hands-on-deck approach is required to protect the vulnerable. A community-led and nationwide effort is needed to provide support where possible. Yet these efforts will remain undermined for as long as the NHS and social care suffers around the clock.

Frantically funnelling funds today appears a little too late: invaluable staff have already left the sector and few will be able to pass through border control to offer a helping hand come January 2021.

There are of course several transformative methods the Government could design to safeguard social care but seem reluctant to implement.

In an ideal world, increased rates of pay would make some headway into attracting both homegrown Britons to the sector while simultaneously allowing overseas talent the opportunity to score the points necessary for a visa, but care homes, agencies and local councils are already skirting on the fringes of bankruptcy.

The second most realistic measure would be to create a separate immigration route specifically for carers. NHS staff are set to benefit from a streamlined 'NHS Visa' where they can reap the benefit of a marginal visa discount while agriculture and horticulture can recruit thousands of staff every year via the Agricultural Seasonal Workers Scheme.

Both of these initiatives allow the NHS and farmers to rest assured that they will be able to continue to recruit from abroad without encountering visa restrictions once Free Movement ends.

With this in mind, the Home Office could sketch up a 'Care Worker Visa' which could grant migrant carers the remaining 20 points necessary as well as offer them a relief from the exorbitant visa costs.

The Brexit aftermath grants an unprecedented opportunity for the current Government to create an immigration system that meets the needs and demands of the UK. Yet when it comes to care, the Home Office pushes investment and resources to the bottom of the priority list – taking our elderly and loved ones with it.

And what with coronavirus set to harm this demographic the most, the Government's indifference to save the sector from a cliff edge may well materialise into very real and tragic human costs."