

Australia extends 'backpacker visas' to ease farm worker shortage



PETER PARKS/AFP

Australia announced on Monday that it was extending working holiday visas to allow young travelers to stay longer in the country to help meet a shortage of farm laborers.

The change allows travelers on so-called 'backpacker' visas to remain in Australia for up to three years if they spend at least six months doing agricultural work, AFP reported.

Previously the one-year 'Working Holiday Maker' visas allowed travelers to remain for a second

year if they took up work in the remote Northern Territory.

From July 2019, they can extend this to a third year as long as they spend six months working in agricultural regions suffering from particularly acute labor shortages.

The new rules were announced by Prime Minister Scott Morrison during a visit to farming communities in the eastern state of Queensland, a key battleground for his fragile coalition government which must face a national election by May.

Australia's conservative government has since 2017 been reducing the scope of temporary working visas as part of a broader effort to curb immigration.

But the agriculture sector has complained of severe labor shortages during harvest periods, especially in rural Queensland, prompting Monday's changes.

More than 200,000 working holiday maker visas were granted in 2017-18, with Britain, Germany and France providing the most participants from the 45 nations

eligible for the program.

Last week a survey published by the University of New South Wales found that most international students and backpackers working in Australia earned only a fraction of the minimum wage.

"Our study confirms that Australia has a large, silent underclass of underpaid migrant workers," said UNSW lecturer, Bassina Farbenblum.

"The scale of unclaimed wages is likely well over a billion dollars."

Firework packaging should show graphic injuries, doctors say

Senior doctors are calling for graphic images of injuries to be displayed on firework packaging.

Plastic surgeons said the number of life-changing injuries is rising every year despite numerous safety campaigns, BBC reported.

They believe shocking images, like the one they have mocked up using a man's severely damaged hand, might deter buyers.

Half of those seen in hospital last year were aged 18 or under, and 80 percent were male.

'Handling explosives'

The campaign is being led by the British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons (Bapras).

Bapras president, David Ward, said, "We are extremely concerned about the continued misuse of fireworks, particularly by those under the age of 18 away from organized events."

"Although [fireworks are] packaged in a jovial, toy-like fashion, people forget that when using fireworks, they are handling explosives which can cause extremely serious injuries that may require extensive reconstructive surgery."

"Bapras is calling on the government to make a commonsense change by legislating to ensure all firework packaging in the UK includes mandatory graphic warning notices, similar to those found on cigarette packaging."

Almost 4,500 people in England attended accident and emergency (A&E) departments with injuries from fireworks last year, double the number in 2009-10, according to figures from NHS Digital.

'I can't feed myself'

The hand used in the campaign belongs to a 25-year-old man from Wales, who did not wish to be identified.

"My friend threw a firework which landed by my feet. When I picked it up to move it out

of the way, it exploded in my hand. I've had five operations, with plastic surgeons reconstructing parts of my fingers, and months later I still have three operations to go.

"The incident has had a huge impact on my life. I can't feed myself or play with my newborn kid.

"A clearer warning label might have made me and my friend think twice about the potential danger," he said.



BAPRAS

Many fireworks are currently packaged in the bold colors of children's toys, and the warnings are often found in small boxes on the back of the packaging.

Legally you have to be 18 or over to buy fireworks, yet the hospital statistics show that many injuries requiring surgery are in males under the age of 18.

Jim Fitzpatrick, an MP for Poplar and Limehouse, is also supporting the campaign.

"There is an urgent need for government to introduce graphic warnings on firework packaging. The hope is that a graphic image of the potential dangers of misuse may stop someone in their tracks, preventing a possible life-changing injury."

A YouGov poll of 2,020 adults conducted in October found that 62 percent supported introducing graphic warnings on fireworks packaging.

The campaign is also being supported by the Royal College of Surgeons and the British Society for Surgery of the Hand.

Two in five people in UK with learning disabilities not diagnosed in childhood

Two out of five people in the UK with learning disabilities are not diagnosed in childhood and, even if they are, they will likely die before they collect their pension, according to a study commissioned by the National Health Service (NHS).

Researchers from the UCL Institute of Health Eq-

cause they are being 'catastrophically' failed by the government.

Professor Michael Marriot, the IHE director, said, "This is a direct result of a political choice that destines this vulnerable group to experience some of the worst of what society has to offer: Low incomes, no work, poor

tank cites statistics that show children with learning disabilities are at increased risk of mental health conditions, including depression, with half of the increased risk of mental health difficulties attributable to poverty, poor housing, discrimination and bullying.

The IHE said it sounded

percent to at least 22 percent in the best performing regions, although it says 48 percent could be achievable.

It highlighted the example of Walgreens pharmacy chain in the US, which actively recruits people with learning disabilities in their distribution centers. It found them to be equally productive, have less accidents and to have helped reduce staff turnover at sites by up to 50 percent.

A government spokeswoman said, "We recognize the need to tackle the unacceptable inequalities faced by people with learning disabilities and autism."

"Improving the lives of people with learning disabilities will be a key part of the NHS long-term plan and we will be consulting shortly on mandatory awareness training for health and care staff to help end unacceptable differences in life expectancy."

"Funding for children with special educational needs and disabilities is the highest on record and we are working with employers to support more people with learning disabilities into work."

A spokeswoman for NHS England said the report was commissioned "precisely to draw attention to the wide range of factors which need tackling if, as a society, we are to give everyone with a learning disability the opportunity to lead a long and fulfilling life".



BARRY BATCHELOR/PA

uity (IHE) found that people with learning disabilities will die 15 to 20 years sooner on average than the general population, theguardian.com reported.

That amounts to 1,200 people each year, a figure which chimes with the government's own estimate.

The IHE said it is not a consequence of the underlying condition that led to the learning disability but be-

housing, social isolation and loneliness, bullying and abuse.

"A staggering 40 percent of people with learning difficulties aren't even diagnosed in childhood. This is an avoidable sign of a society failing to be fair and supportive to its most vulnerable members. We need to change this. The time to act is now."

The health equality think

the alarm bell a year ago that government policy was not working, having documented a slowing down in life expectancy, and called for research into a potential link with austerity, but action has not been taken.

It wants the government to focus on tackling poverty, poor housing, discrimination and bullying, and aim to increase employment levels from the current rate of 5.7

Too many students left with debts for 'too little payback'



GETTY IMAGES

Too many graduates in England are being left with big debts for too little payback, MPs are warning.

Nearly half of recent graduates were not working in graduate roles in 2017, the The Education Select Committee of the House of Commons in the UK Parliament said, BBC wrote.

Its chairman Robert Halfon also highlighted the excessive pay of some university vice chancellors, saying that is not value for money.

The government is reviewing post-18 education and funding to see how it can ensure that value.

The Augur Review, which is due to report early next year, is looking at the system under which students take out tuition fee loans to fund courses costing £9,000 a year.

But the committee warned that the scope of this review, which has been limited by the government, means there is a risk it "will fail to overhaul the system" in a way that will benefit graduates and students.

The government said the review's recommendations must be consistent with the government's fiscal policies, must not affect taxation or cover the earlier pre-2012 loans system.

The report, 'Value for Money in

Higher Education', said the committee was encouraged by an increase in information on the kind of outcomes graduates can expect.

But it warned: "The graduate premium varies greatly depending on where and what a student studies."

Halfon said, "The blunt reality is that too many universities are not providing value for money, and that students are not getting good outcomes from the degrees for which so many of them rack up debt."

The report quoted a recent National Audit Office report which said had decisions on courses could "lead to poor financial outcomes".

"The MPs' committee report said, 'There is still a long way to go before students have access to robust data on graduate employment which will inform their choices.'"

It pointed to Office for National Statistics data showing 49 percent of recent graduates were not working in graduate roles across the UK in 2017.

The report also highlighted how students from poorer backgrounds are far more likely than their wealthier peers to go to lower-ranking universities.

Here, opportunities for better-paid

employment tend to be more limited. And it recommended: "Higher education institutions must be more transparent about the labor market returns of their courses."

"This is not simply a measure of graduate earnings but of appropriate professional graduate-level and skilled employment destinations."

It should be obligatory for universities to publish this information, it said. Halfon called for strict criteria on acceptable levels of vice chancellor pay to be enforced.

A new voluntary code covering senior staff pay was published by universities in the summer.

Under this code, institutions must provide meaningful explanations if pay diverges from the code.

Halfon said, "Too many institutions exist where vice chancellors and senior management earn excessive amounts that does not represent value for either the student or the taxpayer."

"Self-regulation should be out of the question, and the Office for Students must enforce strict criteria on acceptable levels of pay that could be linked to average staff pay, performance and other measures."