

Jane's speech at launch of 'The Role of Migrant Care Workers in Ageing Societies': Report on the Research Findings in the UK, 25th June 2009

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to speak today.

I think the discussion we are having today is fundamentally one about how we foster a culture of mutual respect between those requiring care and support and those providing it, including migrant workers.

So I want to start with a short example of what it might look and feel like from an article which appeared in the Guardian last year:

'Arthur Bridgewater, a 94-year-old resident at Woodcote Grove House, says it's a two-way cultural exchange. "I am an expert on Polish culture after my many conversations with [care home worker] Estella." Estella agrees: "I am learning a lot about Britain's social history, especially what life was like during the war. I have also learned how to make a good egg on toast for my residents. Oh, and Arthur teaches me great words like tickety-boo."

Our ageing society begs a wide range of tricky questions.

Sadly few are being given the airtime they require.

I think this is in part because of a peculiar dichotomy.

We find ourselves in the rather odd situation of striving for health and longevity on the one hand, and then viewing the outcome as a terrible burden to be contained on the other.

We all need to lift our heads out of the sand and accept that we are becoming a far more – let's say 'mature' – society.

The debate we are having today is not simply one about older people and migrants.

It is about recognising the society we will be and how in that society we protect and promote everybody's rights to be treated with dignity and respect.

The question of how we organise care and support must be at the centre of that question.

The Commission set out its position and proposals in a report called ‘from safety net to springboard’ in February. This was in anticipation of the forthcoming Green Paper on social care.

We believe the time has come for a radical re-appraisal. We need to fundamentally change the way we think about the purpose of care and support and the way it is delivered, accessed or consumed.

The Commission supports reforms which are transforming the relationship between individuals, families and the State and in particular moves towards self-directed support.

We do so because we believe this provides the most effective way to promote the rights of individuals and families to exert the choice and control they need to lead the lives they wish to lead, and to **practice citizenship**. We also believe society will see a better return on its investment in public services.

More individuals and their families should be able to stay in or get in, to paid employment, contribute to the lives of their communities and avoid the

negative impact on health and well-being of being locked into a cycle of dependency.

And finally we propose this personalisation transformation, because it is not going to be sustainable to continue with the notion that there is one group who are the objects of care, and another who are its commissioners or providers.

At the turn of the 20th Century, for every person aged over 60 there were 19 of working age. Today the ratio is four to one. In the next 20 years it will become two to one.

The idea that the answer remains the young looking after the old – as informal carers, taxpayers, or professional careworkers - is neither economically or socially sustainable.

How we fund care and support in ageing societies is a matter taxing the best minds internationally.

Who provides care and support is the missing part of the jigsaw.

The answer lies partly in co-production – in cultivating a shared enterprise between individuals, families, communities and the state. I often referred to this as a mutuality model whereby those who receive care and support and those who give it, are mutually supportive of one another, situation and recognize the need to share power.

But it almost inevitably also lies in attracting more people to the UK to plug the gap in workers.

And that is why this report is so important.

Today care and support is an area of the labour market with disproportionately high numbers of workers from outside the UK. Many experts in the field believe the system would collapse without migrant workers.

Over the 2 decades I have recruited approximately 150 personal assistants, of that number at least 70% have been from outside the UK. This is the same pattern with many of my friends and colleagues.

This is partly due to migrants high standards of caring capability, but more often a consequence of often low pay, poor conditions and status attached to this work.

Sadly, the report being launched today highlights one such aspect of the conditions facing some in the care workforce.

My deep hope is that this is a generational issue. Many older people accessing care and support today, aged 85 and over, do not share Arthur's outlook and have without doubt a different perspective on matters of immigration, globalisation and ethnic diversity – very different to the baby boomer consumers of the coming decades.

But it would be wrong to be complacent. And news travels. Why should more people come to our shores to do work no one else will do, or when they hear of such stories of hostility and abuse?

Is the economic imperative strong enough to overcome the reluctance such an image might create?

And if it is, well isn't that just exploitation?

We need to act on this issue now to ensure people will come to work here in future.

But more importantly we need to act because people should never be subject to discrimination, harassment or ill-treatment at work, no matter what their work is or who they are.

The Commission supports choice, control and personalisation, but we must avoid this providing a vehicle for prejudice to find expression; for the power it provides to be abused.

I said earlier that an objective of the reforms of public services which the Commission promotes is supporting people to practice citizenship.

Citizenship is as much about responsibility as it is rights. The changes we are making are about overcoming the paternalism of the past.

As Arthur and Estella demonstrate, respect is a two way street.

Individual choice is not without condition or constraint

Where individuals take a direct payment and become an employer, they are then subject to the same legal duties not to discriminate as any other employer. If they use their direct payments for unlawful purposes then a local authority can withdraw the direct payment.

Where a local authority is working with an individual to determine how they wish to spend their individual budget, the local authority retains its duties to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. They should not collude in discrimination either way.

Where a service provider allocates a member of staff to an individual they will, under the Equality Bill, retain duties to protect their staff from discrimination or harassment at the hands of the customer.

Non discrimination is part of the quid pro quo for greater choice and control.

There is never an excuse for it.

Of course there are reasons why some migrant workers may be unsuited to the task of providing care and support to older and disabled people.

In relation to the assistance I receive, communication is key. I have had in the past to let people go because their English or overall communication skills were so poor, everything took too long and I was always late for work.

But that is not about migrant workers per se. It is about objective and necessary criteria which may disproportionately affect migrant workers.

Discerning between genuine problems and prejudice is not always straightforward. But we need to set clear expectations and demonstrate a willingness to defend against ill treatment where it happens – penalising the perpetrators, not the victims.

The flipside of course is that many migrant workers come from countries with a far more respectful attitude to their elders and with a stronger ethos of care than in the UK.

A 2007 survey by Skills for Care and Development found that many employers believed overseas workers compared favourably with UK workers and were

often more committed and ambitious. Some argued that foreign workers were more likely to have a genuine interest in care work, as opposed to just needing a job.

In the years ahead we are going to need to attract many more such workers to the UK. We are going to need to revisit immigration rules which stand in the way.

And we cannot allow discrimination and hostility to continue unchecked. It is not only morally wrong. Alongside low pay and poor conditions, it will prevent us from securing the workforce we are going to need.

That's why the Commission will continue to work with Compas on this project. In the autumn we will co-host a seminar to begin to explore solutions.

Conclusion

So to conclude.

Disabled and older people have for too long been relegated to the status of objects of others' care and charity. This has been bad for them, bad for their families and bad for society. The objective of the reforms we support are to transform the status of those requiring care and support, from objects to citizens. Citizens have both rights and responsibilities, and strong citizenship

demands a culture of mutual respect in which discrimination of all kinds is not tolerated. I called this, mutuality model.

Only by balancing the rights of those requiring care and support with those who in future will be asked to provide it can we arrive at a position which Arthur and Estella would hopefully describe as 'tickity boo'.

Ends.

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