



Wetherspoons boss denies facing shortage of EU workers Free 221224

Description



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The boss of Wetherspoons has denied claims his pubs are facing a staff shortage caused by Brexit.

It comes after Tim Martin was quoted by the Daily Telegraph as saying he favoured a more “liberal” visa scheme for EU workers to tackle shortfalls.

Mr Martin, a vocal Brexit supporter, told the BBC he had always favoured an Australian style system which treated near neighbours preferentially.

There was “no recruitment issue” other than in small coastal towns, he added.

Many hospitality businesses have struggled during the pandemic despite extensive government support, and firms are reportedly now struggling to recruit as they reopen.

According to trade group UK Hospitality, Brexit has added to the problem, as more EU workers return to their home countries.

According to the Telegraph, external, Mr Martin said a more flexible visa system for EU workers could help ease the pressure on firms.

“The UK has a low birth rate. A reasonably liberal immigration system controlled by those we have elected, as distinct from the EU system, would be a plus for the economy and the country,” he told the paper.

“America, Australia and Singapore have benefited for many decades from this approach. Immigration combined with democracy works.”

However, Mr Martin later told the BBC the comment has been taken out of context.

He added that Wetherspoons was not struggling to recruit, and in some towns, such as Northallerton, jobs at its pubs were oversubscribed.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics in April suggest that more than one in 10 UK hospitality workers left the industry in the last year.

James Reed, chief executive of the Reed employment agency, told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme the firm was advertising 275,000 new jobs in the sector in May.

“When we added them up we had more jobs in May than in any month since February 2008,” he said.

Hotel chain Best Western said it could not open some of its venues at full capacity due to staffing shortages.

‘It’s becoming restrictive’

Boss Rob Paterson told the BBC: “One hotel didn’t have the cleaning staff to be able to sell all of their rooms.

“It’s becoming restrictive on trade, at a time when we’re investing so much on meeting safety precautions and needing more staff to do that.”

He said uncertainty and a fear of being repeatedly furloughed had driven some employees away.

“They don’t want to be in a hospitality industry that’s shutting down and opening up and their jobs are always at risk. It’s not just about pay conditions,” said Mr Paterson.

UK Hospitality has urged the government to encourage UK-based workers to join the sector.

It is also asking the government to renew its list of shortage occupations and consider a visa scheme for workers who would not qualify under the points-based system.

Over the past 12 months Wetherspoons, which has 871 pubs, has reduced the number of staff by about 6,000 to almost 38,000.

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