

Unqualified Hull immigration adviser receives suspended sentence

Press release

Found guilty of giving unlawful immigration advice



A Hull man has received a suspended prison sentence after pleading guilty to providing unregulated immigration advice.

Gary Pounder, 59, of Orchard Park Estate, Hull, was sentenced three months' imprisonment (suspended for 12 months) and ordered to repay costs to the victims at Hull & Holderness Magistrates Court on December 10.

In September 2020, Mr Pounder admitted to providing illegal immigration advice or services following an investigation by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) in which three unrelated individuals confirmed Mr Pounder gave them unregulated advice for which he charged fees.

Mr Pounder's actions meant that the victims had their immigration status put at risk, including one victim who following advice from Mr Pounder, found he inadvertently applied for a travel document rather than seeking leave to remain. Another had been incorrectly informed of the fees required by the Home Office to cover his application which was subsequently rejected. The third victim's application was refused as insufficient evidence had been supplied.

Immigration Service Commissioner John Tuckett said, "Gary Pounder was not regulated and misled his clients. The impact on the victims and sentence given to Mr Pounder clearly demonstrates the importance of only providing immigration advice if you are lawfully qualified to do so."

Notes to editor

1. The OISC is an independent public body, established under the Immigration and Asylum Act (IAA) 1999, to regulate the provision of immigration advice and services in the UK.
2. Section 91 of the IAA 1999 creates a criminal offence of providing

immigration advice, contrary to section 84 of the IAA 1999.

3. Media queries to Cornelius Alexander, Corporate Communications Business Partner on 0207 211 1167 or communications@oisc.gov.uk.

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British Embassy in Santiago receives Civil Service Award

In a year when the pandemic has taken up so much of the Embassy's agenda, 2020 has brought excellent news for Diversity and Inclusion in Santiago. After many years of continued work to make the Embassy a good place to work for LGBTI+ talent, on 4 December we proudly received the [Advancing LGBTI+ Inclusion Award](#), a recognition given by the UK Civil Service to showcase the best outcomes in the Civil Service's aspiration to attract greater diversity and be the most inclusive employer.

Out of 297 nominations in 12 categories, the Embassy won the D&I Civil Service Award for having received the ["EquidadCL Certification"](#) in July 2020, a local recognition that placed the Embassy in Santiago among the twenty best employers in Chile for LGBTI+ talent. This, in turn, allowed the Embassy to become the first diplomatic mission and public sector employer in Chile, and the only British Embassy in the region, to receive accreditation as a workplace committed to LGBTI+ inclusion.

EquidadCL Certification

The "Equidad CL Certification" is given each year by [Fundación Iguales](#) (one of the leading organisation for LGBTI+ rights in Chile), [Pride Connection Chile](#) (a business network that promotes inclusive workplaces) and the [Human Rights Campaign](#) (HRC; one of the Americas largest LGBTI+ civil rights organisations).

In 2020, a total of 63 companies and organisations participated in the certification process and were assessed in three core areas of LGBTI+ inclusion: adoption of non-discriminatory policies; the creation of employee resource groups/diversity and inclusion committees; and engagement in public activities supporting LGBTI+ inclusion. And the Embassy scored well in all those key areas.

UK Civil Service Awards

Part of the team who received the Award.

On its part, the UK Civil Service awards showcase the strong public service ethos of civil servants all across the Government departments in tackling demanding and important issues with innovative solutions, through collaboration and effective actions, to produce real impact for the people both in the UK and abroad. In this context, the Embassy's efforts working with the LGBTI+ community in Chile put into action the UK's wider commitment to make equality a reality for LGBTI+ people the world over.

Receiving the Civil Service Award was a recognition to the Embassy pulling together its public diplomacy, corporate policies, learning and development, and local outreach, to transform them into a strategic effort, working towards contributing to eradicating discrimination and setting a standard for LGBTI+ inclusion in Chile for the public and private sector alike.

The work ahead

From the first time our Embassy flew the rainbow flag above its building in 2012, becoming the first foreign mission to do so in Chile, until 2020 when we flew the transgender flag to mark the Transgender Day of Remembrance, our team in Santiago has worked permanently to make the Embassy a good place to work for LGBTI+ talent and to advocate for the protection and promotion of LGBTI+ rights and values at a local level.

What about the future? Our Embassy is committed to continue demonstrating what can be achieved through a truly inclusive workplace that celebrates diversity, and we hope that other British Embassies around the world can get a similar certification to make our organisation a better place to work for all.

Further information

If you want to know more about the D&I Civil Service Awards , please contact [Pamela.Gallardo](#), GREAT Campaign Manager.

For more information about the activities of the British Embassy in Santiago, follow us on:

[Rail fare rise to be delayed](#)

- rail tickets will remain at 2020 prices until March 1 2021, giving commuters the chance to renew season tickets at old prices
- passengers still advised to reduce number of journeys as much as possible for the time being
- regulated fares to increase by 2.6% in March, the lowest amount in 4 years, ensuring taxpayers are not unfairly overburdened by anticipated

investments of around £10 billion to keep vital services running during pandemic

The government will delay the normal annual January change to rail fares until 1 March next year (2021), offering a significant window for commuters who cannot work at home to purchase cheaper season tickets at the existing rate and allowing greater flexibility in uncertain times.

Regulated fares will then increase by RPI+1, a 2.6% rise. This is the lowest actual increase in 4 years. The effect of the delay means that key workers and those using the network throughout 2021 will pay about the same across the year than if fares had risen by inflation at the usual time. Those renewing season tickets will be able to do so until 28 February, getting up to a year's travel at the old rates.

Changes to the price of tickets reflect the need to continue investing in modernising the network, improving punctuality and reliability, and also recognises the unprecedented taxpayer support over the last 12 months.

The government took immediate action at the outbreak of the pandemic to support our railways, investing over £4 billion to date to protect the key services passengers depend on and frontline jobs. In total, the government anticipates providing around £10 billion to protect the railway through its emergency agreements with rail operators.

This change will help recover some of the significantly increased costs met by taxpayers to keep services running during the pandemic.

Chris Heaton-Harris, Rail Minister, said:

Delaying the change in rail fares ensures passengers who need to travel have a better deal this year.

Right now, our priority must be ensuring our transport network is safe for passengers and staff, and we urge members of the public to follow the government's advice and only travel when absolutely necessary.

By setting fares sensibly, and with the lowest actual increase for 4 years, we're ensuring that taxpayers are not overburdened for their unprecedented contribution, ensuring investment is focused on keeping vital services running and protecting frontline jobs.

The guidance remains that you should reduce the number of journeys you make wherever possible. Walk or cycle where possible, and plan ahead and avoid busy times and routes on public transport. This will allow you to practise social distancing while you travel. If you're in Tier 3, you should avoid travelling outside of your area.

If you need to use public transport, you should follow the [safer travel](#)

[guidance](#).

Granting the fare break follows on from extensive investment by the government to provide refunds on Advance Tickets during changes to regional and national restrictions throughout the pandemic, ensuring passengers were not left out of pocket for following essential health guidance.

COVID-19: CMA launches investigation into airlines over refunds

The move comes as part of ongoing work by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in relation to holiday refunds during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The investigation will consider situations where airlines continued to operate flights despite people being unable lawfully to travel for non-essential purposes in the UK or abroad, for example during the second lockdown in England in November.

The CMA is aware that, in some cases where flights were not cancelled, customers were not offered refunds even though they could not lawfully travel. Instead, many were offered the option to rebook or to receive a voucher.

The CMA recognises that the airlines sector, like many others, is under strain due to the pandemic. However, it is concerned that certain airlines may have breached consumers' legal rights by failing to offer cash refunds, leaving people unfairly out of pocket, and has therefore opened an investigation to examine the matter further.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive of the CMA, said:

We will be carefully analysing all the evidence to see whether any airlines breached consumers' legal rights by refusing people cash refunds for flights they could not lawfully take.

We recognise the continued pressure that businesses are currently facing, but they have a responsibility to treat consumers fairly and abide by their legal obligations.

The CMA will be working closely with the UK Civil Aviation Authority as it progresses its investigation.

While the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) leads on consumer protection in the airline sector, the CMA has undertaken extensive action in connection with

cancellations and refunds during the pandemic and is well placed to support the CAA on these issues. The CMA and the CAA continue to work closely and share the same enforcement powers to tackle breaches of consumer protection law.

The CMA will now be writing to a number of airlines requiring information to understand more about their approaches to refunds for consumers prevented from flying by lockdown.

Following a careful analysis of this evidence, the CMA then will decide whether to launch enforcement action against individual airlines.

Notes to editors

1. It should not be assumed at this stage of the CMA's investigation that any airline has breached consumers' rights. The CMA has not reached a view on this issue and, ultimately, only a court can decide whether this has occurred.
2. At this stage, the CMA is not disclosing the identities of the airlines it will be writing to. Should it decide to launch enforcement action, it will likely name the airline(s) involved at that time, in line with its [transparency policy](#) in consumer enforcement cases.
3. As an enforcer under Part 8 of the Enterprise Act 2002, the CMA cannot levy administrative fines, but it can enforce consumer protection legislation through the courts, and where appropriate, obtain additional measures to improve consumer choice, drive better compliance with the law, or obtain redress for consumers.
4. More information about the investigation will be available on the CMA's [airlines case page](#).
5. With media queries, contact the CMA press office via press@cma.gov.uk or on 020 3738 6460.

Fifth COVID-19 vaccine starts UK clinical trials

- Valneva begins first UK clinical trials for its promising COVID-19 vaccine, being developed in Livingston, West Lothian
- the UK government has pre-ordered 60 million vaccine doses
- follows a multi-million-pound UK government investment in Valneva's manufacturing facilities, boosting its capacity to supply up to 250 million vaccine doses

Valneva has today (Wednesday 16 December) started UK clinical trials for its promising COVID-19 vaccine, currently being developed in Livingston, West Lothian.

Speciality vaccine company [Valneva](#)'s candidate will initially be tested on 150 UK volunteers at four [National Institute for Health Research](#) (NIHR) testing sites in Birmingham, Bristol, Newcastle and Southampton. These early phase 1 and 2 trials will show whether the vaccine produces a safe and effective immune response against COVID-19.

Should this early trial prove successful, larger clinical trials will be planned for April 2021 with over 4,000 UK volunteers testing 2 doses of the vaccine in 2 groups: those aged between 18-65 years and over 65s.

The UK government has already pre-ordered Valneva's vaccine candidate and should studies prove it to be safe and effective, 60 million doses could be made available to the UK by the end of 2021.

This latest milestone follows a [multi-million-pound up-front investment](#) announced in August by the UK government and Valneva to expand its Livingston facility. This supports over 100 highly skilled jobs for technicians and scientists at the West Lothian site, while advancing Scotland's vaccine manufacturing capacity.

Through this investment, if Valneva's vaccine candidate proves successful, this permanent facility will potentially have the capacity to supply up to 250 million vaccine doses to the UK and internationally.

Valneva's vaccine is the fifth to enter clinical trials in the UK, alongside Oxford/AstraZeneca, Imperial College London, Novavax and Janssen, whose studies are currently ongoing.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma, said:

As we take the monumental steps in rolling out the first COVID-19 vaccine, we must remember that we need to have a range of vaccines available to protect the British public now and long into the future.

Today we have more welcome news that life-saving clinical trials will begin across the country to test the safety and effectiveness of Valneva's vaccine, which is being clinically developed right here in the UK.

Having visited Valneva's state-of-the art facility in the Summer, I have seen first-hand the incredible work our scientists and researchers are doing to develop this vaccine.

Thanks to significant investment from the UK government, we are doing all we can to ensure our country has the capabilities in place to produce hundreds of millions of doses of this vaccine for the UK, and for those around the world.

Secretary of State for Scotland Alister Jack said:

Today marks an important milestone not only in the UK's fight against coronavirus but for the hundreds of staff at the Valneva facility in Livingston who have worked tirelessly over the last few months to develop this vaccine. This is a great example of the work of Scotland's world-class life sciences sector.

The UK government is doing everything it can to support all parts of the country throughout the pandemic including ordering and paying for vaccines for the whole of the UK. We are investing in Valneva's manufacturing facility in Livingston, supporting hundreds of highly skilled jobs.

With a number of other vaccines in development, this gives us all hope for the months ahead.

The UK was the first country in the world to both procure and authorise the [Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine](#), ordering 40 million doses – enough for around a third of the population. The UK was also the first country in the West to start a mass COVID-19 vaccination programme, which began on 8 December.

In total, the UK government has developed a portfolio of 7 different vaccine candidates and secured access to 357 million doses to date, putting the UK in the best position for a vaccine and increasing chances of finding vaccines that work for different people.

Chief Executive Officer of Valneva Thomas Lingelbach said:

Our teams have been working extremely hard to develop our differentiated vaccine candidate and I would like to thank them, as well as the UK government, for their dedication and support. While conducting our first clinical trials, we are already ramping-up our manufacturing capacities and commencing production at full-scale so that we can make the vaccine widely available across the world assuming the vaccine is safe and effective.

Interim Chair of the government's Vaccines Taskforce Clive Dix:

Huge progress has been made in developing a successful COVID-19 vaccine. While this is very positive, we must remember there is no one size fits all approach, and we need to continue developing different types of vaccine so we can vaccinate the UK population.

We believe that Valneva's vaccine is promising and has the potential to tackle coronavirus now and into the future, which is why we have pre-ordered 60 million doses and are investing to help them expand their UK manufacturing facility. This will not only support them in manufacturing hundreds of millions of vaccines for the whole world but boost the UK's resilience against possible

future health crises.

Chief Investigator for the Valneva study Professor Adam Finn said:

We are really pleased to be initiating this first-in-man phase 1 study in Bristol and continuing it in several other centres across the country in the New Year. This is a more traditional vaccine design than those that have been in the news recently, consisting of the whole SARS CoV2 virus that has been chemically inactivated. This kind of viral vaccine has been in widespread use for 60 years.

Our team will be working hard through the Christmas holiday period to get the first participants enrolled and vaccinated. We are pleased to be adding further to the research already done via the NIHR in Bristol over recent months to test COVID-19 vaccines and we are really grateful to the many members of our community who continue to come forward and volunteer to take part in this important work.

Some of the volunteers taking part in Valneva's clinical trials came through from the [NHS Vaccines Registry](#), allowing the UK public to support the national effort to speed up vaccine research. Over 364,000 people have already signed up to the Registry, with more needed.

Additional information about volunteering for clinical studies can be found by visiting the [NHS site](#) to join the NHS Vaccine Research Registry.

The Registry was launched by the UK government in partnership with the NIHR, NHS Digital, the Scottish and Welsh governments and the Northern Ireland Executive in July. It aims to help create a database of people who consent to be contacted by the NHS to take part in clinical studies, to help speed up the development of a safe and effective vaccine.

Through the government's Vaccines Taskforce, the UK has secured early access to 357 million doses of 7 of the most promising vaccine candidates, including:

- BioNTech/Pfizer – Phase III – 40 million doses secured
- Oxford/Astra Zeneca – Phase III – 100 million doses secured
- Moderna – Phase III – 7 million doses secured
- Novavax – Phase III – 60 million doses secured
- Janssen – Phase III – 30 million doses secured
- GSK/Sanofi – Phase I / II – 60 million doses secured
- Valneva – Phase I / II – 60 million doses secured, with an option to acquire a further 130 million if the vaccine is proven to be safe, effective and suitable