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The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into the need to object English language requirements for temporary business visas

The 457 visa scheme is a life saver for numerous Australian businesses, which have been operating for years. The booming mining industry, for example, attracts skilled workers due to very high packages offered. Local workers are leaving workshops for the much higher pay at the mines. This movement creates a serious shortage at the workshops. The shortage is so great that these Australian businesses are often considering closing down because they can not operate without enough workers on board.

In our daily operations, we hear the voice of the silent majority; Australian business owners who do not write to committees, do not go on the news or dictate their opinions to news interviewers. These people are extremely thankful for the 457 visa scheme. They know it is the reason they are still operating and prospering today and the 457 visa scheme is the reason they can now employ many Australian workers whom they would have had to let go if not for the additional foreign workforce.

We are calling out to you to resist any suggestion of adding English language requirements to the 457 visa scheme, which will make it harder to find the right workers and slow visa processing even further.

Objection to English language requirements

Adding English language requirements to the 457 visa scheme will make a huge number of excellent skilled workers unavailable for Australian employers.

Our experience with our many clients shows that skilled workers from China are the preference of many Australian employers because they are reputable for their tradesmen-ship, work ethic and reliability. It would be unthinkable to close China, which holds one quarter of the world's population, from Australian employers.

Reliability is so important for Australian businesses. Our clients are telling us about new recruits from English speaking countries who apparently migrated to Australia for the life style and were not ready to do the hard work required by the employer. These English speaking workers who seem like the perfect candidates on the surface, prove to cause more trouble than those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

It is important to understand that in many cases the best candidates are coming from a non-English speaking environment. It would be easier for everyone if this wasn't the case, but this is the reality at the moment. Due to the low income in China, for example, the high income secured for skilled workers by the 457 scheme is very attractive for them. Chinese workers are coming here to work and earn money and not necessarily for the Australian lifestyle and they are ready to live in remote areas and work hard as needed by the business. The mistake of adding English language requirements to the 457 scheme will completely prevent Australian business access to these good workers.

Workplace Safety

The claim that safety of foreign or Australian workers is threatened by the presence of non-English speakers is ridiculous and shows a lack of familiarity with the system.

As dictated by the 457 visa scheme, the skilled recruits must be experienced workers and therefore, they have been implementing OH&S international regulations for years. As part of the visa processing, the workers must show work history in similar environment to the Australian one, where workplace safety was as essential as it is in Australian workshops. In addition, most of the communication in the workshop is international as it is done by numbers

and drawings. This has proved to be the case with hundreds of workshops that would not replace their non English- background workers with anyone else.

The Australian employer is the only one who knows their business well enough to decide what level of English is needed for that particular business and they are the first to tell us when they believe the English would be a problem for their workplace.

The decision of where to recruit the skilled workers from must remain an employer decision and responsibility and not part of the visa restrictions.

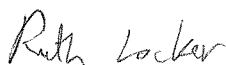
Workplace safety of Australian workers is catered for in many ways by our clients. First of all, new recruits from non-English speaking countries are making an admirable effort to learn English once on Australian land. They are tutored for vocational English after hours, converse in English amongst themselves and learn to read and write at institutions such as TAFE. It takes them a couple of months before they can converse in English and become an integral part of their workplace. We have seen that bilingual signage in the workshop, 'buddying' with Australian workers and an "induction into the community" programme are very successful ways tried by our clients. This would be the way to go for those looking for a real solution.

Despite great effort on the side of these foreign workers to study English prior to their arrival in Australia, it can not be learnt at the same speed and with the same results as it is done once they are in Australia and surrounded by English speakers.

We are calling out to you to keep the 457 visa scheme as it is now and if anything, let it be processed faster instead of thinking of adding more criteria which will definitely slow it down further.

Help us make Australian economy stronger with the help of the 457 visa scheme by supporting Australian businesses to create more work places for Australians.

Yours Sincerely



Ruth Locker
Director