

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 29 MAY 2008

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(68) Output 2.3: Australian Citizenship

Senator Nettle (L&CA 34) asked:

Which country conducted an assessment of their citizenship test and was it completed?

Answer:

The United States and the United Kingdom have both recently conducted assessments of their citizenship tests. The US have completed their assessment and are currently implementing the proposed changes. The UK have recently completed a consultation process on the proposed changes.

United States

The Office of Citizenship, within the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Department of Homeland Security recently completed a multi-year redesign of the naturalisation test to create a more standardised, fair and meaningful test and testing process. This was in response to concerns raised regarding inconsistent administration of the test, and new citizens lacking a meaningful understanding of US history and government.

To address these concerns, the federal government launched a test redesign in 2000. In 2005 the USCIS Office of Citizenship took over responsibility for this redesign which incorporated input from a variety of stakeholders including immigrant advocacy groups, citizenship instructors, history and US Government scholars, linguistic experts, current applicants, and a panel of English as a Second Language (ESL) experts.

USCIS conducted a pilot program of the re-designed test in 10 cities from February 2007. The revised test was announced to the public on 27 September 2007 and nation-wide implementation will take place on 1 October 2008, allowing immigrant educators and applicants sufficient time to prepare for the new test.

United Kingdom

A major review of UK citizenship was conducted by Lord Peter Goldsmith QC from October 2007 through to March 2008. In particular, the review sought to clarify the rights and responsibilities associated with British citizenship; the difference between categories of citizenship and possible incentives for long-term residents to become citizens; and explore the role of citizens in civic society.

The review recommended adapting the knowledge included in the Life in the UK test, such that it does more to stimulate learning, and also advocated consideration of a credits-based system which may be better suited to measuring a person's commitment to living in the UK and engaging with UK society. Under such a scheme a person could, for example, get 'credit' for working as a volunteer with community organisations.

In February 2008 Prime Minister Gordon Brown launched a Green paper, 'The Path to Citizenship: Next steps in Reforming the Immigration System', outlining proposed changes to citizenship rules for migrants. Under the new rules, a new 'contract' for citizenship with three distinct phases – temporary residence, probationary citizenship and full citizenship or permanent residence – would be implemented.

In order to progress to the next stage, migrants would need to improve their command of the English language, contribute economically by paying taxes, obey British law and demonstrate 'active citizenship' by actively engaging with the wider community. In the new system, the requirement that migrants demonstrate English language ability and knowledge of life in the UK would apply to those seeking to move from temporary to probationary citizenship.