

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 30 October 2006

IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO

(136) Output 1.1: Migration and Temporary Entry

Senator Carr asked:

1. Are you aware that the SkillForce International website claims that the company can provide workers in categories including “skilled and unskilled agricultural trades”?
2. Can you confirm that unskilled workers cannot enter Australia on 457 visas?
3. What action have you taken to stop SkillForce from advertising that it can arrange importation of unskilled workers? What action will you take?
4. Are you aware that SkillForce implies in at least two places on its website that 457 visa holders are technically responsible for their own private health insurance?
5. Can you confirm that 457 employer sponsors are (1) responsible for providing private health insurance for 457 visa holders; and (2) paying for it?
6. To what extent do you monitor the claims made by companies active in overseas recruitment of workers under 457 visa arrangements?
7. Have you stepped up this activity recently? How?
8. Do you plan to step up this activity? How and when?

Answer:

1. The claim made by the company Skillforce International Pty Ltd that they are able to provide workers for ‘unskilled agricultural trades’ is misleading.
2. The Subclass 457 programme does not allow the entry of unskilled agricultural workers.
3. The Department has written to Skillforce International Pty Ltd to reinforce that unskilled agricultural roles are inappropriate for the Subclass 457 programme and cannot be approved. As Skillforce International Pty Ltd is a member of the Recruitment & Consulting Services Association (RCSA), the Department has also written to the RCSA on this matter.
4. No.

5. (i) Subclass 457 sponsors are responsible for paying all medical or hospital expenses incurred by a sponsored person resulting from treatment administered in a public hospital (other than those met by health insurance or reciprocal health care arrangements).

(ii) Subclass 457 sponsors cannot make deductions for health insurance if this brings the salary of the visa holder below the Minimum Salary Level (MSL). Sponsors and Subclass 457 visa holders can negotiate to package health insurance where allowed under other laws, provided it does not cause the visa holders pay to drop below the MSL.
6. The Department does not have control over claims made in the public domain by individuals or businesses. Where the department becomes aware of claims made by a sponsor and those claims may give cause to concerns about their ability to comply with their undertakings as a sponsor, this will be raised with the sponsor. Where a migration agent makes misleading claims, these claims can be referred to the Migration Agents Registration Authority.
7. The Department has increased its efforts in monitoring all 457 matters, including through greater links with state government agencies with responsibility for employment agents and with the RCSA.
8. See answer to part 7.