



Answer to question:

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

MIGRATION, PATHWAY TO NATION BUILDING INQUIRY

QUESTION: The Chair would welcome any further thoughts on the English language requirements for visas.

ANSWER:

At the hearing Mrs Waldren raised the point that the English language requirement for construction trades workers may be too high. English language requirements should reflect the level of English necessary to perform the work safely and appropriately.

The level of English proficiency required to do a particular skilled occupation varies depending on the nature of the work. For example, a client facing and highly technical occupation such as a lawyer or a general practitioner needs considerably higher English proficiency than a tradesperson.

A single English language requirement for permanent skilled visas is a blunt tool resulting in thresholds that are too low for some occupations and too high for others.

Research should be commissioned to better understand the level of English needed to perform occupations safely and appropriately in Australia. The English language requirements for permanent skilled migration should be adjusted to align with this.

Since meeting with the Standing Committee Master Builders has been made aware of an additional issue that will likely be of interest to the Committee.

Secondary student visa holders (i.e. the partner of an international student) are subject to the same work entitlements and restrictions as the primary visa holder (i.e. the student). During covid the Government removed the limit on work hours for student and secondary student visa holders. However, this is coming to an end on 30 June 2023. From 1 July, the partner of an international student will be subject to fortnightly caps on the number of hours they can work.

There is logic in restricting the number of hours an international student can work – to ensure they focus on their studies, which is their primary reason for being in Australia. However, there is no sound rationale for limiting the hours their partner can work.

Limiting the hours an international student's partner can work is poor policy. It reduces the earning potential of the couple, increasing the likelihood of financial stress. This in turn increases the need for the student to also work and the likelihood of the student and/or partner seeking undocumented work.

Additionally, Australia continues to experience acute workforce shortages. Caps on the number of hours secondary student visa holders can work from 1 July 2023 will unnecessarily exacerbate this shortage.