

RECEIVED
29 JAN 2007



Submission No. 7

Date Received

BY: MIG

Response: Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Inquiry into eligibility requirements and monitoring, enforcement and reporting arrangements for temporary business visas

Details of Respondent

Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES)
4/1 Little Collins Street
Melbourne
VIC 3000

Contact Person

Ahmed Yusuf
General Manager, AMES Corporate Strategy Division
Phone 9926 4785
Fax 9926 4695
Email yusufa@ames.net.au

Background

For the past fifty-three years, programs delivered by Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) have been assisting refugees and special humanitarian program entrants establish and build their new lives in Australia. AMES now provides English language and literacy education, vocational training and employment services and settlement services to people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. With its head office in Melbourne, AMES offers settlement, education and employment services at AMES locations across metropolitan Melbourne and through outreach services to regional and rural Victoria. It also offers specialist employment services at six locations in western Sydney.

Over the past two to three years AMES has worked particularly closely with the recently arrived African communities in Melbourne and Sydney (Sudanese, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali) in employment and capacity building projects which support successful settlement. In October 2005 AMES and its consortium partners, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Redback Services and the Foundation for the Survivors of Torture commenced delivery of the IHSS contract across the whole of Victoria.

AMES' response to this Joint Standing Committee inquiry addresses the points within the Terms of Reference that relate to (1) adequacy of the current eligibility requirements regarding English language proficiency for Visa 457 applicants and (2) to identify where procedures can be improved.

1. Inquire into the adequacy of the current eligibility requirements (including English language proficiency) and the effectiveness of monitoring, enforcement and reporting arrangements for temporary business visas particularly Temporary Business (Long Stay) 457 visas and Labour Agreements.

The current eligibility requirements relating to English language proficiency for applicants seeking skills-related visas is described as functional. Functional English is measured at Level 2 in the *International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR)* or if assessed offshore, by the *International English Language Testing System (IELTS)* at an averaged score of the four language skills of IELTS 5.

Feedback from employers and peak body industry groups confirm that communication skills overlap with generic employment skills in the modern workplace. It is also essential that newly arrived employees are able to work safely within OH&S parameters in the workplace.

AMES delivers the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) to eligible new arrivals to a level of ISLPR 2 or Certificate 111 in Spoken and Written English. This program includes a range of language related courses, including modules with an employment focus. AMES also offers advanced language Certificates including the Pre Vocational Studies module in the AMEP which covers OH&S issues.

These courses are undertaken at the ISLPR 2 or Functional English level.

Visa 457 clients are not eligible for the AMEP, but may attend AMEP and general AMES classes (including ELICOS) as private clients.

Australia should benefit from Visa 457 immigration. Inherent in the rationale for this visa category is the ability to pass on new skills by effectively communicating in the workplace and where necessary to deliver training for new or imported skills. Effective communication skills are essential for the transfer of knowledge and skills.

2. Identifying areas where procedures can be improved

Information describing the English language proficiency requirements are difficult to access and identify in the current information relating to employment focussed visa categories. However, various references external to the online information indicate the government's strong desire that functional English is required in order for such visa holders to participate effectively in the workplace.

It is also unknown how language assessments are currently being undertaken by applicants. Issues of consistency of assessment and whether desired language levels are mandatory are not immediately apparent.

Currently Visa 457 holders attend English classes as private students either by personal choice or at employer suggestion. There appears to be no inducement to attend accredited language classes should the visa holder or employer find their English is not at an appropriate level.

A similar process would be recommended as that used to ensure Visa 139 applicants possess either the required English language levels or inducement to access classes.

The sponsor/employer would be obliged to fund an amount for English language, vocational preparation or workplace communication if the applicant's IELTS score is rated at less than functional.

At present for Visa 139 applicants the IELTS test conducted offshore requires an averaged score for the four skills of IELTS 5. However, if one skill is rated at less than 4.5 then a fee (\$2,000 for Visa 139) must be paid before a visa is processed. This sum is then quarantined for an appropriate language program in Australia.

On arrival the applicant's language level is assessed and the client directed to a suitable local program.

This method ensures encouragement to increase language skills to the required level, access to a consistent language assessment, and direction to appropriate and targeted courses.