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01 JUN 2005

Submission No. 1  
Date Received 1-6-05

BY: MIC **NOEL HEWITT ASSOCIATES LLC**

P.O. Box 230747  
New York, N.Y.  
U.S.A. 10023 - 9998

Registered Migration Agent Number: 0320247

Telephone: 212 724 7177  
Facsimile: 212 724 6733

May 31, 2005

Web Site: [www.noelhewitt.com](http://www.noelhewitt.com)  
Email: [enquiries@noelhewitt.com](mailto:enquiries@noelhewitt.com)

I am a Registered Migration Agent based in the U.S. Some of my clients include tradesmen seeking advise on obtaining Skill based visas. Those applicants seeking Skill Visas often encounter difficulties caused by differences existing between the standards required in Australia and other countries with similar trade training programs and those countries with different trade training regimes. Often these difference occur due to counties having different categorization of occupations and specialization. For instance a plumber in the U.S. because of specialization existing in this country may only need limited experience and qualifications in order to be classified as a plumber in their particular specialised field. In Australia the trade training seems to cover all possible employment areas a plumber may eventually find work. The plumber in Australia will in the end, like his U.S. counterpart eventually end up specialising in pool construction as an example and never again touch sewerage. Air conditioning mechanics are another example.

When advised of the requirements of needing a broad education in their trade these applicants will request information on how they can upgrade their skill levels to a level allowing them to meet the Skill Visa criteria. The advise I give them is there is no visa or institute in Australia allowing a non Australian trained trade qualified person to complete an 'upgrade' trade course and then apply for a Skill Visa or a visa leading to a Skill Visa (the exception is the sponsored Occupational Trainee visa which allows for experience after formal training with the applicant being required to leave Australia after receiving the on the job training). In addition most trade courses require a 'on the job' component during training which creates issues concerning Student visa 'work rights'. These individuals certainly do not meet any permanent visa or the Long Term Business visa criteria if they apply outside Australia on the basis of their present skills and academic qualifications.

There is, I explain, provision to allow nurses and some occupations like medicine to attend 'upgrade' courses in Australia but there is nothing for tradesmen. I also advise the requirement for any Skill visa they will need post education training of 12 months at the time the application is submitted or have completed at least 2 years education training in Australia.

Recent press releases have identified a 'Trade Skill' shortage in Australia. It would seem logical that a cost effective and timely means of filling these shortages, be these shortages located in capital cities or remote areas (where any visa could be tied to a residence / employer requirement), would be to have these occupationally experienced individuals attend short upgrade courses in Australia as is presently the case with

registered nurses. Presently overseas registered nurses have provisions under the Student visa to attend upgrade training which later allows them to change to the Long Stay Business visa and eventually the possibility of obtaining a permanent resident visa.

The proposed 'New Apprentice Scheme' and its predecessor may now be redundant. Trades have now gone beyond the requirement where you learnt on the job spending the first two years of the apprenticeship doing menial tasks and only later in the apprenticeship being granted trade specific duties. Most trades can now require a level of knowledge and the experience which may be considered equivalent to that of a good technical degree.

In U.S. individuals attend trade schools and obtain associate degrees. These graduates then go on to find employment in their chosen field of study. There seems to be some merit in this way of training tradesmen.

In Australia if this scheme was implemented, at some time applicants should obtain 'on the job experience' in order to learn the methodology and thinking process to be able to apply their academic training to practical situations. Perhaps a process of a two or three year full time academic year with paid practical on the job experience not tied to any particular employer during semester breaks may have some merit. At the conclusion of that full time training the applicant works for a year in their trade and then sit a final academic and practical examination in order to obtain their trade qualifications.

Overseas applicants could come to Australia and complete bridging courses and if a sponsorship position was available, be employed in that position for a year and sit the final trade examination. If no position comes available or an 'Australian first' policy is adopted for these one year practical training, they could return to their own country and perhaps complete their practical training there and later sit the Australian Trade examinations. These overseas based applicants could then be sought when trade skill vacancies occur that cannot be filled by Australian citizens or Australian permanent residents. Certainly these practical positions should first be filled by Australians or Australian permanent residents.

What is proposed has some merit. It provides:

1. A ready pool of trade qualified applicants. The overseas applicants could rapidly fill any short falls and as their qualifications were obtained in Australia they could be readily absorbed and licensed to be employed in the field of employment in Australia. If they have to complete their practical training overseas, they would still be 'Australian experienced' and be more likely to settle successfully in Australia because of the experience of having studied in Australia.
2. Training full fee paying students provides for greater investment in trade knowledge base, infrastructure and funds for this training – economies of scale.
3. Trade applicants will first enter their field of employment at the completion of academic training thus have greater skills to offer than traditional 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year apprentices.

4. Trade trained personal would come from areas other than the traditional British type apprenticeship countries thus providing valuable diversification and knowledge contribution to the trade in which they are employed.
5. Policy could be made as per the SIRS visas to encourage suitably qualified individuals to locate in remote locations thus benefiting these communities which traditionally have felt the impact of the loss of skilled tradesmen to metropolitan areas.
6. The selection process for apprentices in Australia tends to be one of informal contacts. There is no guarantee an individual with no experience in a trade will on commencing the trade complete the years of training. A process where the applicant presents their academic qualification to potential employers in order to complete the practical aspects of training will provide a potential employer with a better idea of the potential merit of employing that applicant.
7. An academic training process will allow applicants to move across trades due to commonality in subjects i.e. reading plans, occupational health, electrical circuitry and also become dual trade trained in trades if necessary.

#### Conclusion:

Trade training and the skills required from tradesmen today are expected to be at a higher standard than in the past due legislative and technological changes. A training process allowing individuals to enter the trade of their choice on the basis of academic training will assist future employers in sponsorship by allowing choice of applicant based upon academic and 'academic practical experience'. Australia could benefit by having a readily trained pool of applicants from overseas and with the additional overseas student income assist in funding of the training process.

The present visa processes seems to cover most occupations and study situations but not tradesmen. There is a good opportunity here to address trade shortages, provide an improved means of training tradesmen and bring in foreign income to assist in the payment of this training.

Noel Hewitt