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PDA

Dear Paola,

Re: Inquiry into Skills Recognition, Upgrading & Licensing

I refer to your letter dated 6 May 2005 requesting for comments on the above. The following are my notes for the Committee. This information is provided on a best effort basis & may not necessarily be entirely accurate.

Skills assessment process:

- A higher level of automation possible for certain parties involved in the skills assessment process
 - Country Education Profiles (CEP) published by the NOOSR still paper based. An online subscription service should be considered
 - Certain skills assessment bodies ("skills bodies") should adopt the use of IT more readily (e.g. using emails for correspondence or acknowledgements)
- Opportunities to improve availability, consistency & quality of skills assessment bodies' information to clients
 - Skills bodies should aim to present their information in a unified way through collaboration with other skills bodies, e.g. a central website listing all the skilled occupations & web links from this website to the skills bodies' websites
 - Greater consistency in the way skills bodies present their information in terms of structure, content, form, procedure, etc.
 - More user friendly websites, e.g. keeping certain key website links static, or provide link re-directions if web pages are moved
 - Availability of "value add" services from skills assessment bodies, e.g. they notify "registered" clients of changes to requirements (e.g. fees, forms, procedures)
 - Availability of up to date & accurate information, including contact details (e.g. contact details missing/out of date for certain skills bodies' websites)
 - Availability of timely & informative replies to enquiries (e.g. email enquiries to certain skills assessment bodies not responded to, or response is unsatisfactory (e.g. slow turnaround, not informative))
- Where a shortfall in learning is identified by a skills body for an applicant (e.g. the applicant needs to complete additional subjects before being successfully assessed), certain skills bodies do not offer programmes to complete the required subjects on a correspondence basis
- Greater consistency in the recognition of qualifications for occupational licensing by State and Territory regulators largely depends on how well the bodies are able to work together to achieve this

Alternatives to Qualifications Assessment:

Most skills assessment bodies assess an applicant's ability to work in his/her nominated occupation based on formal post secondary qualifications. Skills assessment bodies such as the TRA, ACS & AIM offer a Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) skills assessment option in lieu of formal qualifications.

It may be worthwhile to consider broadening this approach (e.g. skills recognition through RPL or by examination) to certain generalist occupations such as Child Care Coordinator & Sports Administrator. I acknowledge RPL assessments are tricky to do.

Skills bodies such as APEC conduct examinations at certain overseas venues bi-annually for overseas qualified pharmacists intending to apply for skilled migration. This is an excellent service but hampered somewhat by the high costs associated with participation. It would be unusual for young pharmacists (especially those from third world countries) to be financially well off to be able to afford costs associated with skills assessment, visa application & settlement.

Registrable Occupations in Australian:

A high percentage of overseas qualified people working in occupations registrable in Australia are discouraged from applying for skilled migration for reasons including:

1. The considerable effort & costs associated with the exercise – the skilled migration programme favours young people with skilled work experience. It is not unusual for young people to have problems funding such endeavours
2. In the case of someone who is required to complete a bridging course in Australia before applying for skills assessment, the person faces disruption to work & family life. Not many people are able to take time off work to study in Australia & have a job to return to
3. It takes a long time to complete skills assessment/registration. The overall duration in applying for a skilled visa puts many people off. Further, Registered Migration Agents are generally unwilling to commit themselves to cases which can drag on for more than 2 years
4. There is no guarantee to the prospective migrant that all this effort will result in a successful visa application

Bridging Courses

Bridging courses which require a person to study in Australia for 6 months or more can affect a person's ability to meet the Recent Work Experience (RWE) requirement for skilled migration. Periods of study during a bridging course are not recognised as periods of full time employment – affected persons will need to return to their home country & immediately resuming work to meet RWE requirement.

The Australian government should assess the effectiveness of the skills assessment process by conducting periodic surveys to identify problem areas which hamper skilled migration for certain occupations.

Until a better understanding of the barriers faced by prospective skilled migrants is achieved & steps taken to address those issues, Australia will be hard pressed to meet its intended goal to overcome its current skills shortage problems, particularly in relation to registrable occupations on the Migration On Demand List (MODL).

Currently, it is generally easier for overseas students who graduate in Australia in "migration eligible" skilled occupations to apply for permanent residence as compared to their overseas qualified counterparts. Subject to people with overseas qualifications which are readily recognised in Australia (e.g. UK qualified registered nurses), it is significantly more difficult for people in registrable occupations holding overseas qualifications to apply for migration due to additional hurdles associated with registration.

While the Australian government is in a position to tap into the skills pool of overseas local graduates to address the skills shortage issue to some extent, Australia stands to continue to turn away qualified professionals with overseas qualifications who more often than not, are in a position to contribute valuable skills, experience & wealth to Australia.