

Submission No.	60
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From; **Howard Tebble**

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BY: MEG

To; **The Secretary
Joint Migration Committee
House of Representatives,
PO Box 6021,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600**

February 27, 2007

Inquiry into temporary business visas

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; and;

Identify areas where procedures can be improved. for the subclass 457 Temporary (Business (Long Stay)) visa

Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee Submission in relation to the current monitoring, enforcement and reporting arrangements

My background;

Bachelor Degree: (Modern Asian Studies.) included study of Asian Cultures & Societies, languages. etc) Grad. Dip. Adult and Voc. Education.

Volunteer Migrant English Tutor at TAFE (South Bank),

Volunteer tutor with an adult literacy programs.(Caboolture)

English Language teacher WTUSM(Wuhan University). China. for three years.

Participant in various Cross Cultural awareness programs.

Friend and personal English tutor to many Asian families.

encl. CD ROM

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.

I have just found out about the inquiry, and do not have access to adequate resources. However I have included my thoughts, observations, and some suggestions. I have no objection to the 457 visa policy, but am very concerned at the lack of action against those who have abused the trust put in them by the foreign workers.

Over the years I have come into contact with many people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Here in Australia they add a vital element to the Australian community, not just in the valuable work they perform, but also in vast range of colourful cultural practices and foods that we have come to enjoy. Those from Asian backgrounds are the ones that I have had most contact with.

(1) Adequacy of current eligibility requirements regarding English language proficiency.

I think that the current requirements are adequate for the type of work performed. Obviously different jobs would require different skills. The ability to be able to follow directions and work well is the most important. We do not discriminate against those with hearing or speech loss. We train them and ourselves to react accordingly. What is important is that we ensure that Australians as a whole are better equipped to live with people with different backgrounds.

My comments below include some suggestions, some of a more general nature.

In a voluntary capacity I have come into contact with both employers and the workers and have praise for both groups. The workers are well educated, hard working, and very keen to integrate within the community. The employers for their part provide good working conditions, pay the same wages as the locals and endeavor to help them settle into the community. Assistance is provided with housing and transport. The workers are free to move about within the community and are well accepted by the local inhabitants.

English Instruction.

Because of the amount of work available and the shortage of local labour all the workers are offered overtime. Thus all workers often work six days a week. The type of work is noisy limiting much opportunity to hear or practice English. It is also not feasible to take large numbers of workers from the work-floor to teach them English.

Therefore the only time available for English instruction is on the remaining day when families usually like to be together, do the shopping, go to church, or to socialise. Fortunately many of the local people now take part in many of these activities and help with English instruction.

I have been actively involved in this area and formed many good friendships. Families with young children are more fortunate because the children learn so fast and enjoy helping their parents.

The employers were prepared to offer facilities for English instruction to small groups at a time but they also needed a good teacher. No government assistance is available for workplace training, unless they are Australian citizens.

The businesses have to employ foreign workers because Australia citizens do not want to work in some locations. Government funding is available for Work for the Dole, CDEP, Disability (overweight, intoxicated, etc), and other funds for those who are regularly 'managed, and administered' by Centrelink staff. Many local potential workers only want to work one or two days then take several days off.

I was advised by staff at the Immigration Department that the employer had no obligation to provide English instruction. The main criteria being that occupational health and safety issues be properly addressed. This is being done, but without proper procedures being put in place there is no guarantee that the messages are adequately understood. Only when there is an accident does it become evident that there is a communication problem.

The schools said that they are obliged to provide education to the children but they are not setup to teach English to non-English speakers. Special instruction for children was provided for a limited period before the students were dropped in with the mainstream students. Adult students can be taught but they must pay. Lack of funding was the given problem, although there was no shortage when it came to sports and the principals' pet projects.

Concern was expressed, by some government officers and ESL teachers, that only highly qualified teachers should be employed to teach ESL English, and other teachers should not be employed. The reason was that the students may learn the wrong grammar and not speak 'good English'. Volunteers would be OK though.

These officers and others (who don't volunteer themselves) overlook the fact that the workers and their families want to be able to mix with the community. Social English should come first. It is better for a person to develop the confidence to try and speak English, even with mistakes. A good listener will include subtle corrections in their feedback and response.

Australians who have tried to learn a little of a foreign language know the thrill of being able to get their message across when shopping in an overseas market. It may be wrong but if the listener is thoughtful they will understand.

Too much effort is being made to get more volunteers to attend Adult Literacy Tutor Training courses. This only adds more highly paid people to a group, who are not actually assisting the foreign worker families. If they can get funding to train volunteers why not get them to teach the migrant worker families instead.

Some problems observed.

I have observed several potential problems since my involvement over the years.

The first is the assumption that the foreigners need lots of help, especially with things like obtaining food and cultural items not normally obtainable locally.

Meetings were held of various well meaning local groups and the many government departments to work out what could be done. It was very interesting to observe how little communication there had been between the various departments.

Cultural awareness training, and knowledge of the functions of each department were poor.

Whilst these meetings were taking place the workers used their own ingenuity and networking to solve most problems themselves. There was much use of mobile phones to contact distant family and friends in Australia.

The perceived food availability problems did not eventuate. The workers had no trouble adapting to our local produce, just as they would at home during different seasons and shortages. Local stores sourced some of the exotic herbs and spices, which were quickly taken up by the locals as well. Local shoppers would often help the workers whilst they were in the shops, and explained the names of various items. All this happened without the use of any common language.

Cultural awareness training was offered to the community. This was well attended by interested people, however there was poor support from the local authorities, government departments and teachers. These groups seem to prefer to attend these activities during working hours when they are paid.

Communication with the community is the biggest problem, not just for the foreign workers, but also for the local people. Newspapers are generally not interested in promoting any activities unless it is a paid advertisement. News about what is happening in many communities seldom appears unless there is a space available or unless there is enough news and supporting advertisements to support one extra sheet (four pages). Without good communication it is very difficult to bring people together to practice language skills.

Special funding for local community newsletters would be more useful than big government funded advertisements in the mainstream media.

People who have the skills and have lived successfully in diverse communities should be recognised and not be forced to be accredited, often by those who have lesser skills, but who hold down well paid government jobs.

Interpreters/Translators.

Officially only a fully trained accredited person can provide interpreter services.

Businesses, and government services, are told that they should use the TIS(Telephone

Interpreter Service) or an accredited face to face interpreter in any dealings with a non-English speaker.

Interpreters employed by an employer can have conflicts of interest, or inadequate skills. I have seen situations when correct interpreting processes have not been followed. Information has been added, or left out by the interpreter, without this fact being brought to the attention of the parties. There have been personal or cultural problems. However these do not justify the expense of using TIS.

The employer and workers have expressed concern over this but they cannot verify that the interpreter is not performing correctly. The interpreter sometimes performs other duties both within the workplace and out.

There is a need for a buddy interpreter system. Australians can talk about their personal worries with their family, trusted friends, welfare groups, or government information centres. These conversations are not always official, but help the person decide whether to seek more official assistance. The foreign workers can't do this. However they often have Australian friends who they trust, but are not able to adequately convey their concerns. On many occasions, I have had to speak (on a mobile phone) to a person in another state who is a friend of a foreign worker and speaks the same language. Topics have included problems with a car, education, setting up Internet access, banking, and workplace problems.

On one occasion the worker had been very sick and had told the business interpreter that they could not go to work. (Too sick, and a health risk at the premises). The interpreter forgot and the next day the worker was in great trouble. The interpreter would not admit the mistake, (even though there were witnesses), and would interpret the workers concerns.

Many government departments have full time employees with dual language ability. These people should be allowed to act as buddy interpreters. They could be given some basic training in interpreting skills and counseling skills to be used as they would with a friend. They would also have the knowledge to enable them to refer the person to a more qualified person.

Another possible solution is for government departments to provide posters, in the language of the workers. These posters could display rules and advice that we Australians have grown up with. These should be made available to all workplaces on a regular basis.

The posters should not just relate to the workplace. They should cover, workplace safety, safety in the home, road rules and safety, health and services, child care, banking and finance, education, problem resolution, community welfare services, TIS, and buddy interpreters, etc.. A blank space, at the bottom of each poster, could be used to advertise special functions of the business or community.

(2) Procedures that can be improved.

The procedures currently employed in selecting the workers are probably adequate.

Selecting honest employers and backing up and enforcing procedures is more important. The worker who has taken the gamble to uproot their family to come here and help Australia should not have to suffer when we make mistakes.

Directors should be required to take personal responsibility for their actions in the 457 visas and not hide behind company law.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Howard Tebble". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

Howard Tebble