

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 8 FEBRUARY 2010

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(112) Program 1.1: Visa and Migration

Senator Humphries asked:

- (1) The 2009-10 MYEFO foreshadowed the Government was spending \$0.2 million in the current financial year to strengthen the integrity of the student visa program. This measure will include initiatives such as improved checks of student visa holder's documents, better combating cases of document fraud and streamlining visa processing arrangements for post graduate research students. How will each of these measures be put into effect?
- (2) Of the 28,000 student visas that were refused in 2008-09, what were the main reasons for these applications being refused and what proportion of those applications refused falls into each category?
- (3) What has been the cause of an increase of 68% in the number of visa applications being refused between 2007-08 and 2008-09?
- (4) Does the Department keep statistics on the number of applicants who after being refused a student visa, were then granted a visa after making a new application that addressed the reasons for refusing their first visa application? If so, what was this number? If not, can you estimate?
- (5) How will the cost of this measure be met within the existing resources of the Department?
- (6) What is the estimates cost of this measure?
- (7) Will other activities provided by the Department lose resourcing as a result of these measures being implemented?

Answer:

1) The implementation of measures foreshadowed by the Government to strengthen the integrity of the Student visa program included increased interviewing and document checking of identified high risk caseloads. These measures were undertaken by various posts, including New Delhi, Brasilia and Port Louis. The Department applied additional resources to its New Delhi post to assist with interviewing applicants. Posts were required to focus their resources on the increased interviewing and document checking. The Department also applied resources to support overseas posts through the analysis of high-risk caseloads, to enable accurate targeting of their interviews and document checking.

The streamlining of Student visa processing requirements for postgraduate research and doctoral students has been implemented this financial year, through the lowering of Assessment Levels for applicants.

The Postgraduate Research Student visa category has one of the lowest levels of fraud across all Student visa categories.

2) The Department does not collect statistics on the reasons for the refusal of Student visas. Applicants can be refused for many reasons, where they fail to meet legislative requirements. Examples of reasons for refusals include where an applicant has failed to provide required information for the grant of a visa, where an applicant has failed to meet financial or English language requirements, or where an officer has made an assessment and decided that the applicant is not a genuine student or does not intend to comply with their visa conditions. The use of fraudulent documentation is considered as a part of any of these refusals.

3) Australia's Student visa program has experienced strong, sustained growth over several years. With this growth, challenges in determining genuine Student visa applicants have emerged as an ongoing issue.

The Department responds to changes in the risk profile of its visa programs by aligning visa requirements to the immigration risk presented by an applicant. Risk is determined by an objective analysis of visa compliance. The greater the risk identified, the more evidence required to be granted a visa.

Refusal rates are dependent upon the quality of applications the Department has received. All applications are assessed on their merits, and a decision to refuse a visa application is based on the requirements set out in the Migration Regulations. Applications are refused because, in most cases, the decision maker is not satisfied the applicant has a genuine intent to study in Australia.

4) The Department does not collect statistics on this occurrence and could not provide an estimate. Applicants who have previously been refused a Student visa may apply for a Student visa offshore as many times as they wish. Some applicants are granted a Student visa on subsequent applications after having addressed deficiencies in previous applications.

5) Current resource levels within the student and integrity program areas will be utilised to conduct increased integrity checking.

6) The estimated costs for implementing the integrity measures relating to Student visas is \$0.2 million, to be disbursed in the 2009-2010 financial year.

7) No. Other departmental activities will not lose resourcing as a result of these measures being implemented.