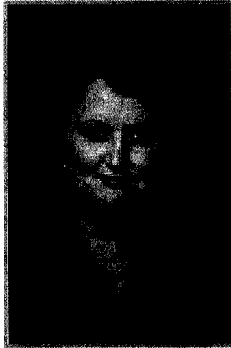


VANSTONE MEETS WITH ITCRA ON 2006 - 2007 SKILLED MIGRATION PROGRAM

ITCRA Executive Director Norman Lacy met with Immigration and Multicultural Affairs Minister, Amanda Vanstone, to participate with other representatives of business organisations in consultations regarding the 2006-2007 Migration Program. The meeting took place on Tuesday 31 January 2006.

Mr Lacy said that the consultations would feed into the process of formulating the Minister's submission to Cabinet on the 2006-2007 Migration Program.



"The consultation process is an opportunity for the recruitment industry to put forward ideas that will further improve the benefits of migration to Australia as a whole and to Australia's industries and businesses."

"The recommendations we made at our meeting with the Minister 12 months earlier, were wholly taken on board by the government."

The Association's main recommendations for the 2006-2007 Migration Program related to the composition of the MODL list, the English language skills of 457 Visa holders and extensions of the 417 working holiday visa.

The MODL list, which has the biggest impact on the ICT businesses of ITCRA members, contains 4 x job categories for the ICT industry that allow for fast tracking of visas for candidates who can demonstrate these skills.

Currently they are CISSP, E-commerce Security (non-programming), Network Security, SAP, SIEBEL

Mr Lacy said that the process of adding and deleting skills on the MODL list needed to be more aligned with the requirements of the ICT industry and the recruiters that service this sector.

"As it is, the list rarely reflects the genuine shortage of skills in the market. For example, TIBCO skills are not reflected in the list but IBM have been looking for the best part of 2005. Unix / Perl is difficult to justify under the list, but again Optus have had an open job order for these skills for the whole of 2005. The timing of skills being added to the list is typically a minimum 12 months behind market trends", he said.

ITCRA also recommended that closer scrutiny needed to be applied to migrant's spoken English language abilities.

"Our members are approached by significant numbers of new migrants, particularly from China and India, whose English communication skills are sometimes so poor that it is impossible for them to be placed. Most employers require very good communications skills as a pre-requisite", Mr Lacy said

"Bringing ICT people from Asia into Australia who cannot be understood for the first 12 months they live here, and are therefore largely unemployable, is not really helping the Australian economy nor the individuals themselves."

"The shortfall of appropriately qualified candidates will not, as far as the vast majority of the employers are concerned, be filled by people from Asia or SE Asia with weak spoken English skills. A much more significant contribution to reducing the ICT skills shortages in Australia would be to bring greater numbers of suitably qualified migrants from English speaking countries", he said.

In respect to 417 (Working Holiday) Visas, ITCRA has strongly recommended that:

- the 417 visa be extended to 2 years from the current 1 year.
- the 417 visa holders be not restricted to working for one employer for a maximum of 3 months

"We believe that these modifications would significantly boost the economy. The quality of the work skills of the vast majority of the 417 visa holders employed is of a significantly high standard across the professional disciplines of accountancy and finance, ICT and property as well as the white collar / blue collar disciplines of administration, customer service and almost all the 'trades' ", Mr Lacy said.

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"The majority of our members' clients in both the public and private sectors want them to be able to assign such labour for more than the 3 month period. Both business and the public services are missing out on this wealth of talent."

"By comparison, the UK and Ireland provide 2 year visas with almost no work restrictions and indeed the financial services sector in London is almost wholly dependant on Australian and New Zealand back packers for their junior / support services' employees", he said.

ITCRA also recommended a further increase in the Skilled Migration component of the program by 10%, a repeat of its recommendation for the previous program (2005 - 2006).

"Our members' experience indicates that there continues to be a serious shortage of appropriately qualified ICT personnel in Australia for specific skills. For example e-commerce, middle-ware skills such as TIBCO (an IBM product) and application specialist / architect skills. They are seeing an increasing demand by clients for candidates from overseas as the trend of suitably qualified local candidate availability continues to decline. ", Mr Lacy said
