

9 May 2017

Submission on Suite of proposed changes to the Essential Skills visa

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Capacity in which feedback is being provided: as a private individual with a long-term interest and involvement in the adequacy of staffing caring for the intellectually disabled, including daily contact as a parent with IDEA Services vocational and residential staff in relation to the needs of a disabled adult, membership of IHC, former member of the Wellington Branch of IHC, and former chair of the Coromandel Street special school (now defunct) committee.

Proposal 2a: Introduction of a maximum duration for lower-skilled Essential Skills visas

IDEA Services has always had considerable difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff, particularly talented staff, because of the nature of the work and the modest remuneration that can be offered. This is a situation that will be aggravated as the number of intellectually disabled continues to increase. Consequently IDEA Services has to recruit some lower-skilled Essential Skills visa holders in order to maintain adequate staffing levels. I have first-hand knowledge of the work of some of them, and rate them very highly, in some cases more highly than their New Zealand counterparts. They are absolutely essential for adequate care of the intellectually disabled. The government proposes to extend the pathway to residence under certain conditions for a number of work visa holders in the agricultural sector in the South Island. That proposal is fully warranted. However, it doesn't go far enough. There is a very good case for extending the proposal and granting a pathway to residence for those working in the service sector who have been in New Zealand for say five years and have the support of their employers. These people came to New Zealand when regulations regarding residency were less clear than currently or than they will be in future. They came in good faith with a reasonable expectation of residency, they have contributed to New Zealand and paid their taxes, and they are indispensable. It has recently been estimated that 200,000 additional workers will be required in the service sector by 2020. Even if that estimate is only remotely correct, it is quite impossible for the need to be met from within New Zealand given the number of unemployed and location and training considerations, and the situation will be aggravated if work visa holders already here are not permitted to stay. On the basis of need, equity and fairness they should be allowed a pathway to residence.

Proposal 2b: Introduction of stand down period for lower-skilled Essential Skills migrants

As indicated above, a stand down period in the disability sector is not a practical possibility. Not only are lower-skilled Essential Skills migrants essential for providing adequate care for the intellectually disabled because of difficulties of recruitment and retention within New Zealand, but continuity of care by those with whom they are familiar is in the best interests of the intellectually disabled.

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