

Proposals to Changes in Immigration - Essential Skills Visa

Proposal 1

What impacts or implications do you see foresee from defining lower-,mid-,and higher-skilled Essential Skills migrants in this way?

Agree somewhat with defining migrants into lower, mid, and higher skilled categories, however we don't agree that lower skill migrants should not have a pathway to residency. Many industries require low-skilled workers. These people should have the opportunity to become residents too, as they are often essential to the workforce.

A lower-skilled worker is no less essential to the labour workforce.

Tourism - the biggest export industry in the country – relies heavily on migrant works in the \$16-23/hour pay range. In many areas, especially Queenstown, the industry would collapse without these workers. The recent Berl report shows expected shortage of 200,000 roles in service sector.

We need dedicated, long-term staff in frontline, cleaning, and grounds maintenance positions. Traditionally these roles start in the \$16-20/hour range, but can attract wages over \$20/hour after 2-3 years' service.

We rarely get New Zealanders applying for roles when we advertise. A recent campaign on Seek to attract a frontline staff member received 40 applicants, none of which were New Zealanders. Similarly, we recently advertised for Housekeeping staff. Again, no New Zealanders.

We have a good record of retaining staff for over three years in 'low-skilled' positions. The cost of recruitment and training, consistency for guest satisfaction, and gaining knowledge of local area and attractions, means it is desirable to keep existing staff members who have work visas. We believe these staff should have the opportunity for residency as well as higher skilled staff.

Queenstown Holiday Park Ltd employs 25 staff. 15 of them are migrant workers and of that, 11 are on Essential Skills visas.

Queenstown is a difficult town for many low-skilled employees. Migrant workers tend to be more adept at making it work here, and generally out-perform New Zealanders in these roles. There is a need for a pathway to residency for these hard-working, and diligent workers. Responsible employers will only support such people through long-term employment. We are not advocating a free-for-all, rather a pathway for good people to become residents, regardless of their skill-level.

Proposal 2a

What impacts or implications do you foresee from the proposed maximum duration of three years for lower-skilled Essential Skills visa holders?

The “lower-skilled” workers are the backbone of the tourism industry, which is now the biggest export industry in the country. Tourism and Hospitality businesses in Queenstown and other regions simply could not operate without these so-called “low-skilled” workers, the majority of which are migrants.

If a maximum duration for Essential Skills migrants is introduced, there will be a reduction in dedication, commitment, and service levels in this vital industry.

If after three years, both the employer and employee are happy, and the lack of New Zealand applicants is still as low as it has been traditionally, then the migrant should be given chance to continue and/or gain residency.

There are conditions that could be imposed on staying longer. For example, these migrants may be required to remain in the South Island if necessary for a set period of time, but the good workers should be given the opportunity to stay.

If an employer has continued to employ the same person for three years, and each year has had to prove to immigration that there is no suitable New Zealander for the

role, then they should be given the opportunity for continued work visa and/or a path to residency.

These workers and employers should not be punished because New Zealanders are not available, suitable, or willing to do the job.

Proposal 2b

What impacts or implications do you foresee from the proposal to introduce a stand-down period for lower skilled Essential Skills migrants?

A stand down period will only serve to disrupt both businesses and migrants. As above, the so-called “low-skilled” workers are essential to many businesses and should not be regarded as a lower class of person. These people work hard and should be afforded the same rights and opportunities as so-called “higher-skilled” persons. A lower skilled worker is no less essential to the labour force. A good example of this is the large number of foreign graduates from hospitality schools. While they have qualifications that may class them as higher-skilled workers, they often have little practical experience. It is our view that experience often counts for more than education. These graduates often do not wish to apply for ‘low-skilled’ positions, such as housekeeping.

Proposal 3

What impacts or implications do you foresee from the proposal to remove the ability for lower-skilled Essential Skills visa holders to bring their partners to New Zealand for the length of their visa?

Migrants on work visas with families are more productive, work harder, party less, and are generally more reliable employees. Again, the proposal is based on the argument that lower-skilled workers are lower-class persons and not as essential as

higher-skilled persons. We reject this argument. We have had great success with migrant workers who have their families here too. We often end up hiring them both and can ensure they have enjoyment of life by synchronising their rosters.

Proposal 4

What impacts or implications do you foresee from the proposal to remove the ability for lower-skilled Essential Skills visa holders to bring their children to New Zealand for the length of their visa?

As above, workers with families are more motivated to succeed, work harder and are more reliable. We do not support the proposal of charging a child of migrant workers, who are presumably on the lower pay rates, international student fees.

Summary

- Workers in 'low-skilled' roles are equally, if not more, essential to the Tourism and Hospitality sector.
- Lower skilled migrants should be treated like higher skilled workers and be given the same path to residency. They are just as important.
- Tourism is now the biggest export industry in New Zealand.
- Latest Berl report shows a massive shortage in service sector. These proposed changes will only compound the problem.
- Queenstown employers can not attract New Zealanders to service roles.
- Limiting Essential Skills visas to 3 years disrupts businesses and lowers customer experience in the tourism/hospitality sector, especially in Queenstown.
- Migrant workers with partners and families are often more reliable.
- Do not punish low-skilled workers and service sector businesses because New Zealanders are not available or willing to work.