

## **TRADE ASSESSMENT CHANGES HURT BOTH THE UK AND AUSTRALIA**

The changes made to Australia's migration program in recent months has led to a real slowdown in the supply of badly needed trade skills. Both the Ministers for Immigration and Workplace Relations have instituted changes that have cut the numbers of skilled building and related tradespersons from the UK and other countries by at least 50 percent.

Whilst the effect will not be felt in Australia immediately, the long-term consequences can only add pressure to building costs and contribute to inflation. The changes have not been given much publicity outside migration circles but cannot be ignored in the present climate because of the effect they will have in mid 2008. The change has really hit prospective UK tradespeople looking to migrate to Australia.

In September this year the Minister for workplace relations agreed with that section of his department responsible for the assessment of overseas trade skills, to stop all assessments for those whose skills had been obtained from on-the-job training. While this may not appear to be significant matter, well over half of UK tradespeople and those from other English speaking countries have learnt their trade on-the job.

The excuse given for ceasing this pathway was that there had been a significant number of fraudulent documents provided with some applications. It seem strange that this appears to have occurred only recently, and why the UK has been included, when assessment of those under this pathway had been successfully carried out for over 10 years beforehand.

The problem for Australia is that UK tradespeople for many years have been trained only on-the-job, this has been brought about by employers who did not have the capacity to allow time off for formal training, and a variety of other training schemes not directly related to the apprenticeship pathway that were introduced over the post-war years. Most of those with on-the-job training are just as competent if not more so than those completing a formal apprenticeship. It is a well-known saying in trade occupations that "you only start your training when you finish your apprenticeship"

The other move that has resulted in a slowdown of key tradespeople from the UK is the decision to allocate the assessment of many key trades to another organization. This has resulted in the assessment process being lengthened from under one month to approximately 4 or 6 months, and an increase in assessment fees for the migrant from \$350 to \$2100.00.

Cost in itself has been a major disincentive for many. The justification for this cost is that practical assessments will be carried out in the overseas country for all those who apply under this avenue. A consortium of Australian training organizations will carry out the assessments. Why this could not have been arranged with the training bodies in the UK saving both cost and time has never been explained.

We were told earlier that the assessment of on-the-job training will resume again with new guidelines but the longer this takes the greater the pain for Australia in the near future.