

Major Changes to TRA Skill Assessments

For years the Trades Recognition Australia (TRA) have been responsible to assess the suitability of overseas international students for migration purposes.

Those students who have completed trade qualifications (Certificate III) in Australian Educational Institutions are currently eligible to obtain a positive skill assessment for a trade occupation on the current DIMIA Skilled Occupation List (SOL). This has been a dependable way for many students to gain their permanent residency. From the 1st of July 2005 however TRA is advising a major change will take place.

The shock release from TRA is that from the 1st of July 2005 all students who study and complete a trade Certificate III course in Australia must also demonstrate 900 hours of relevant work experience in order to gain a positive skill assessment!

The current TRA guidelines for this assessment are the Certificate III minimum and it is also possible for them to ask for a Trade Test. In reality though with a demonstration of a little work experience the TRA trade test is often not required.

How did we learn this?

This information was stumbled upon accidentally when one of our clients sent TRA a personal request for information about choosing a suitable course. The response from TRA on the 25th January 2005 is reproduced below;

“AQFIII graduates may apply to TRA for migration skills assessment. You should note, however, that AQFIII is a minimum qualification for skills recognition and you are encouraged to supplement your qualification with relevant work experience. (From July 2005, TRA will be requiring all AQFIII applicants to provide evidence of 900 hours of relevant work experience in order to apply for skills recognition with TRA).”

Donna PATERSON, Business Support Unit, TRA

It should be noted that AQF stands for “Australian Qualification Framework” and “III” refers to Certificate III courses.

This drastic change in policy by the TRA is going to cause great heartache to most international students currently enrolled on trade Certificate III & Diploma courses across Australia.

Confirmation!

Of course we needed to confirm with TRA that the above e-mail information was actually true. Our office made contact with the TRA telephone enquiry service and discovered that the TRA has indeed a plan to enforce this new guideline from the 1st of July 2005 and no exceptions to this rule will be allowed.

When we pointed out to them about the hundreds of currently enrolled students who are doing AQFIII (Certificate III) courses and cannot now organise 900 hours of work experience their response was indifferent. The enquiries officer flatly said again that there will be no exceptions.

When asked why the TRA web site had no information about this new change in policy, the inquiries officer had no comment. As this newsletter is released publicly the TRA web site still has no warning about the impending change.

A Prior Example! (1) The A C S.

Back in 2002 the Australian Computer Society (ACS) decided their skill assessments as Computer Professionals for migration purposes was a little too easy. The ACS decided to change their own assessment rules.

Instead of the usual two-semester Graduate Diploma in IT that many students were using to gain their permanent residence after any Bachelor Degree, they enforced the new three-semester rule as it still stands today.

However the ACS took a more conciliatory approach. They recognised that hundreds of students had already enrolled into Graduate Diploma's in IT around Australia based upon the early 2002 guidelines for skill assessments. The ACS acknowledged that it would be unfair to international students to change the

rules before they completed their current courses. To compensate for this they issued a rule which incorporated a **transitional arrangement**.

This rule stated that all students who had enrolled in a course before the 1st of October 2002 were to have their skill assessments for migration purposes judged under the old two-semester requirements. Students who finished their courses well after the 1st October 2002 (as long as they showed they were enrolled before this date) would be judged under the easier guidelines for their skill assessments.

Many students in fact did not complete their Graduate Diploma's until December 2003. Under the fair transitional arrangement organised by the ACS they were assessed using the old rules and many went on to gain their permanent residency.

Another Prior Example! (2) NOOSR

In July 2003 the Australian Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) also changed their assessment guidelines for Teachers (Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary) to make it more difficult for international students.

Prior to this date international students who had completed at least one year of professional education tertiary studies in Australia were granted an exemption from providing an IELTS test result to NOOSR.

In July 2003 NOOSR changed their rules without notice to force all international students who have not completed at least a Bachelor Degree in Education in Australia to produce an Academic IELTS test result of at least 7.0 on each section. This had a major impact upon those students who had enrolled in the Graduate Diploma in Education in the beginning of 2003. For most international students, obtaining a score of 7.0 on each section of the Academic IELTS test is a difficult prospect.

Fortunately NOOSR changed their minds to allow all 2003 enrolled students who applied for their skill assessment with them before the 1st April 2004 to be granted the exemption from the IELTS exam. This again, is an example of a

common sense transitional arrangement for a change in assessment guidelines.

What Can You Do?

The past has demonstrated that if enough international students and Educational Institutions complain things can change. Our office believes that the manner in which TRA plans to implement this change in assessment is grossly unfair to the students currently enrolled in these types of courses. If such an unfair policy were to be enforced it will have a dramatic consequences in the way international students view the stability of the Australian DIMIA migration program. It will mean that if the TRA are allowed to act in this manner what will stop other assessment agencies authorised by DIMIA to change their rules without fair notice.

Common sense must prevail that if Australia wants to attract the financial benefit of having international students study here, then you cannot create an atmosphere of uncertainty for them. Students need to be sure before they invest in a large sum of money (often about \$30,000) in a course of study that they can be sure they achieve the result they are planning for.

Sadly it seems that it is the Australian government departments such as the TRA and DIMIA that are slow to face this reality.

Many students may remember the disastrous approach DIMIA took when they suddenly announced in March 2003 that all students must study two years full time in Australia before they could apply for permanent residence with an exemption from the normal recent work experience requirement.

There was such a protest from students and schools that within a couple of months of making this announcement they had decided to make a transitional arrangement.

DIMIA back peddled to say that this new two year rule would not come into affect until the 1st April 2004. If you applied for permanent residence or the Graduate 497 visa before the 1st

April 2004 and had enrolled in your course before March 2003, then you only needed to study one year full time.

This was at least a common sense approach to a decision that any reasonable person could see would create resentment and an outcry of foul play amongst international students. Today this two year rule is still resented by many international students but at least they can organise their studies appropriately.

Let Your Voice Be Heard!

The best way to instigate a change is to let your voice be heard to the TRA, DIMIA and the school where you are studying. If you don't do this nothing may change and the thousands of dollars you have spent studying in Australia may be wasted.

The education providers themselves are outraged at this change and they are currently trying to argue and place pressure upon DIMIA and TRA to at least be fair to the students who are currently enrolled.

The owners of "ACTH Management" in Sydney which provides courses for Commercial Cooking and Patisserie Certificate III and Diploma's, have themselves just become aware of the new changes and are now actively seeking ways to assist their students gain work experience.

Our office has also contacted various TAFE schools and the International Student Advice Centre and it seems at the moment they are completely unaware of the new TRA guidelines. We can only hope that they too will lobby the TRA on the student's behalf for they realise many students will start dropping out of their courses unless this issue is resolved.

It should be noted in all fairness to the education providers that have enrolled students into their courses, it seems they have not been aware or consulted by TRA about these new changes. Students should not direct their anger towards them or the education agents who may enrolled them for not even DIMIA was aware these changes were going to happen.

Last week we contacted one of the managers of the Adelaide Skilled Processing Centre (DIMIA) about this news and she was unaware that TRA had changed its assessment guidelines.

We suggest you write to the Director of TRA Mr. Rodney Walsh to voice your opposition to these new changes and the manner in which they are to be implemented (Mr Rodney WALSH, Director TRA, traenquiry@dewr.gov.au.)

Fax: (02) 6121 7768

Mail: Mr. Rodney Walsh, Director TRA, GPO Box 9873
Canberra ACT 2601

900 Hours of Relevant Work Experience?

The only positive information we were able to gain from the TRA was the fact that the 900 hours of work experience can be gained during the course of your study and does not have to be after you have gained the Certificate III qualification. This will be little consolation however to those planning to finish their courses this year!

Relevant work experience will have to be in your particular area of study. For example if you are studying the Commercial Cooking course, then restaurant work experience would be suitable. If you are studying Pastry Cooking then you would need to work in a bakery or an international Hotel which produces its own patisserie menus.

Students have the usual 20 hours work limitation on their visa if they have applied for permission to work with DIMIA. This would mean 45 weeks of work experience is required to meet the TRA requirements. During the holiday periods students have unlimited work permission so if you can work full time this will have a significant impact on gaining these 900 hours more rapidly.

It may be required for you to provide evidence to TRA or DIMIA of your work experience. Please refer to our Newsletter Volume 11(Bonus Points for Work Experience) which discusses the sort of documents that may be required.

We will keep you informed of any new information on this issue.

AILS 3rd February 2005