



22 August 2008

Ms Barbara Deegan
457 Integrity review
By email: 457IntegrityReview@immi.gov.au

Dear Ms Deegan

The Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) is the national union for nurses and midwives with Branches in each state and territory. The ANF is also the largest professional organisation in Australia with over 165,000 members. The ANF's core business is the industrial and professional representation of nurses and midwives throughout Australia.

The ANF is delighted to have this opportunity to comment on the discussion paper relating to English language but firstly by way of explanation, the ANF will not be responding to the questions posed but rather describing the importance of English language minimum standards for nurses on 457 Visas.

As you would be aware there are range of requirements for nurses and midwives from other countries wanting to migrate to Australia on a 457 Visa or similar. One of the minimum requirements is that of English language proficiency. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, in conjunction with the state and territory nurses registration boards, is responsible for ensuring English language proficiency.

All nurses and midwives applying for migration to Australia must prove English language proficiency by completing and passing one of the 2 accepted tests. This ensures that migrants are able to communicate competently and safely within a healthcare environment. The two tests are either the International English Language testing system (IELTS)-Academic test or the Overseas English Test (OET).

With respect to the IELTS test score, a nurse or midwife must achieve a minimum of 6.5 in reading and listening and 7 in writing and speaking with an overall band score of seven or greater. A nurse or midwife submitting an OET test as evidence would need to achieve a B pass or greater in all four sections (reading, writing, listening and speaking).

The only exemption to English language proficiency testing is in the case where a nurse or midwife has completed a course in nursing or midwifery in United Kingdom, United States or Ireland. If however, the nursing or midwifery course was completed in Canada or South Africa there must be evidence the course was conducted in English and as a result English language testing is therefore waived.

The nursing and midwifery professions all agree that the above is the minimum score required to work competently in an Australian healthcare environment and as a result feel compelled to reinforce with some vigour our requirements that these standards not be relaxed in any way.

If in the future there was some change to these requirements the only change that we would support was one that supported an increase in English language proficiency for nurses and midwives.

We understand that your paper excludes nurses and midwives from it because of the requirement for registration, however, we believed it was important to clarify the professions opinion on this matter, given that frequently we are approached to consider relaxation of these standards.

Also of concern to us is the practice of labour hire firms or recruiting companies, bringing in registered nurses on 442 training Visas as well as 457 Visas with the 'promise' of English language courses that will enable them to eventually register as nurses in Australia. The immigrant nurses are enrolled in courses that do not add value to their qualifications and are employed on 'clinical placements' in aged care facilities on questionable employment conditions or as unlicensed workers under their 457 status.

More often than not the promise of registration is not realised. The nurses are therefore returned to their country of origin, and a second tranche is brought out on similar terms. This is unethical behaviour. The 442 Visas, as you would be aware, carry little restrictions around employment conditions and it is the view of the ANF that they are exploited. The promise of assistance with the IELTS is the lure that entices the nurses into these unfair and unethical situations, and 442 and 457 Visas should not be used in this manner.

We sincerely thank you for the time and effort you are contributing to this important issue and would be pleased to discuss any points in this correspondence with you.

Yours sincerely



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National Secretary
Australian Nursing Federation.

The industrial and professional organisation for nurses and midwives in Australia

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