

# human connections

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## 'Holding pattern' until new changes announced



➤ Raft of changes to Australia's immigration rules announced in February causes an air of uncertainty

Immigration changes announced by the Minister for Immigration, Chris Evans, in February 2010 included a decision to revoke the existing Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) and introduce a new Skilled Occupation (SOL) list from mid-2010.

The MODL will be replaced by a more targeted skilled occupations list 'better able to meet the demands of Australia's labour market' according to the Minister.

The immediate scrapping of the MODL has caused a frustrating wait for potential visa applicants according to ISA Group Director, Noelene Merrey.

"Many people have sent us CVs that don't quite meet the points test threshold but would have if the MODL had still been in place," said Noelene.

The new SOL has been released and will come into effect on 1 July 2010. In conjunction with the SOL, each state will have its own skilled migration list of occupations. It is anticipated the list for WA, which is in a draft format, will be released by 1 July.

Businesses that want to employ workers that need to be granted 'exceptional circumstances' under the Employer Nominated Scheme (ENS) have also been affected by the revoking of the MODL.

Visa applicants under the ENS could apply for exceptional circumstances if their occupation was on the MODL but they fell outside the requirements of the

scheme, for example, if they were older than 45 years or could not meet the required English language standard.

"The revoking of the MODL makes it very difficult to apply for exceptional circumstances, which has impacted on some of our corporate clients," said Noelene.

A watching brief is also in place in respect to state migration plans, which will identify occupations in demand in each state of Australia.

Although state migration plans were identified as a key part of the Australian

General Skilled Migration program in the February announcement, how they will look and work remains largely unknown.

"In a state like Western Australia where the skills shortage will hit hard, we are eagerly awaiting the official release of the WA State Migration Plan as we expect it will facilitate faster visa approval for workers with skills in demand in this state," said Noelene.

"It really is a situation of 'wait and see' on all fronts including our own, employers and skilled people and their families who want to migrate to Australia."

## The world of finance's loss is ISA Group's gain

ISA Group migration agent Yin Tan didn't plan on joining the immigration industry, but it is not a decision she regrets.

Yin, who was born in Singapore, studied finance at Curtin University on a student visa. As so often happens, the appeal of the relaxed Australian way of life was too great and Yin decided she wanted to stay. After successfully obtaining a permanent visa, finding work in her chosen



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# Thinking ahead to prepare for skills shortage

ISA Group plans to skills test trade workers in advance of demand

Of the immigration changes introduced in 2009, the one likely to have the greatest impact is the mandatory requirement to skills test candidates in many trade occupations from ten 'high risk' countries.

According to ISA Group Director, Brett Merrey, Australian businesses won't appreciate the severity of this change until they need skilled workers and won't be able to employ them when they want to.

"Many projects could end up at a standstill because it's no longer possible to employ workers in many occupations that were in high demand in the last skills shortage from countries deemed 'high risk' unless the worker has undergone a web-based skills assessment," said Brett.

"We are talking about occupations such as welders, fitters, carpenters and auto electricians and countries that include the Philippines, South Africa and India, which were important sources of labour during the last skills shortage.

"This change adds a layer of complexity to overseas recruitment that will have a detrimental impact on many projects because it adds time and cost," said Brett.

In response, ISA Group is testing potential workers in the Philippines in advance of requests from employers for skilled workers.

"We have bitten the bullet and are skills testing to create pools of proven workers that Australian businesses will be able to draw from when there aren't enough local workers to meet demand," said Brett.

To do this, ISA Group is working with a number of reputable Philippines



Potential skilled workers put their skills to the test under the watchful eye of Australian assessors at the IIM centre in Manila.

recruitment companies to identify potential candidates to undergo the skills testing.

"The government's new skills testing requirements only requires a web-based skills assessment. On the basis of our past experience in recruiting overseas workers, we don't think this goes far enough," said Brett.

"Our approach involves practical 'hands on' tests using qualified assessors from Victorian University, one of five organisations accredited by Trades Recognition Australia to undertake the web-based skills assessments.

"This way, we can be sure candidates have the necessary level of expertise," he said.

Brett and fellow ISA Group Director, Jackie Hill, were in the Philippines in



April to oversee the first round of skills testing for 2010.

The testing took place at the IIM centre near Manila, a dedicated skills testing centre the ISA Group established with two other partners in 2009. Twenty five candidates were tested in trades that included welding and boilermaking.

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More tests are planned later in the year including a round of skills testing of heavy diesel fitters and bus fitters in June.

Candidates are not being charged to undergo the skills testing.

"We are so confident these workers will be in demand we have taken the initiative to undertake the skills testing in advance of requests for skilled workers by Australian companies. We consider it an investment in Australia's future," said Brett.

Representatives of Australian companies that expect to employ overseas skilled workers in the future joined Brett and Jackie for the April visit and will be part of the June visit.



Australian assessors were impressed with the facilities of the IIM centre for skills testing.



ISA Group Director, Jackie Hill, explains the process for skilled workers to migrate to Australia in one of the IIM centre's meeting rooms.

## High praise for skills testing

The April skills testing impressed both the skills assessors and potential Australian employers.

Cameron Vinicombe, Manager of Pilbara-based Fortesque Bus Services, praised the professionalism of ISA Group and the conduct of the skills testing.

"Thank you for the opportunity to attend the IIM centre. (ISA Group) was the ultimate host and you provide a very professional service," said Cameron.

Assessors from Victorian University were also quick to praise the professionalism and assistance of ISA Group and IIM personnel.

Commenting on the performance of the IIM centre as a venue for the skills testing, Brett Merrey couldn't be more pleased.

"We established the IIM centre with skills testing in mind, and it was very satisfying to see it work so well for both applicants and assessors. We are confident its use will grow as the demand for skilled workers increases," said Brett.

More information can be obtained by contacting [brett@isa.com.au](mailto:brett@isa.com.au). More information on the IIM skills testing centre can be found at [www.iim.com.ph](http://www.iim.com.ph)

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vocation was a different matter. So, when she was offered a role as a trainee migration agent Yin jumped at the chance.

"It was not something I had considered, but I liked it and will soon notch up seven years as a migration agent," said Yin.

Her own experience in applying for a visa has acted as a motivator to do her job well.

"Applying for my own visa was not a happy experience and I would have benefited from using a migration agent," said Yin.

"I find it very fulfilling to help people achieve their aim to move to Australia. As a migrant myself I understand why people want to live here and I want to make the process to achieve this as smooth as possible."

Although she has assisted people to apply for the full gamut of visa types, Yin has specialised in the subclass 457 visa program since joining ISA Group more than three years ago.

According to ISA Group Director, Noelene Merrey, Yin's bilingual talent has been a great bonus to the business's 457 visa team.

"Yin's ability to speak Mandarin has been a key to preparing hundreds of visa applications for Chinese resources giant MCC Mining," said Noelene.

"MCC Mining's involvement in the Sino Iron project in the Pilbara is the first time they have undertaken a project in Australia, so the success of this venture will influence their decision to take on work here in the future.

"Yin has been able to use her language and understanding of Chinese culture to help guide MCC Mining through Australia's immigration processes with great success," said Noelene.

Although working with MCC Mining has been challenging, Yin says it has been rewarding.

"It has been exciting to play a part in such a project of this scale and importance to the Western Australian and Australian economies," said Yin.

While studying at Curtin, Yin met her now husband Aaron, who is also from Singapore and who studied here. While she enjoys regular visits to the country of her birth, she is happy to call Australia home.

## Labour agreements may be the answer to labour shortages

Since July 2009, employers need to establish a labour agreement to employ overseas workers in a range of trades. But according to ISA Group Director, Noelene Merrey, labour agreements also provide a solution to businesses and industry bodies that are looking down the barrel of worker shortages.

"We know from the last skills shortage that industries such as the hospitality industry really struggled to find workers as they couldn't compete with the salaries being offered by the resources sector," said Noelene.

"It is unlikely the situation will be any different this time around. The scope of labour agreements allows industry bodies to establish a labour agreement for a category of worker across industry, such as chefs, cooks, restaurant managers, supervisors and the like which provides a blanket agreement that member businesses can use to employ overseas workers.

"Similarly, a business can establish a labour agreement to cover a nominated occupation or a number of occupations," she said.

ISA Group has already assisted large nationwide employers in the fast food business to lodge applications for labour agreements and is in discussion with three major industry bodies considering setting up labour agreements for their members.

"Traditionally, the process for getting a labour agreement approved has been a long one, so our advice to businesses and industry bodies that are facing worker shortages in occupations that are not highly skilled is to get in early," said Noelene.

"Businesses need to learn from the lessons of the past skills shortage to avoid the need to put up the 'job vacancy' signs that were so ubiquitous just a couple of years ago," said Noelene.

For more information about labour agreements contact Noelene Merrey on (08) 9346 8888 or email [noelene@isa.com.au](mailto:noelene@isa.com.au)

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# Extending the ISA Group reach



## ISA Group website notches up 1000 enquiries

The 'new-look' ISA Group website that was launched less than a year ago notched up a major milestone recently when the one thousandth enquiry was received.

"When we redeveloped the site, we added new functionality that enabled visitors to send an online enquiry or complete an online questionnaire that enables us to provide an initial assessment of their eligibility for an Australian visa," said ISA Group Director Brett Merrey.

"When the site was launched we were inundated with dozens of enquiries, but thanks to the website optimisation team that is working behind the scenes, we have been

able to maintain this momentum," he said.

Brett added that the company has been impressed by the calibre of people who are enquiring about migrating to Australia.

"Initially, we received a lot of enquiries from people who unfortunately didn't meet eligibility criteria under the general skilled migration program. Since adding more information regarding these requirements, we now mostly receive enquiries from people who have the skills and experience to work in Australia," said Brett.

Although many of the enquiries

come from people who are overseas, the website receives 30 – 40 per cent of its enquiries from people who are already in Australia.

"We receive a lot of enquiries from people who are here on a subclass 457 visa for instance and who want to apply for permanency. We are also contacted by people on working holiday visas who want to stay as well as families here in Australia who want to help parents and other family members migrate," said Brett.

Visit ISA Group website at [www.isa.com.au](http://www.isa.com.au)

