

The April issue contains reforms to the visa programs involving the Taxation Office, and changes to tighten and strengthen the integrity of the 457 program feature strongly in the April newsletter. People smugglers and visa overstayers together with an unregistered migration agent have been apprehended and paid the price of their misdeeds.

### Immigration to give ATO data on visa holders

The Australian Taxation Office will scour the details of 1 million Australian visa holders in the hunt for fraud, tax-law breaches and cases of people flouting work rights.

Previous data-matching programs in 2010 and 2011 found an "elevated level of risk" of non-compliance and fraud linked to temporary working visas.

Two months ago, Prime Minister Julia Gillard vowed to end alleged rorting of the 457 skilled worker visa program.

The Tax Office confirmed the Department of Immigration and Citizenship would provide it with names, addresses and other details of the holders of 27 types of temporary visas, including skilled workers, students, working holiday makers, medical practitioners and diplomatic staff.

The data exchange will include international travel movements by the visa holder, the place the person intended to study, details of immigration agents, and whether the visa has been cancelled.

"These will be electronically matched and analysed with certain sections of ATO data holdings to identify potential fraud, and other non-compliance with lodgment and payment obligations under taxation law," the ATO said.

It also plans to share information with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship about visa holders not abiding by the conditions of their temporary working visas. Serious breaches of conditions can lead to visa cancellation and removal from Australia.

<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/immigration-to-give-ato-data-on-visa-holders-20130425-2ihih.html>

Employers should be aware of the heavy criminal employer sanctions which now operate where persons are employed in breach of visa conditions. For more information contact Managing Partner [David Bitel](#).

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## Notice of a data matching program

This program is called the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Temporary Working Visas Data Matching Program and it enables the ATO:

- to improve existing risk detection models and treatment systems
- to identify potentially new or widespread refund fraud methodologies and those entities controlling or exploiting those methodologies
- to investigate and take steps to mitigate threats of non-compliance and fraud; and
- to develop and implement administrative strategies to improve voluntary compliance and address the identified risks posed by temporary working visa holders and employer sponsors.

[SpecialPurposeDataSteward@ato.gov.au](mailto:SpecialPurposeDataSteward@ato.gov.au)

## The case for 457 visa changes

The Prime Minister has announced changes to tighten up the 457 visa program for temporary skilled workers.

In February 2013 there were 107 510 temporary workers on primary 457 visas in Australia - 21.5 per cent more than in February 2012. And 5860 new applications for 457 visas were lodged in February 2013 - up 9.5 per cent on January 2013.

This is at a time when the unemployment rate across Australia is 5.4 per cent. While this is much lower than many other developed nations, it is of little comfort to computer programmers in Sydney or Melbourne who can't find a job.

Nominal and real wages for 457 visa holders have been falling by between 5 per cent and 12 per cent in information technology and computing occupations. This is utterly inconsistent with the idea that these are scarce skills.

The 457 visa program is a valuable visa when used as it is intended - to fill temporary skills shortages in some sectors and some regions.

One of the areas of concern in the latest figures is the big jump in the hospitality sector. Applications for visas for the accommodation and food services sector jumped 110 per cent in the three months to February 2013 compared with the same period last year.

Why should Australia be importing thousands of workers to work in restaurants, cafes and bars? Jobs in this sector are traditional entry-level jobs for young Australians and provide them with valuable income while studying at TAFE or university.

The government always said that the 457 program is needed. But when we see spikes in particular sectors that are out of step with growth in those industries, we must take action. This is about getting the right mix so that we are not leaving local workers, graduates and apprentices behind when it comes to jobs and training.

<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/bo/2013/bo194879.htm>

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## Strengthening the integrity of the subclass 457 program

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship prepared a discussion paper for the Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration regarding changes in the Australian labour market and the integrity of the 457 visa program.

The paper noted that the 457 visa program "has been growing strongly" and it "is now timely to evaluate the efficacy of the existing integrity measures and, where needed, adjust those measures to ensure that program continues to deliver on Australia's interests".

The paper then outlines a series of measures that former Minister Chris Bowen was considering to "strengthen DIAC's capacity to identify and prevent employer practices that are not in keeping with the fundamental tenets of the subclass 457 visa".

The discussion paper which has been released under Freedom of Information laws is now available.

See: Discussion Papers

<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/bo/2013/bo202339.htm>

The press has continued to report disturbing examples of gross exploitation of in particular vulnerable overseas students who have applied for 457 visas. Some pay illegal sums of money to procure the sponsorship and others are required to work contrary to acceptable industrial laws or in breach of their visa conditions. "Students and others intending to apply for 457 visas should get meaningful independent legal advice as to the risks associated with holding this visa" says Managing Partner [David Bitel](#), a strong advocate for greater monitoring of 457 visa sponsorships.

## Australian Security Intelligent Organisation justifies "black hole" for refugees

ASIO has made startling allegations - such as plots to kill, training soldiers or terrorists, forging documents and people smuggling - to justify the indefinite incarceration of dozens of refugees as security threats to Australia.

But ASIO has given no detailed explanation to back up its assertions, raising serious doubts about the sincerity of a new review into the cases and an escape for what has been dubbed a "legal black hole" of indefinite detention.

A carefully worded summary of secret ASIO assessments has finally been sent to most of the 55 refugees who have been branded a risk to "national security" and held in immigration detention without charge - some up to four years.

Fairfax Media has compared several of the letters outlining the ASIO claims - but stripped of any secret intelligence - and agreed not to name the individuals being held. Most are Tamils who fled the Sri Lankan government's bloody civil war with the separatist Tamil Tigers. This group includes women and their children.

All are said to be "likely to engage in acts prejudicial to Australia's security" but for reasons that are varied or vague.

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The Australian government, a signatory to the refugee convention, cannot return the man to Sri Lanka - but other countries will not accept him when he has a negative security assessment.

Immigration Minister Brendan O'Connor has refused to grant a visa to any of the refugees with adverse assessments from ASIO, even one allowing them to live under strict control orders, preferring to leave them in indefinite detention.

A review system introduced last year allows the refugees to request former federal court judge Margaret Stone to examine their case. All 55 have since applied for review and in recent weeks been granted the first insight into the suspicions against them. ASIO has given 53 summaries of its reasons.

Justice Stone recently heard the first oral evidence from two of the refugees. But although the refugees will be told the outcome of the review, ASIO cannot be compelled to change its assessment.

A spokesman for ASIO said the summary of reasons for adverse security assessment was "limited to information that can be provided to the eligible person without prejudicing the interests of security" but Justice Stone has full access to the information.

"Disclosing classified national security information to the subject of a security assessment would jeopardise ASIO's ability to provide advice to protect Australia, its people and interests," the spokesman said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/asio-justifies-black-hole-for-refugees-20130420-2i72o.html>

Managing Partner [David Bittel](#) notes that many applications for skilled (and family sponsored visas) as well as protection visas also are held up while ASIO completes security assessments from applicants. For those whose applications are unreasonably delayed an appeal is possible to the Inspector General of Intelligence and Security. For more information contact us.

### **First Significant Investor visa granted**

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Brendan O'Connor announced Australia's first significant investor visa has been granted to a successful Chinese toy manufacturer and his young family.

The significant investor visa was introduced in November 2012 to attract potential migrants with a demonstrated history of success in business and investment.

Under the scheme, significant investors must invest at least \$5 million in the Australian economy under the business innovation and investment program. They become eligible for a permanent visa after holding a provisional visa and maintaining the \$5 million investment in Australia for four years.

"Australia is in active competition with other countries across our region for successful, high wealth individuals and the capital and business acumen that comes with them," Mr O'Connor said.

"Significant investors bring with them their skills in business, their links to international markets and additional capital for investment in other projects in Australia that interest them."

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“There has been substantial interest from potential migrant investors with more than 170 applications lodged, totalling a potential of \$850 million in investment.”  
Further information about the significant investor visa is available.

See: Significant Investor Visa

<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/bo/2013/bo202683.htm>

For more information on the Significant Investor visa contact Diana Tong.

### **Unregistered migration agent appears in court**

A senior Lebanese community member who appeared before the Sydney Downing Centre Local Court has been charged with offences related to providing migration assistance while not a registered migration agent.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) initiated court action against Toufic Laba Sarkis following complaints alleging he provided immigration assistance and asked for and received associated fees while not a registered migration agent.

A department spokesman said Laba Sarkis, who began working as a migration consultant in 1989 before registration was a requirement, was charged under the Migration Act 1958 with the following offences:

- providing immigration assistance when he was not registered as a migration agent (section 280)
- charging for providing immigration assistance when he was not registered as a migration agent (section 281) and
- advertising that he gave immigration assistance when he was not registered as a migration agent (section 284).

The spokesman said people who act as “community volunteers” could face criminal charges if they gave migration assistance when they are not trained, qualified and subject to regulatory oversight by the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (Office of the MARA).

People found to be engaging in such conduct face possible penalties of up to 10 years’ imprisonment and/or fines.

See the Office of the MARA’s website [www.mara.gov.au](http://www.mara.gov.au).

<http://www.newsroom.immi.gov.au/releases/unregistered-migration-agent-appears-in-court-2>

### **The Bali Process**

Since its inception in 2002, the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (Bali Process) has effectively raised regional awareness of the consequences of people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crime, and developed and implemented strategies and practical cooperation in response. More than 40 countries and numerous international agencies participate in this voluntary forum.

## **Fight against people smuggling**

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Brendan O'Connor and Foreign Minister Bob Carr in Bali for the 5th Ministerial Conference of the Bali Process on People Smuggling announced the region has taken a significant step forward in combatting people smuggling and human trafficking.

Mr O'Connor, who is leading the Australian delegation, welcomed a decision to link the Bali Process with the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation (JCLEC) which "has led training in countering terrorism and is well placed to boost our region's police and border security response to people smuggling and trafficking in persons."

Mr O'Connor said late last year, the Bali Process established a regional support office in Bangkok to coordinate work under the framework to tackle people smuggling and trafficking. "We are pleased to announce that Ministers have agreed to an implementation plan for the Regional Framework." It "will help Bali Process members to better work together to deter the irregular movement of people in the region and make it harder for people smuggling syndicates to operate."

[http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2013/bc\\_mr\\_130402.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2013/bc_mr_130402.html)

## **28 arrested in Hong Kong people-smuggling bust**

Officials in Hong Kong say they have broken up a people-smuggling syndicate that used fake documents to smuggle mainland Chinese into a number of countries, including Australia.

Immigration department officials said 28 arrests have been made following an eight-day operation aimed at halting the ring.

It was also confirmed that at least half of the arrests had been made in Hong Kong and estimated that some 50 people had been smuggled since 2011.

The department said illegal migrants would pay 200,000 yuan (\$31,000) to leave China through Hong Kong before ultimately journeying on to various countries on false documents.

Argentina, Brazil and Spain were also among the destinations.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-04-05/people-smuggling-ring-busted/4613334>

## **Australian man extradited from the United Arab Emirates**

A 44-year-old Australian man has been extradited from the United Arab Emirates and charged with allegedly organising and facilitating two people smuggling ventures into Australia since November 2011.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) has charged the man with ten offences contrary to the Migration Act 1958. The offences include nine counts against Section 233A (people smuggling involving individuals) and one count against Section 233C (aggravated people smuggling involving a group of five or more).

These charges carry a maximum penalty of 10 and 20 years imprisonment respectively.

The man's arrest is the result of successful close cooperation between Australian and UAE law enforcement authorities and their joint commitment to the fight against people smuggling.

<http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2013/april/australian-man-extradited-from-the-united-arab-emirates-to-face-people-smuggling-charges.aspx>

### **Tourists caught selling drugs in Sydney**

Two tourists who have overstayed their travel visas have been charged with peddling drugs in Sydney's CBD.

Police say a 25 year old British man was caught with 91 grams of cannabis and some ecstasy during a sniffer dog operation in Haymarket.

Police then searched a hostel where the man was staying and found another stash of cannabis and ecstasy. A few hours later in Haymarket a 31 year old Irish man was busted with 29 bags of cannabis, totalling 161 grams.

Both men were charged with drug supply and possession offences.

They were refused bail and are due to appear before Central Local Court.

Police have alerted the Department of Immigration and Citizenship that the men have overstayed their travel visas.

<http://news.ninemsn.com.au/national/2013/03/28/06/38/>

### **Immigration status resolution visit in Canberra**

Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) officers will visit the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre to provide immigration information to people who have overstayed their visas as well as to local community leaders and service providers.

A departmental spokesman said the community status resolution service (CSRS) outreach program enables people who do not have a valid Australian visa, or who are on a bridging visa, to talk with an immigration officer about specific issues they might be facing.

"Where appropriate, officers also will be able to grant short-term bridging visas to people while they work through their immigration matters."

"The department is committed to ensuring the integrity of Australia's migration and visa programs. People must have a valid visa to remain in the country," the spokesman said.

<http://www.newsroom.immi.gov.au/channels/NEWS/releases/immigration-status-resolution-visit-in-canberra>

### **NZ agrees to jointly manage overseas immigration physicians**

New Zealand and Australia have agreed to align the management of an offshore network of panel physicians to improve the quality of health examinations visa applicants receive.

Panel physicians are doctors and radiologists who undertake immigration health examinations for visa applicants.

This will create a jointly managed network co-ordinated by Immigration New Zealand (INZ) and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

The benefits of alignment include:

- improved customer service

- targeted communication, administration, performance management and training for a single panel physician network, and related cost savings
- enhanced integrity through robust auditing and analysis
- expansion of tuberculosis screening and treatment networks and
- progression of Five Country Conference objectives including the promotion of health protection and efficiency through effective shared management and quality assurance, and promoting best practice, partnership and shared investment.

The Secretary of DIAC, Martin Bowles, said the arrangement would facilitate INZ implementing electronic processing of its immigration health examinations and support broader alignment of Australian and New Zealand immigration health policies and processes.

<http://www.newsroom.immi.gov.au/channels/NEWS/releases/nz-agrees-to-jointly-manage-overseas-immigration-physicians>

### **Large citizenship ceremony in Darwin**

Darwin has seen the largest citizenship ceremony conducted in the city when 270 people took the pledge to become Australians. The group consists of families, couples and individuals from 40 countries. So far this year the Darwin City Council has conferred citizenship on 424 people.

“Darwin has for many years been a vibrant community with a large number of cultures represented in its population and this ceremony certainly reflects that community. The 270 people have taken the final step of joining the Australian community as fully fledged members who will enjoy all the rights and responsibilities of being an Australian.”

“The values of inclusiveness, respect and belonging are fundamental to the development of Australia’s successful multicultural framework.”

“This ceremony, involving so many people, is a fantastic time to reflect on and celebrate the rich patchwork of cultures which make Australia such a fantastic place to live,” the spokesman said

<http://www.newsroom.immi.gov.au/releases/large-citizenship-ceremony-in-darwin>

### **Immigration attends Brisbane’s Sri Lankan New Year**

Free phone cards to “call home” with important messages about Australia’s changed refugee processing arrangements and increased humanitarian and family visa places have been distributed as part of new year celebrations in Brisbane.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) join Brisbane’s Sinhalese community celebrating Awurudu, the Sri Lankan new year, staffing an information booth promoting awareness of the dangers of people smuggling and the regular ways to migrate to Australia.

“This is a wonderful event and we are proud to be a part of it,” a DIAC spokesman said.

“Australia is a diverse nation which welcomes people from all cultures but we encourage them to come here through safe and regular migration channels.”

“The simple message is – tell your family and friends overseas to come the right way. Don’t risk being sorry,” the spokesman added.

<http://www.newsroom.immi.gov.au/releases/>



As part of our commitment to Multiculturalism PPI has both Sinhalese and Tamil speaking staff. For information contact Mahalingam Sutharshan and Mal Wickramasinghe.

### **Don't be sorry campaign – Muttiah Muralitharan message**

Sri Lankan cricket stars Muttiah Muralitharan and Lasith Malinga have joined forces with the Australian Government in its latest campaign to reach ethnic communities whose members often encourage family to seek asylum on risky boat journeys with people smugglers.

### **Spaniards flock to Australia to escape economic woes**

Spanish workers are looking to Australia to escape the nation's deepening economic woes, as youth unemployment reaches 60 per cent in parts of the country.

The Spanish-Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry says some of those enquiring into Australian employment remain in Europe while others have already made the move to Australia and are looking for work.

Many of those who are making the move are employed on 457 visas in industries where there are skills shortages in Australia.

According to the chamber there are skill shortages in renewable energy requiring workers to be brought in from Spain.

Young Spaniards enrol in a course at a university or college and apply for a student visa, which lets them work 20 hours per week.

Juan Gutierrez, who is a qualified engineer, could not find an engineering role in Australia or Spain.

He is now studying a masters in engineering and works part-time at a Sydney delicatessen.

"The situation is pretty difficult back in Spain. We've got 6 million people unemployed."

"I'm looking for a job as an engineer but working here helps me to live, helps me to pay my bills, helps me to live here in Australia," Mr Gutierrez said.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-04-29/spanish-workers-flock-to-australia/4655314>

### **Island school an oasis of normality**

Seven children sit in rapt attention in Dale Brittle's class at Christmas Island. But these kids - aged between five and seven - aren't like the others at the island's school. When they go home to their families, they'll return to the fences of their secure detention facilities.

"It's just like teaching any children," Ms Brittle says.

There are 280 children at Christmas Island District High School (the name is a misnomer), between the ages of five and 17. Another 24 children from the nearby detention camps come here for daily classes, with five to seven year olds in one class, and seven to 13 year olds in another. Teenagers aged 13 to 17 are offered classes at the nearby recreation centre. Intensive English lessons are a priority for older children.

Teaching asylum seekers' children is complicated by the fact most only stay on the island for one to three months, before they are transferred with their families to mainland facilities.

Ms Brittle sadly says: "They're kids, and it is amazing how resilient they are." "It's quite interesting, you know, they all love playing in the [play equipment] boat. Some of them have been through some pretty terrible things."

<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/island-school-an-oasis-of-normality-20130402-2h55c.html>

### **Uruguay work and holiday visa starts**

Young people from Australia and Uruguay now have the opportunity to visit and work in each other's countries through a work and holiday visa arrangement.

The new work and holiday arrangement aims to strengthen people-to-people relations and build on economic ties and links between the two countries.

This arrangement will allow university-educated Australians and Uruguayans aged between 18 and 30 to work and holiday in each other's country for up to 12 months.

The work and holiday visa differs from a working holiday visa as it requires applicants to have the support of their government, hold or be studying towards tertiary qualifications and to speak functional English.

<http://www.newsroom.immi.gov.au/releases/uruguay-work-and-holiday-visa-starts>

### **Graduate Temporary visa changes**

Alterations to visa subclass 485, the temporary graduate visa, will make it easier for international students to stay in Australia after completing their studies.

The changes, which took effect on March 23, allow students to obtain a two-year work visa if they study in Australia for at least 16 months and complete either a bachelor's degree or a master's by coursework. Students who complete a master's by research can qualify for a three-year visa, while those who complete a doctorate get four years.

This is a significant increase on the previous limit of 18 months. What's more, applicants no longer need to be qualified for any of the jobs on the skilled occupation list. Any graduate can get the 485 visa if they are aged below 50 and have competent English, as long as their first visa to study in Australia was granted on or after November 5, 2011. The broadening of the visa also serves to make studying at an Australian university more appealing in a competitive global education market.

Expanding temporary work rights is an attempt to regain lost ground. NSW Olympics minister Michael Knight stated plainly that an expanded work visa was essential to "the ongoing viability of our universities in an increasingly competitive global market for students". Vice-chancellors also made the connection explicit.

With about 240,000 international students enrolled at Australian universities and colleges the visa was proving popular even before the work rights were expanded: annual visa grants grew from about 15,000 in 2009 to about 38,000 in 2012, and by last year there were 38,000 graduates in Australia on the post-study visa.

It's likely that tens of thousands more graduates are waiting for their 485 visas to be issued. If the current processing time of 12 months persists, the two-year post-study entitlement is, in reality, valid for three years, since graduates can live and work in Australia on bridging visas while awaiting decisions.

Unlike skilled workers on a 457 visa, international graduates do not need a firm offer of work. Nor must they find a job related to their qualifications or requiring a certain level of skill. While 457 visa workers must be paid at or above prevailing market rates, the temporary graduate visa has no minimum salary requirements.

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/graduate-visas-may-yet-prove-controversial-20130403-2h706.html>

## Education

### New-look international education website

Austrade has launched the first stage of its website's redesigned education web pages, aimed at providing better service to the international education sector through easy-to-access, high quality and timely market research and opportunities.

The education pages have now been given their own place in Austrade's website at [www.austrade.gov.au/education](http://www.austrade.gov.au/education) and feature improved information architecture and increased multi-channel navigability to enable education providers to more easily move around the site and locate relevant information.

Key features of the redesigned website include:

- new visual design and layout
- easier site navigation
- interactive [world map](#) of education market profiles
- new look country pages featuring overview statistics, news, opportunities and events
- quick links to related articles and country pages
- new refinement options to narrow down [news articles](#) by country, article type or sector
- simplified education [newsletter signup](#)

Queries about the new website or the Market Information Package should be directed to [MIP@austrade.gov.au](mailto:MIP@austrade.gov.au)

<http://www.austrade.gov.au/Education/News/Austrade-update/Austrade-launches-first-stage-of-new-look-international-education-website>

### Call to base foreign ties on the European model

ASIAN Century-style links between Australian and regional institutions should be modelled on the European experience. This credit transfer system had taken a decade to harmonise the higher education syllabus under the Bologna process, but a similar attempt should be made in Australia and then across the region.

In this way students would eventually be able to take undergraduate as well as postgraduate courses across a range of countries and institutions, extending the sector's already keen engagement with the region.

Profession Taji welcomed the government's Australia in the Asian Century white paper, and joined the chorus of academics and others calling for additional funding to achieve that and another crucial goal, a workforce proficient in at least one other language.

### Australian Council for Private Education and Training

The role of education in the economic and social development of the region is paramount. Education prepares individuals to integrate into their local, regional and global community. Education also supports participation in the workforce, enabling individuals to contribute to their personal and community's economic advancement. Investment in education in Asia has flourished over the past 20 years; this has been accompanied by high population growth, donor support in less developed countries, private sector investment and a growing middle-class eager to access quality education.

“Education is key in promoting human resource development, bridging the development gap, enhancing regional competitiveness and in achieving sustained economic recovery and development”. (East Asian Ministers Meeting 2010).

## Human Rights

### Using a law to Change Our Lives

The twentieth anniversary of the Disability Discrimination Act was celebrated with the launch of twenty short films by Governor-General, Ms Quentin Bryce AC CVO, at Admiralty House.

Called Twenty Years: Twenty Stories, the Australian Human Rights Commission, in partnership with the Sydney Community Foundation, have made films showing how people have used this law to change their lives, and the lives of others.

Going to school, catching a bus, watching a movie or entering a building are things we do every day. But some of us have had to fight hard to be able to do them, Commissioner Innes said.

The Disability Discrimination Act provides Australians with disability – and their relatives or associates – with the chance to pursue a complaint if they are treated less favourably than other people in a range of areas of public life.

The purpose of these twenty short films is to show that the biggest barrier Australians with the disability face, is not disability itself but negative attitudes towards disability. They illustrate that people with disability can make rich contributions to society if barriers in our schools, universities, buildings and retail stores are removed.

The 20 stories are available at <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/twentystories/index.html>

### The right to request flexible work arrangements

Millions of Australians will have the express right to request flexible working arrangements under changes to federal workplace laws.

Minister of Employment and Workplace Relations Bill Shorten has announced the Government would amend the Fair Work Act to broaden the right to request flexible working arrangements to more workers who need it.

“The independent panel that reviews the Fair Work Act last year found the current provisions in the National Employment Standards for requesting flexible arrangements were working effectively, were being taken seriously by employers and employees and the vast majority of requests are being granted when they are made,” Minister Mr Shorten said.

“However the panel noted that many workers weren’t aware of their rights to request flexible work arrangements and recommended that more workers should be able to access the right.”

Currently, the right to request flexible hours is limited to parent with responsibility for a child under school age or a child with disability under 18.

Workers who can make right to request flexible work arrangements will be extended to include:

- Workers with caring responsibilities
- Employees who are parents, or who have responsibility for the care of a child of school age
- Employees with disability
- Mature-age employees

- Workers experiencing family violence and workers providing personal care, support and assistance to a member of their immediate family or member of their household because they are experiencing family violence.

The Government will also amend the fair Work Information Statement provided to every new employee to ensure they are aware of their rights to request flexible work arrangements.

<http://ministers.deewr.gov.au/shorten/expanding-right-request-flexible-work-arrangements-help-modern-australian-families-0>

### **Supporting mature-age job seekers to boost business in WA**

Business leaders came together at a Cooperate Champions seminar in Perth recently to tackle age discrimination and boost the number of mature-age Australians in the local workforce.

Federal Minister, Gary Gray hosted the seminar and said that for Australia to remain competitive, it needs to take advantage of the skills and expertise of mature-age workers.

“We know there are 3.8 million mature-age Australians interested in working but who face barriers to employment. Yet research shows mature-age workers are more reliable, loyal, cost less to recruit, and provide a greater return on investment. There is a compelling case for businesses to rethink their practices when it comes to employing mature-age workers, and this is why we encourage them to become a Corporate Champion,” Mr Gray said.

For information on the Government’s mature-age employment programs visit:

[www.deewr.gov.au/experienceplus](http://www.deewr.gov.au/experienceplus)

<http://ministers.deewr.gov.au/ellis/supporting-mature-age-job-seekers-boost-business-wa>

### **A Pledge to All Women and Girls**

International Women’s Day has been marked with a pledge to continue Australia’s efforts to eliminate and prevent violence against women and girls.

The United Nations theme for International Women’s Day this year is a promise: time for action to end violence against women.

The first International Women’s Day rallies were held in March 1911, a time when support for the right for women to work, vote and hold public office was building momentum.

We have a come long way since that time and made significant gains in achieving greater gender equality and enabling women’s social, political and economic empowerment.

But tragically, far too many women around the world are still victims of violence by their governments and armies and by those who should love and protect them - by partners and family members.

In Washington, the Minister for the Status of Women, Julie Collins, participated in a panel examining domestic and international initiatives aimed at improving gender equality and to attend the International Women of Courage Ceremony.

Ms Collins has been in New York to lead the Australia delegation at the 57th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the world’s main policy-making body, at which countries agree to a set of concrete recommendations to be implemented to improve gender equality.

Domestically and internationally – including through our aid program and advocacy – Australia is promoting a world where women and girls can thrive and where their safety is guaranteed.

<http://juliecollins.fahcsia.gov.au/node/322>

## **Challenge for Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has released the first publication of a project aimed at improving the evidence base for family, domestic and sexual violence.

The new Defining the data publication defines and describes the social phenomena of family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia. Family, domestic and sexual violence comes at a considerable economic and social cost to the nation. At present, high quality and comprehensive statistical information about family and domestic violence is scarce, and this publication sheds light on the significant challenges faced when trying to quantify these forms of violence.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyCatalogue/A49B46015C839781CA257B0A000EC4E5?Opendocument>

## **Foreign Affairs**

### **DFAT announces new Data Centre**

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has signed a contract with Canberra Data Centres (CDC) to host the Department's new data centre.

The contract was signed by DFAT Chief Information Officer, Tuan Dao, and representatives from CDC at a ceremony at the Department's headquarters in Canberra.

"This is a major step forward for our ICT modernisation agenda."

"The new facility will provide next-generation technical capabilities for the Department and our many client agencies across government," said Mr Dao.

The new data centre will be fundamental in supporting the development and operation of Australia's new Passport system.

<http://dfat.gov.au/media/releases/department/2013/dfat-release-20130411.html>

### **European Union lifts Myanmar sanctions**

Foreign Minister Bob Carr applauded the lifting of European Union sanctions on Myanmar. This decision follows a meeting of European Union Foreign Ministers in Luxembourg. The EU has also agreed to develop a framework to encourage Myanmar's reform process.

Speaking from Brussels where he addressed the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, Senator Carr said he was pleased Australia had led the way by lifting travel and financial sanctions on Myanmar in June 2012.

"I welcome the lifting of these sanctions as an endorsement of Myanmar's efforts for political change but I remain concerned by religious and ethnic violence in Myanmar and want the government to more effectively intervene to prevent it. Specifically I've called for protection of all affected communities including in Rakhine and Kachin states," Senator Carr said.

Australia's arms embargo against Myanmar remains in place.

[http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2013/bc\\_mr\\_130424.html](http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2013/bc_mr_130424.html)

## The Australia-Japan Foundation welcomes students

Twenty young Japanese junior high-school students from the Togura, Shizugawa and Utatsu junior high schools in Minami-Sanriku, one of the areas worst affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, have been invited to visit Victoria.

The AJF Chair, Mr Murray McLean AO, extended a warm welcome to these students who have gone through such difficult experiences over the past two years. "I am delighted these young Japanese students are visiting Victoria and will experience an interesting and varied program of educational, cultural and recreational activities."

Mr McLean, the Australian Ambassador to Japan at the time of the tragedy, said he believed the visit would continue to strengthen the people-to-people links between Australia and Japan - two nations that are already close long-term friends and partners.

The young students participating in the visit wrote essays about what they would like to do in Australia if they had the chance to visit. The students will experience different aspects of Australia's school and cultural life through classes at Fairhills High School in Knoxfield, staying with local families, participating in farm stays, seeing the sights of Melbourne's CBD and enjoying an evening at one of Melbourne's favourite destinations – Phillip Island – to see the penguin parade.

Some of their essays may be viewed at [http://www.australia.or.jp/en/news/20130322\\_essays.php](http://www.australia.or.jp/en/news/20130322_essays.php).

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/releases/department/2013/dfat-release-20130325.html>

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