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Visa priority list grows to 41 positions

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Skills shortage

David Marin-Guzman
Workplace correspondent

The government has more than doubled its priority occupations for skilled visas after lobbying from business in a bid to fill “critical” vacancies.

The 22 new occupations, including auditors, accountants, chefs and foot doctors, will be given priority processing for migration and travel exemptions, although they will still be subject to domestic quarantine caps and likely face problems getting flights.

It comes as major audit firms reported it takes up to six months to recruit experienced auditors due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and as the mining giants lobbied this week for a special visa to bring 30,000 overseas workers into Western Australia.

However, unions have argued the move will further drive down wage growth and give business another reason to avoid investing in training.

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke said the government had “received valuable feedback from Australian business stakeholders on critical skill vacancies, which has been considered together with data from the National Skills Commission”.

The new occupations take the priority list from 19 to 41 and include tax accountants, auditors, engineers, prosthetists, multimedia specialists, software programmers, ICT security specialists and chefs.

Employer groups, which have been lobbying for the expansion for the past six months, praised the decision.

Australian Mines and Metals Associ-

ation chief executive Steve Knott said “today’s announcement may well prove to be a turning point in Australia’s skills crisis”.

“Prolonged closed borders to the small pool of international skilled migrants that supplement our domestic workforces has wreaked havoc on Australia’s resources industry, as it has most others.”

Chartered Accountants executive Simon Grant said the audit profession was experiencing “a war for talent as a result of the current border restrictions coupled with the longer-term growth in demand for audit professionals”.

Australian Hotels Association chief executive Stephen Ferguson said the sector could not access the “usual stream of international chefs”.

“Some of our most successful hotels are currently more than 50 per cent down on job applications for the same time last year.”

However, ACTU secretary Sally McManus said “rather than allowing even more exploitation of temporary migrant workers, the Morrison government should be taking action to help the 1.7 million underemployed or unemployed Australians find the hours and jobs that they need”.

“The Reserve Bank have raised concerns about businesses using the temporary migrant worker system to avoid investing in training and hiring local workers which is contributing to the near-decade of record low wage growth that Australian workers have endured.”

Prolonged closed borders ... has wreaked havoc on Australia’s resources industry.

Steve Knott, Australian Mines and Metals Association CEO