

LABOUR SHORTAGES

SEMI-SKILLED/ELEMENTARY LABOUR SHORTAGES

Most manufacturers will be aware of the standard work permit policy applied by Immigration New Zealand (INZ) when a manufacturer would like to employ a non New Zealand citizen or resident. Essentially, before the individual will be granted a work permit to commence employment, the manufacturer must demonstrate to INZ that there are no suitably qualified and/or experienced New Zealand citizens or residents available and/or trainable for the position.

Most manufacturers would have experienced difficulty with the application of this policy when trying to employ overseas individuals for a semi-skilled/elementary position. An example that comes to mind is a large seafood factory that was unable to hire an overseas person to be employed on the line, as the position merely required the individual to open mussels. The difficulty this employer had was that they could not locate anyone via advertising; and in relation to the people referred by Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) the individuals in question were not interested in the position, and stayed for a period of between 15 minutes to 2 days. The position of INZ in this particular case was that as people were available to be trained through WINZ, the overseas individual identified by the employer could not be hired; notwithstanding the fact that this individual most likely would have stood in that line for 8 hours per day quite happily receiving a market rate remuneration for the position.

Quite often the first “tier” of the policy can be demonstrated (no individual available). However, where manufacturers run into problems with test is the second tier, as in terms of semi-skilled/elementary positions an arguable case can be made by INZ that any individual who is unemployed in New Zealand could be trained for the position on offer.

On 13 March 2007 INZ introduced the Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy. The policy was introduced by INZ to help alleviate the chronic need for semi-skilled/ elementary labour in the horticulture and viticulture industries. It allows for the placement of a maximum of 5,000 overseas workers per year, to be employed in vacant positions in these industries where it can be clearly demonstrated that there are no New Zealand citizens or residents available.

Whilst this policy may not be of specific interest to manufacturers, the implementation of this policy, following significant lobbying by these industries to government, is an example of INZ introducing a special policy for a private sector which has clearly demonstrated to INZ major problems in locating semi-skilled/elementary staff.

The Department of Labour provides a job vacancy monitor on a monthly basis which reports on apparent labour shortages based on advertisements collected from 25 regional newspapers and selected websites of New Zealand.

In March 2007, a total of 7,219 vacancies were listed, and of those 4,500 were semi-skilled/elementary positions (over 62%). Bearing in mind that the monitor only lists positions actually advertised (semi-skilled/elementary positions will not be advertised as often as highly skilled or skilled positions), then the real extent of the problem is evident. Why then, has INZ not issued a policy that can be generically applied to semi-skilled/elementary positions across the board?

There is no reason to assume that manufacturers could not band together as a united entity and approach INZ in relation to the shortage of semi-skilled/elementary labour in the industry, and request the provision of a similar policy to allow manufacturers to hire overseas individuals where there is a clear historical foundation of staff shortages.

Manufacturers would agree that the viticulture and horticulture industries are not the only industries suffering chronic shortages of labour. The new policy of INZ provides a precedent that can be used as a foundation for lobbying government to address the labour needs of manufacturers.

ARTICLES

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