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ALP condemns extension of Accession States Worker Registration Scheme

The Association of Labour Providers has protested to the government about its last minute decision to maintain the Worker Registration Scheme under which workers from eight EU members have to pay a £90 fee when they begin work in the UK.

In a letter to the Home Secretary, Mark Boleat, the Chairman of the ALP said –

“The Association was appalled to learn through the media that the Government has decided to extend the WRS for a further two years. We believe that the decision cannot be justified. Also, this last minute decision, without proper consultation with affected parties, will cause practical difficulties for businesses, which have been entitled to assume that the scheme ends automatically on 30 April.

The Government believes that it can extend the scheme because there is “serious disturbance” in the labour market. However, the scheme itself is not the cause of serious disturbance. The Migration Advisory Committee in its report accepted this: “the evidence reviewed does not indicate that any substantial negative labour market impacts are likely to result from removing the WRS. Nevertheless, negative impacts of a lower order are plausible, even though evidence is limited and this is only a possibility”. These are very flimsy grounds for maintaining a scheme that costs low paid workers £90 just to register and cost employers millions of pounds a year to administer. The report does not indicate the transmission mechanism for these negative impacts. Bearing in mind that the scheme does not prevent workers from working in the UK but merely charges them for doing so, it is assumed that the £90 is intended to be a deterrent to workers coming to Britain. It is not, although it is a deterrent to workers registering. All that the scheme does is to encourage some workers to operate in the flourishing informal economy.

The Association has also protested about the continual failure of the Home Office to consult on the scheme –

“Not once had the government been willing to have a sensible discussion on the scheme with relevant stakeholders.”

In 2005 the Home Office, again without consultation, decided to extend the scheme for three years. The ALP has successfully obtained a copy of the Cabinet Office paper on this issue, following a freedom of information request. That paper, and the decision of the Information Tribunal to reject an appeal from the Cabinet Office against the decision that the paper should be provided, are available on the ALP website. The Home Office paper commented:

“There has been some lobbying amongst employers for closure of the WRS, particularly among the agriculture, food processing and hospitality sectors (where most workers are located). However, the employer lobby has been contained and managed effectively within the Illegal Stakeholder Working Group”.

Mark Boleat commented: “This exemplifies the Home Office attitude to stakeholders on this matter – they are there to be contained and managed not to be involved.”

The Association has requested an urgent meeting with the Home Secretary to discuss these issues and will be urging MPs to reject the statutory instrument that seeks to extend the scheme. It is also asking the European Commission to investigate the legality of the decision.”

Notes:

The Association of Labour Providers (ALP) is the specialist trade association for organisations that provide and use temporary, contract and seasonal workers within the food, agricultural and other GLA regulated sectors.

The Sept 2005 Cabinet Office paper on WRS and the Decision of the Information Tribunal on the release of these papers can be found at

http://www.labourproviders.org.uk/Policy_and_research_papers.aspx