

Britain tightens visa regulations

THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE

May 6, 2008

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LONDON — Britain's Home Office tightened visa regulations for skilled workers Tuesday, forcing employers to prove they had no option before hiring a foreigner.

The change is part of a full overhaul of Britain's immigration system that will impact students, workers and temporary visitors and that is meant to make the process of choosing whom is allowed into the country more selective. It is modeled on Australia's strict point system for granting visas.

Under the new rules, potential workers will be evaluated based on their age and their ability to speak English, and the amount of money they earn. Potential migrants earning more than \$48,000 would have a simpler time than those earning less.

"Our new points system means that British job seekers get the first crack of the whip and that only the skilled migrants we actually need will be able to come." said Liam Byrne, the immigration minister.

The new regulations are part of government attempts to limit levels of immigration and will affect thousands of computer programmers, lab technicians, midwives and other skilled laborers that come to work in Britain annually. Another set of rules that covers students and temporary workers will be announced later in the year.

Had the new regulations been in operation last year, the Home Office said 20,000 people would have not been allowed into the country. That figure represents about 10 per cent of the workers who came to Britain from outside Europe.

The new rules will not affect the movement of people from within the European Union, Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland.