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BRITISH GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN TO RESTRICT BACKPACKERS

A year less for that working holiday

By Youth Affairs Reporter LAURA KENDALL

THOUSANDS of young Australian travellers face restrictive and "inflexible" conditions under planned changes to the British working holiday scheme. The British Home Office is expected to announce next month that it will reduce the length of working holiday visas from two years to one.

The changes mainly will affect the large number of Australians who intersperse short periods of casual work with travel in the UK and around Europe.

"Travellers who (want) to work for three months then travel for three months then work again are not going to have that flexibility," Michelle Canty, international careers manager for recruitment agency TMP Worldwide, said yesterday. "It will have an effect on the ones who are looking for casual, non-skilled work and see it as a chance to do that 'hopping'.

"They won't be able to use the UK as their base for as long."

Under the existing two-year working holidaymaker scheme, Australians, aged up to 28, are entitled to work for half their stay in Britain.

They are not permitted to take work which represents a continuation of their career, such as a senior or management position. Ms Canty said reducing the length of the visa was designed to stop abuses of the working holiday scheme, such as travellers working for longer than the allowed period. The changes are expected still to allow travellers to work for 12 months.

The British Home Office will issue a consultation paper in March detailing the proposed amendments to the scheme. Other possible changes include: RAISING the visa cut-off age from 28 to 30.

ALLOWING travellers to work in roles which represent a continuation of their career.

"It seems fairly definite that there is going to be some kind of revision. What that is is still really unclear (because) they've kept it very quiet," Ms Canty said.

British High Commission public affairs manager Peter Fuller said the review of the working holiday scheme was under way but no decisions had been made on amendments "or indeed whether there will be amendments".