

A Migration System for Australia's Future Review

15 December 2022

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission to the review of Australia's migration system to inform A Migration System for Australia's Future.

Our current migration system is complex and inflexible, lacks a strategic rationale, and no longer meets our needs. As we transition away from the wide-ranging disruption generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a valuable opportunity to reconsider the purpose and operation of our migration system to ensure it is well-placed to address the challenges presented by our current and future environment.

A migration system for Australia's future, Department of Home Affairs discussion paper, November 2022

As the Department of Home Affairs discussion paper so accurately describes above, there is a unique opportunity to overhaul Australia's migration system to ensure all parts operate effectively to their clearly articulated purpose. In addition, a fundamental part of any new migration system will be a cohesive and joined-up skilled migration system.

This new skilled migration system should be built on the strengths and quality of our international education system and provide an ideal foundation on which to meet the needs and aspirations of Australians, local industry, students and migrants.

Universities and industry are ready to work in partnership with the Government to ensure the skilled migration pathways for students, graduates, and expert researchers are sustainable, adaptative and attuned to the needs of Australia's economy and society. This partnership can use existing and ready-made support structures that exist between universities and their students and graduates, and between employers and their staff. Together with the Government, we can balance the needs of Australian workers, migrants, businesses, regions and the workforce and create a system that is responsible, targeted, measured and responsive.

Our international education system, combined with a cohesive, streamlined and easy to navigate migration system, is ideally placed to bring new people and ideas into Australia to drive local jobs and industries and enrich society and communities.

ATN has consistently advocated for this:

- [Employment White Paper consultation](#)
- [Pre-Budget policy statement](#)
- [Ai Group and ATN joint statement](#)
- [Planning Australia's 2022-23 Migration Program](#)
- [Joint Parliamentary inquiry into Australia's skilled migration program](#)

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Summary of ATN advocacy on skilled migration

Vital features of an overhauled migration system are flexibility, adaptability and coordination with the needs of Australians, industry and employers. While maintaining its cohesiveness, fairness and ease-of-use, the migration system be able to respond to changing needs, requirements and circumstances.

ATN with Australian Industry Group

Migration policy and settings must also be created in line with educational and social development opportunities available to Australians, international students and migrants.

This is why Ai Group and ATN have jointly urged the Government to support the creation of a tripartite Skills Forum as way of developing strategy and coordinating action on Australia's skills development. This would include the role of international education and skilled migration as complements to local education and training.

The Skills Forum would establish a three-way partnership between industry, universities and government to drive the national skills agenda. It would help secure Australia's skills future and realise Australia's potential through practical and sustainable actions and reforms. This is a shared challenge and opportunity that we are ready to address with the help of the Government.

ATN with Tech Council of Australia

ATN supports the Tech Council of Australia's advocacy on skilled migration as an anchor partner in the Digital Employment Forum, which brings together Tech Council members with major employers in five other sectors of the economy along with universities.

The Australian Government and the tech sector have a shared commitment to achieve 1.2 million tech jobs in Australia by 2030. While reskilling and upskilling is forecast to be the largest source of new tech workers, skilled migration is a crucial part of reaching that jobs goal.

We join Tech Council's call for the overall policy objective for skilled migration to be maximising the economic benefits to Australians. As universities that are a bridge to our global community, we also commend the social, cultural and diplomatic benefits of migration and knowledge exchange.

Complementing Tech Council's recommendation to prioritise employer-sponsored skilled migration, ATN recommends that we create more opportunities for international students and graduates to participate in work-integrated learning, internships and graduate programs. These opportunities will support the formation of strong relationships between international graduates and employers which will enable the outcomes Tech Council is recommending.

ATN advocacy

Australia's workers and businesses need a coherent skills strategy that can quickly plug urgent and persistent skills gaps in the economy with a balanced and fair pipeline of domestic and international workers.

This must be supported by reforming post-school education so that universities can flexibly meet emerging and priority skills need through the innovative and adaptive ways our universities are pioneering.

Together with the Government, we can balance the needs of Australian workers, migrants, businesses, regions, and the workforce to create a system that is high-quality, targeted, measured and responsive.

Australia's skilled migration settings post-pandemic need to be guided by an integrated, pragmatic, and coherent migration policy - one that voices the characteristics and ideals that all Australians can support and one that supports economic growth and skills transfer.

Australia must remain open to new people, ideas and innovations if we are to prosper and grow. While we perform above our weight in university research, we are still reliant on innovations and supply chains overseas.

This is made clear in the Productivity Commission's interim report *5-year Productivity Inquiry: Innovation for the 98%* that reveals between 1 and 2 per cent of Australian businesses are currently producing 'new to the world' innovation. We must consider how international partnerships can help the other 98 per cent improve performance and productivity.

The report states that "many ideas and technologies will come to Australia from overseas" so it is important not to unduly restrict our own access to innovation. It also recommends that "skilled migration policy should be reframed as a way of diffusing innovation and best practice among Australian businesses".

While studying in Australia, international students get an opportunity to practise and develop their skills in the workforce. We should encourage these students to blend part-time study and part-time employment (in a relevant occupation or industry) as a way of filling skills and labour shortages and helping students build a career and life in Australia.

There are several advantages to strengthening the links between student and graduate visas and permanent migration. Graduates have:

- A qualification from a recognised and quality assured Australian provider that can be designed with Australia's skills needs in mind
- Developed primary, secondary and tertiary foundations and support networks which will aid their transition to permanent residency (e.g. links with their university, fellow graduates, alumni groups, internship employers)
- Deeper cultural understanding of Australia.

Graduates with a history of part-time work in a relevant occupation or industry are even more valuable to Australia.

Graduates have a track record of education, employment and engagement with Australia and a strong understanding of the society and culture they are committing to when applying for permanent residency. This benefits both the graduate and Australia as the experience is more likely to be a productive and successful one.

Further enquiries should be addressed to:

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