

Migration, Pathway to Nation Building inquiry

16 March 2023

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration into the role of permanent migration in nation building.

A fundamental part of migration system that serves the needs of both Australians and migrants will be a cohesive, joined-up and simplified 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.

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.

At the heart of this must be a system that maintains the high quality and supportive system on which Australian providers pride themselves on – one that centres the student and their educational, working and cultural experience.

Much has been made of the success of international education as an Australian industry – generating \$40 billion a year pre-pandemic as Australia's largest services export. While we should celebrate that achievement and work towards rebuilding the industry, we should not lose sight of its greater cultural and social value to both Australians and international students.

International students are an important contributor to Australia. They bridge cultures and countries, enrich our experience through cultural exchange, deepen our understanding of our Asia-Pacific neighbours and their rich history, and contribute to the university teaching and learning experience of all students.

Recommendations

1. The Government forms standing partnerships with universities and industry to guide skilled migration policy in the interests of Australians and migrants.
2. As part of that tripartite agreement, we explore more opportunities for international students and graduates to participate in work-based and work-integrated learning, internships and graduate programs.
3. The Government sees international education as a core part of migration policy and recognises the importance of the student experience and the importance of higher degree by research students to our national innovation system.

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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's pre-Budget 2023-24 submission

ATN's [submission](#) highlighted the importance of international education to Australia's society, culture and economy and made recommendations to improve how it integrates with skilled migration.

Cohesion of the approach to international education and migration across Government

The Jobs and Skills Summit, Universities Accord and renewed focus on skilled migration have shifted the dial and changed our priorities and opportunities for international education. We are already witnessing substantial changes through measures like extended post-study work rights and improved visa processing.

The beginning of the recovery in our international education sector is underway and it is timely to forge a new consensus and plan for action across the Government, sector and all stakeholders.

There needs to be a whole of Government approach to international education including:

- Jobs and skills policy
- Alignment with foreign policy
- Visa processing
- Migration policy
- International development
- Trade diversification
- Tourism
- Affordable housing.

Focus on the international student experience

A key feature of the Australian education is the experience students have inside and outside the classroom and on and off campus – we can improve these for both Australian and international students. This will be key to attracting students back to Australia to study, work and live – ensuring we are a destination of choice and build our international partnerships and connections.

ATN universities place student experience and engagement with students at the centre of their activities. An important part of this is giving all students the opportunity to gain relevant and meaningful work experience both during and after study. This will better prepare students to make a contribution to the Australian economy and society, utilise their post-study work rights and live in Australia long-term.

ATN has consistently advocated for an effective system that combines part-time work while studying, post-study work rights and permanent migration. We should alleviate the administrative and cost barriers for employers, simplify the sponsorship process and encourage greater use of work-integrated learning options. Creating an effective, tangible and realistic pathway from student to graduate and then to permanent resident will help attract, build and retain talent and meet Australia's future skills needs.

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.

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".

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