

## **Review of the migration system points test 23 May 2024**

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN Universities) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Home Affairs review of the migration system points test.

As technology-focused institutions with applied learning as a cornerstone, ATN universities are destinations of choice for almost 18 per cent of Australia's international students. We support an integrated migration system with clear links between student and graduate visas and equally clear pathways to permanent migration. The discussion paper rightly notes that permanent migration prospects are a key factor for prospective international students considering whether to preference Australia, or other destinations. There are several advantages to a streamlined system: graduates receive a high-quality qualification from a recognised Australian provider (which can be designed with Australia's current and future skills needs in mind); they are more likely to have already developed strong professional and support networks, and potentially part-time work experience, that would facilitate a smooth transition to permanent residency; they understand Australia's cultural context, and in most cases are considered an integral part of the community. International students also make a significant contribution to national innovation and productivity through higher degree research, and clear pathways to retain this expertise in Australia and allow students to utilise the expertise gained in this country and contribute to the local economy, are essential.

We note that education and skills are a significant component of the current points test allocation, with 85 of 145 points being allocated to these criteria. ATN Universities support the continued inclusion of these criteria to reflect the value of international students and graduates who contribute much-needed skills and experience to the Australian economy. Creating a realistic and tangible pathway from student to graduate to permanent resident that manages expectations is essential to attract, build and retain talent to meet Australia's immediate and future skills needs.

### **ATN Universities recommends that the pathways between student and graduate visas and permanent migration be strengthened, to provide greater certainty and increase Australia's competitiveness as a destination for prospective international students.**

An integrated migration system relies on consistent and complementary messaging across relevant policies. There needs to be close alignment between the goals of the migration system in meeting immediate and future skills needs, and other Australian Government policies, including education, jobs and skills, housing, foreign policy, development and trade. For example, the discussion paper notes that it is 'reasonable to conclude'<sup>1</sup> that aspiring migrants may preference qualifications for roles on the occupation list rather than choosing something that aligns with their own long-term career goals. The draft International Education and Skills Strategic Framework published by the Department of Education appears to go further than this by suggesting the framework should 'encourage'<sup>2</sup> study in areas of Australian skills shortages or gaps.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Department of Home Affairs discussion paper *Review of the points test*, p12

<sup>2</sup> Australian Department of Education draft for consultation *Australia's International Education and Skills Strategic Framework*, p22

Similarly, there is a disjunct between the migration system recognising the value of migrants selected today at universities in helping to manage the challenges of an ageing population and contribute to Australian workplaces and communities, and messaging that students should not expect to stay on in Australia beyond the duration of their studies. It is important that policies send consistent signals that today's international students (who may fill tomorrow's skills gaps as permanent migrants) are welcome and cherished members of Australian society – continuing to build the social licence for appropriate levels of migration. ATN Universities would be pleased to work with relevant Australian Government departments to better understand the perceptions and implications of messaging on international education.

**ATN Universities recommends that the Australian Government prioritise close alignment of migration policy with related policies, particularly international education, to ensure consistent and cohesive messaging.**

In terms of mechanisms to most effectively anticipate and recruit for skills needs into the future, ATN Universities strongly supports regular consultation between government, the higher education sector and industry. ATN Universities and the Australian Industry Group have long advocated for a standing tripartite Skills Forum that could serve as a forum for consultation and consensus on skilled migration settings and pathways, and emerging skills needs. Such a forum could also partner on initiatives such as short courses to upskill overseas qualified workers and opportunities to gain relevant industry experience in priority areas such as healthcare, technology and engineering. Should there be interest in pursuing this proposal further, ATN Universities could convene an inaugural Skills Forum to demonstrate the positive impact such a body could have.

Whatever system is designed to assess skills needs, flexibility to adjust to changing labour market conditions is essential. Adjustments should be undertaken in consultation with universities and industries given the long lead times required to change recruitment strategies. Clear communication well in advance of changes would also ensure the migration system remains fair to potential migrants who have made significant life, study and career choices on the basis of Australia's current policy settings.

**ATN Universities recommends that the Australian Government create formal mechanisms for regular consultation and partnerships with the higher education sector and industry, to ensure that emerging skills needs are being addressed effectively while remaining fair and transparent about migration policy settings.**

ATN universities are committed to welcoming international students and providing those who wish to stay and contribute to the Australian economy and community with the skills they need to do so. We look forward to working closely with the Department of Home Affairs as the Migration Strategy is implemented and policy settings adjusted.

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