
Submission in response to the review of Australia's migration system *A migration system for Australia's future*

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Federal Government's review of Australia's migration system led by Dr Parkinson AC PSM, Dr Howe and Mr Azarias.

UTS is the top-ranked young university in Australia. Our vision is to be a leading public university of technology recognised for our global impact. As such, it is our role to ensure our graduates shape the future of professions and businesses that will be needed in Australia and overseas. Since our inception, an integral building block of our success has been our outward, global focus and ability to partner with industry. Our campus has no walls; it is deliberately designed to be porous and support connections, knowledge exchange and collaboration. This embodies our approach to engagement and permeates our teaching and research. Our student body is diverse, and we encourage our students and staff to look at the world from different perspectives.

In the interests of conciseness, and noting the parallel commencement of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's inquiry into the role of permanent migration in nation building, UTS makes three high-level strategic recommendations for consideration by the review panel:

1. UTS agrees with the broad assessment made in the Discussion Paper *A migration system for Australia's future* that our current migration system is 'complex and inflexible, lacks a strategic rationale, and no longer meets our needs' (page 2). Migration policy is complex because it is informed by the strategic priorities of other parts of government and community expectations. Migration policy as it applies to the higher education sector is no exception with four government departments / authorities involved in some aspect of the movement of international students across Australia's borders (Department of Education, Department of Home Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Authority).

Further complexities are experienced in research (e.g. higher-degree research students and requirements from the Australian Research Council or the *List of Critical Technologies in the National Interest*); timely recruitment of global talent in academia; international engagement (e.g. the myriad of laws and regulations that apply here), and innovation (e.g. accommodating flexibility for the startup ecosystem 'digital nomads'). The *Strategic Review of the Student Visa Program* (otherwise known as the Knight Review of 2011) is worth revisiting as part of this review in appreciating the complexities and interdependencies faced by the higher education sector with respect to migration policy.

All the proposed key elements and objectives for Australia's migration system (page 3 of the Discussion Paper) warrant consideration and are admirable. UTS recommends a whole-of-government approach to a redesigned migration system particularly as the migration system, as a function of government, is intended as a reflection of government policy and not a driver of it.

2. UTS urges closer alignment between higher education policy relating to international students and skilled migration policy.

The skills shortage currently being felt in Australia (and in many other Western countries with strong international education sectors) is well known. At present, the vast majority – around 84 per cent – of international students return home overseas after their studies. Our current settings encourage this. Providing certain cohorts of international students with clear pathways to permanent residency would not only help revitalise the international education sector but would also help address Australia's current skills shortage. This policy response would also send a strong signal that we are once again a premier study destination for the best and brightest students that the world can offer.

At present, employers are less likely to employ an international student given it is likely they will have to leave the country after two years. Positively, in September 2022, the Federal Government committed to increasing the duration of post study work rights of international students (e.g. from two

years to four years for select Bachelor degrees) to strengthen the pipeline of skilled labour. UTS strongly supports this change.

It is imperative that this approach – facilitating pathways to permanent residency for international students – is linked to Australia’s broader skilled migration system. It should become a key pillar in how we as a country attract migrants who make, or who will make, a significant contribution to the Australian economy.

Opening pathways to permanent residency for international students qualified to fill vacancies could be achieved by:

- A coherent, joined up approach from how we assess applicants for student visas, through graduate work visas and then transiting from temporary to permanent residence.
- An approach that limits the pathway to professional disciplines in long-term high demand – engineering, IT, design and perhaps entrepreneurs, nursing and aged care, and excludes those jobs where unscrupulous education providers will rot the system – e.g. hospitality.
- A system that is limited to universities who have reputations to protect – the same reasoning as used in the Knight Review’s original recommendations. Universities have skin in the game for long term sustainable outcomes and are not driven by delivering short-term profits to owners or shareholders. Extending a scheme to cover trades, for example, has the potential to open the system to abuse and lead to its collapse without proper regulation and monitoring.
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UTS recommends consideration of the following ideas:

- Replace the Genuine Temporary Entrant requirement with a Genuine Student requirement (at least for designated professions).and make it clear that an international student’s ambition to live and work in Australia is acceptable
- Consider allowing different hours of work for students working in their area of specialisation (i.e. in IT or engineering, but not at restaurants or bars). This will go some way to protect students from exploitation.
- Allow only students who complete a qualification of at least the level at which they originally started with to qualify for the pathway. This prevents poaching by unscrupulous operators.
- Allocate a quota of permanent visas four years ahead – e.g. students starting in 2023 are guaranteed that there will be 5000 (say) permanent residency places available in 2027.
- Make the pathway from the graduate work visa to permanent residency clear and simple – this may include government nomination, employer nomination and points based, but the number of points needs to be substantial and guaranteed.
- Ensure that employers are part of the process, that they understand how the pathway works and will employ international students knowing they can retain them long term.
- Work with industry to make sure international students have access to work placement opportunities in relevant courses, in order to further strengthen the pathway. This is good for businesses, good for students and will help give any scheme a quality and compliance focus. For example, the NSW Government recently partnered with SEEK to pilot a new initiative to connect international students to employers. Employers now have the capacity to add a new #NSWJOBSCONNECT filter to job postings to allow international students to quickly identify which job opportunities are available to them.

3. The Discussion Paper identified visa processing backlogs and wait periods as a challenge for instilling public confidence in the migration system (page 10). UTS strongly supports measures to improve timely decisions on visa applications. At present, information about global processing times indicate a time range of how long it is taking the Department of Home Affairs to finalise visa applications. This position should be reversed with an expectation on the Department to finalise visa applications within a certain period of time.

If implemented as a key performance indicator, the benefits to this approach include:

- Increased certainty for visa applicants in planning to migrate to Australia (whether temporary or permanent).



- Increased certainty for organisations, such as universities, in planning for future loads and for employers around availability of graduates.
- Measurable performance of the Department's efforts in line with community expectations, and fuller comprehension of what constitutes appropriate resourcing to meet those expectations.

UTS recommends conceptualisation of global processing times as key performance indicators for the Department of Home Affairs for the reasons outlined above.