

IRU Submission: Australia's skilled migration program

The review of Australia's skilled migration program in the era of Covid-19 is a major opportunity to recognise the natural links between education policy that encourages education providers to seek students from around the world to migration policy that seeks the best-qualified people to migrate to Australia.

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) will provide a full submission targeting Terms of Reference 1b, concerning long term structural change to the skilled migration program.

This initial response targets Terms of Reference 1a concerning immediate changes to the skilled migration program in response to Covid-19 restraints and opportunities.

International students: a migration target group

Unlike countries such as New Zealand and Canada, Australia keeps a rigorous separation between its international education policy and its migration policy. The issue has been fraught in Australia. International education policy and meeting Australia's longer-term economic and social needs are allowed to operate distinctly.

An effective Australian international education and skilled migration policy should be clear that international students are a legitimate source of applicants for skilled migration places consistent with Government immigration targets year by year.

We should affirm that attaining a qualification from an Australian university or other provider is a positive outcome for a person in demonstrating their relative standing for skilled immigration visas. These students have shown a capacity to live in Australia for the period of study and understand well the country where they are applying to live.

Hence there should be a pathway that allows international students to apply for residence and citizenship, with decisions based on national policy and the relative standing of applicants at the time. This would not create the right for places but the legitimate potential to apply.

Covid-19: the potential from recent graduates, still resident in Australia

The Committee should consider whether there is scope to target recent graduates, still resident in Australia, to maintain an effective migration program through Covid-19 driven limits to entry to Australia.

The Covid-19 driven need to limit entry to Australia to returning Australian citizens and small sets of other people means that the skilled migration program for 2021 should pay particular attention to applicants who are already resident in Australia, including one time students who have completed their degrees and remain in Australia.

They could be using post-study work visas or otherwise be able to remain in Australia. Some of these graduates face an uncertain option for returning to their home countries due to limited options to leave Australia and potentially the risk of Covid-19 in their current home countries.

About the IRU

Innovative Research Universities (IRU) is a coalition of seven comprehensive universities committed to innovation and inclusive excellence in teaching, learning and research in Australia.

The members' impact is local and global, focusing on advancing communities through education, resources, opportunities, translational research and enterprise.

Through its members working collectively, the IRU seeks to be at the constructive centre of Australian university policymaking.

Our membership is Charles Darwin University, Flinders University, Griffith University, James Cook University, La Trobe University, Murdoch University and Western Sydney University.

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