

## SKILLS PRIORITY LIST CONSULTATION

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### 1. KEY POINTS

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- Independent schools use the Skills Priority List (SPL) to recruit and employ overseas principals, teachers and other school staff. This recruitment is critical for many schools in the face of current teacher and other staff shortages.
- ISA strongly supports the inclusion of principals, teachers and other school staff in the Medium-Term Stream on the SPL.
- Including principals, teachers and other school staff in the Medium-Term Stream on the SPL will make it easier for all schools to employ much needed staff and will also enable schools to recruit teachers for hard to staff specialist areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and for boarding schools and regional and remote school to recruit teachers and staff to fill workforce shortages.

### 2. ABOUT ISA

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Independent Schools Australia (ISA) is the national peak body representing the Independent school sector. It comprises the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs). Through these Associations, ISA represents 1,187 schools and over 667,000 students, accounting for approximately 16 per cent of Australian school enrolments. ISA's major role is to bring the unique needs and contributions of Independent schools to the attention of the Australian Government and to represent the sector on national issues.

Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. Many Independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a particular educational philosophy or interpretation of mainstream education. Independent schools include:

- Schools affiliated with Christian denominations for example, Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Seventh Day Adventist and Presbyterian schools
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Community schools
- Indigenous community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities

## SKILLS PRIORITY LIST CONSULTATION

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— Schools that cater for students at severe educational risk due to a range of social/emotional/behavioural and other risk factors.

Many Independent schools have been established by community groups seeking to meet particular needs. Examples include the Independent community schools for Indigenous students in remote areas, special schools for students with disability and boarding schools to educate children from rural and remote areas. There are also schools that seek to reflect the religious values of a particular community or that seek to practice an internationally recognised educational philosophy such as Rudolf Steiner or Montessori schools.

Most Independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. Unlike other school education sectors, school leaders, teachers, and other staff in Independent schools are employed directly by individual schools, or in some cases by the system that owns and operates the school. Four out of five schools in the sector are autonomous non-systemic schools.

### 3. ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION

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ISA prepared this submission in response to the SPL Stakeholder consultation. This submission provides an Independent school sector overview of the impact of the SPL and recommendations for future changes.

ISA also strongly endorses the AHISA submission and recommends that ISA's submission is read in conjunction with AHISA's submission.

### 4. INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AND THE SKILLS PRIORITY LIST

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In 2018, seventeen per cent of the total number of teachers employed in the school sector were born overseas. Furthermore, 15% of school leaders in Australia were born overseas.<sup>1</sup> These school staff are a critical component of Australia's school workforce.

While the SPL attempts to understand and address the skills gaps in Australia, the need for highly skilled school staff is not currently a priority area. This is even though the 2022 Skills Priority List Key Findings Report shows that there was an increase in teacher shortages since 2021.

Given that there is a global teacher shortage, more needs to be done so that the SPL is used effectively, and Australia can attract highly skilled school professionals. Without this change, Australia is at risk of potential staff choosing to work in other countries.

Since the introduction of the Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa in 2017 there has been an on-going concern raised by ISA and other independent sector bodies that there are now several school-related occupations which are no longer listed on the Medium-term Stream, including highly skilled school principals and other school staff (Appendix A). This change has significantly impacted Independent schools' ability to recruit internationally to fill staffing shortages.

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<sup>1</sup> AITSL, "Australian Teacher Workforce Data National Teacher Workforce Characteristics Report," December 2021, [https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/atwd/national-teacher-workforce-char-report.pdf?sfvrsn=9b7fa03c\\_4](https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/atwd/national-teacher-workforce-char-report.pdf?sfvrsn=9b7fa03c_4).

## 5. THE EFFECT OF CHANGES ON INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

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In an increasingly globalised context, it is natural that Independent schools would wish to recruit highly skilled principals with international experience and skills. Other school related professions impacted by the visa changes include primary and middle school teachers, student counsellors, residential care officers and other senior staff.

A 2017 survey undertaken by AHISA showed that in addition to school principals, Independent schools extensively used the 457-visa program to employ a range of staff. These include the following:

- Heads/Directors of Learning or Learning Innovation or Social Emotional learning
- Business Managers
- Teachers in recognised difficult to staff areas including native speakers for Languages other than English (LOTE) subjects; teachers of mathematics, chemistry, physics, Latin and music; teachers of special education
- Staff with experience in international schools
- Leaders of International Baccalaureate (IB) programs (primary, middle years and senior secondary) and teachers in all IB subject areas
- Religious Studies teachers or others with specialist religious qualifications
- Boarding supervisors and Heads of Boarding.<sup>2</sup>

## 6. TEACHER SHORTAGES

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The latest data from the Australian Teacher Workforce Data initiative shows that the teacher workforce growth cannot meet the growing demand of student enrolments. Fewer people are entering the profession and the high proportion of registered teachers aged 50 years and over (38% of all registered teachers) will contribute to future workforce shortages.<sup>3</sup> A recent AHISA survey also found that most staff departures were those staff aged 41-50 years old. It is predicted that the demands on the current workforce will continue to increase alongside shortages, placing additional pressure on existing teachers and the broader sector.

The national teacher workforce shortage has been widely discussed at the Jobs and Skills Summit and is a national priority for Education Ministers. A Ministerial Direction was to deliver more efficient visa processing for skilled applicants and their sponsors across industries, particularly those in schools.

According to the 2022 Skills Priority List Key Findings Report, the labour market has tightened for school professionals. The number of suitable applicants for school professionals more than halved

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<sup>2</sup> AHISA, "Skills Priority List Consultation National Skills Commission 2020," 2020, [https://www.ahisa.edu.au/AHISA/Advocacy/Submission\\_Resources/Submissions\\_2020/Skills\\_Priority\\_List\\_consultation\\_National\\_Skills\\_Commission.aspx](https://www.ahisa.edu.au/AHISA/Advocacy/Submission_Resources/Submissions_2020/Skills_Priority_List_consultation_National_Skills_Commission.aspx).

<sup>3</sup> AITSL, "Latest Data Reinforce Teacher Workforce Pressures," AITSL, accessed December 16, 2022, <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/secondary/news-and-media/media-release---latest-data-reinforce-teacher-workforce-pressures>.

## SKILLS PRIORITY LIST CONSULTATION

between the 2021 and 2022 period and employers had greater difficulty filling vacancies.<sup>4</sup> This includes early childhood teachers, primary school teachers and secondary school teachers.

Staff shortages have also been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and border closures. While some of the immediate pressures of the workforce shortages experienced in schools may gradually subside as Australia moves to a post-pandemic world, the pandemic has placed significant additional pressures on the sector and the teacher workforce.

### SPECIALIST TEACHERS

Employing overseas staff enables Australian Independent schools to increase the range of expertise available. According to AHISA, the most prevalent secondary teacher shortages were in mathematics, physics and chemistry. In 2021, there was a significant increase from 2019 in difficulty recruiting teachers of design & technology, special education, English and religious education (see Table 1). Furthermore, 92% of respondents indicated that the greatest challenge in recruitment is the shortage in teachers with specialist discipline knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1. Hard to staff teaching positions 2019 and 2021, by proportion of respondents selecting each option<sup>6</sup>**

Subject area	2019	2021	% change
Mathematics	67%	67%	0%
Physics	61%	55%	-6%
Design & Technology	33%	42%	9%
Chemistry	36%	34%	-2%
Languages other than English	34%	32%	-2%
Education support/special needs	16%	23%	7%
English	13%	21%	8%
Religious education	4%	20%	16%

### REGIONAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS

In 2020, 23% of overseas trained teachers worked in regional or remote areas. This was a decrease of 5% since 2018.<sup>7</sup> One third of Independent schools are located outside of metropolitan area and the attraction and retention of teachers in 'difficult to staff' regional and remote locations is a critical issue for these schools.

The Independent school sector is quite different to the larger systemic government and Catholic sectors as Independent schools have the sole responsibility for hiring suitable and experienced staff.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government, National Skills Commission, "2022 Skills Priority List: Key Findings Report," 2022, <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/>.

<sup>5</sup> AHISA, "Skills Priority List Stakeholder Survey 2022," 2022, [https://www.ahisa.edu.au/AHISA/Advocacy/Submission\\_Resources/Submissions\\_2022/Skills\\_Priority\\_List\\_Stakeholder\\_Survey.aspx](https://www.ahisa.edu.au/AHISA/Advocacy/Submission_Resources/Submissions_2022/Skills_Priority_List_Stakeholder_Survey.aspx).

<sup>6</sup> AHISA.

<sup>7</sup> AITSL, "ATWD: Key Metrics Dashboard," AITSL, accessed December 20, 2022, <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/australian-teacher-workforce-data/key-metrics-dashboard>.

## SKILLS PRIORITY LIST CONSULTATION

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They are not able to encourage staff within a large system to take up positions in schools in non-metropolitan areas or to move staff to address specific shortages. Attracting overseas teachers and staff is one way that regional schools can fill critical staffing shortages.

### BOARDING SCHOOLS

The Independent school sector is by far the largest provider of boarding schools for Australian school students (74% of the total number of boarding schools). Independent boarding schools sometimes must look overseas for staff who have strong boarding school experience to engage qualified workers. Overseas recruitment is the most common way to address staffing shortfalls of teachers and boarding staff for many of these schools.

## 7. CONCLUSION

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ISA strongly urges the Jobs and Skills Australia to consider the submissions from ISA and AHISA and recognise the urgency of the need to bring more teachers and other staff to work in Australian schools in a variety of contexts.

The SPL should prioritise school principals, teachers, and staff to address the current and on-going skills shortages in Australian schools by including them in the Medium-Term stream for the SPL.

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## SKILLS PRIORITY LIST CONSULTATION

## APPENDIX A: IMPACTED OCCUPATIONS

The following Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) categories indicate areas of impact for the Independent sector based on the Short-Term Stream (STS) and Medium-Term Stream (MTS).

ISA recommends that the following occupations be allocated to the Medium-Term Stream and eligibility for 4-year visas in the SPL.

Table 2: ANZSCO Classifications of Occupations – Education Skills Shortage subclass 482<sup>8</sup>

Occupation number	Occupation title	Current Temporary Skills Shortage (subclass 482) stream	ISA proposed Temporary Skills Shortage (subclass 482) stream
134311	School Principal	STS	MTS
134499	Education Managers nec	STS	MTS
139999	Specialist Manager nec	STS	MTS
249111	Education Adviser	STS	MTS
272199	Counsellors nec	STS	MTS
411715	Residential Care Officer	STS	MTS
241213	Primary School Teacher	STS	MTS
241411	Secondary School Teacher	MTS	MTS
272115	Student Counsellor	STS	MTS
241111	Early Childhood (Pre-primary School) Teacher	MTS	MTS
241311	Middle School Teacher	STS	MTS
241511	Special Needs Teacher	MTS	MTS
241599	Special Education Teachers nec	MTS	MTS

<sup>8</sup> Department of Home Affairs, "Skilled Occupation List," 2022, <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/working-in-australia/skill-occupation-list>