

ISA SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE OF PERMANENT MIGRATION IN NATION BUILDING

DATE 16 MARCH 2023

KEY POINTS

- Australia is facing a critical shortage of teachers and other skilled school staff including principals and specialist school teachers, exacerbated by COVID-19.
- These shortages will directly impact the capacity of Australia's education system and have flow on impacts for student achievement, and ultimately, for Australia's productivity.
- Previous policy changes have made it extremely difficult for schools to bring in school staff on temporary visas as there is often no medium / long terms option available.
- Facilitating schools to recruit overseas teachers for hard to staff specialist areas and discrete settings would help to fill workforce shortage gaps.
- Including principals, teachers and other school staff on the Medium- and Long-Term Stream on the Skills Priority List (SPL) as a minimum, will make it easier for schools to employ much needed staff. Offering longer term temporary visas for school staff would be optimal.

ABOUT ISA

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 1,209 schools and more than 690,000 students, accounting for 17 per cent of Australian school enrolments.

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

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- Indigenous community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities
- Schools that cater for students at severe educational risk due to a range of social/emotional/behavioural and other risk factors.

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 Independent school sector are autonomous non-systemic schools.

ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) prepared this submission in response to the Joint Standing Committee on the inquiry into the role of permanent migration in nation building.

ISA strongly endorses the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) submission and ISA recommends that the Committee read this submission in conjunction with AHISA's submission.

BACKGROUND

In a 2018 survey, 17 per cent of the total number of teachers employed in the school sector were born overseas. Furthermore, 15 per cent of school leaders in Australia were born overseas.¹ These school staff are a critical part of Australia's school workforce.

In 2017, the Australian Government abolished the Temporary Work (Skilled) visa (subclass 457 visa), commonly used by Australian employers to sponsor skilled overseas workers to work temporarily in Australia. The Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa replaced the 457-visa. Since that time, ISA has been making representations to have teachers and other school staff that are in short supply, moved from the Short-Term Stream (2 years) to the Medium- and Long-term Stream (up to four years) on the SPL.

One of the stated aims of the changes to the 457-visa program was the new "targeted occupation lists which better align with skill needs in the Australian labour market"². However, these changes have significantly affected Independent schools' ability to recruit offshore teachers and other school staff to fill critical domestic staffing shortages.

Employing overseas staff enables Australian schools to increase the range of expertise available and hire teachers in high priority learning areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). It also allows schools in hard to staff settings to be able to access qualified staff to fill workforce gaps.

¹ 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.

² Department of Immigration and Border Protection, "Abolition and Replacement of the 457 Visa – Government Reforms to Employer Sponsored Skilled Migration Visas," 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170624100449/http://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Work/457-abolition-replacement>.

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There is a global teacher shortage that is affecting all school sectors in Australia. Australia is at risk of potential staff choosing to work in other countries if there is a lack of support for skilled migration. The Australian Government needs to do more so that Australia can attract highly skilled school professionals.

A 2017 survey by the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) showed that in addition to school principals, Independent schools extensively used the 457-visa program to employ a range of other staff. These include:

- 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.³

TEACHER SHORTAGES

All education sectors are experiencing a critical teacher workforce shortage. This is a national priority for Education Ministers. A recent Ministerial Direction was to deliver more efficient visa processing for skilled applicants and their sponsors across industries, particularly those in schools. This move is an effort to stem workforce shortage gaps and encourage skilled teachers to migrate to Australia.

Staff shortages have worsened since the 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, COVID-19 has placed more pressure on the school sector and teacher workforce.

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 for the 2022 research period and employers had greater difficulty filling vacancies.⁴ This includes early childhood teachers, primary school teachers and secondary school teachers.

³ 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. p.6

⁴ Australian Government, National Skills Commission, "2022 Skills Priority List: Key Findings Report," 2022, <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/>. Section 4.3

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An on-going lack of teachers and other suitably trained staff in schools will directly impact the capacity of Australia's education system and have flow on impacts for student achievement and ultimately, for Australia's productivity.

Specialist teachers

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 and technology, special education, English and religious education (see Table 1). Furthermore, 92 per cent of respondents to the AHISA survey showed that the greatest challenge in recruitment is the shortage in teachers with specialist discipline knowledge.⁵

Table 1. Hard to staff teaching positions 2019 and 2021, by proportion of respondents selecting each choice⁶

| 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

Recruiting and retaining suitable staff in regional and remote areas is an issue for Independent schools. In 2022, one third of Independent schools were outside metropolitan areas. In a 2020 survey, 23 per cent of overseas trained teachers worked in regional or remote areas. This was a decrease of 5 per cent since 2018.⁷ The decrease in overseas teachers in regional or remote areas suggests that there may be a smaller pool of teachers available to staff these areas.

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

Boarding schools

The Independent school sector is by far the largest provider of boarding schools for Australian school students (74 per cent of the total number of boarding schools). Independent boarding schools must sometimes look overseas for staff who have strong boarding school experience. Overseas

⁵ 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. p.2 & 4

⁶ AHISA. p.4

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

recruitment is the most common way to address staffing shortfalls of teachers and boarding staff for many of these schools.

CONCLUSION

Independent schools have always utilised temporary migration as a means to bring in skilled staff with relevant skills including school principals, teachers, and boarding staff to supplement the existing Australian school workforce and to fill workforce gaps.

Visas that enable teacher exchange are also important to Independent schools that have relationships with overseas schools and who wish to engage in reciprocal professional learning opportunities.

ISA strongly urges the Joint Standing Committee to consider the submissions from ISA and AHISA to recognise the urgency of bringing more school staff to work in Australian schools in a variety of contexts. There is currently a real opportunity to improve Australia's migration system to address Australia's current skills shortages, particularly for school staff.

Changes to the current migration and visa system have the potential to positively impact schools and their capacity to provide quality education, the learning outcomes of students and also Australia's on-going productivity.

Including principals, teachers and other school staff on the Medium- and Long-Term Stream on the Skills Priority List (SPL) as a minimum, will make it easier for schools to employ much needed staff. Offering longer term temporary visas for school staff would be optimal. This would enable schools to:

- respond to the critical workforce shortage gaps across the school sector including in specialist areas, including design and technology, special education, English and religious education
- assist schools' recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic
- make the Australian school sector an attractive destination for permanent and temporary migrants
- support all schools, but particularly schools in regional and remote locations, to fill the critical level of vacancies they are currently experiencing.

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