

20 October 2017

Stakeholder Engagement Team
Department of Employment
10/14 Mort Street
Canberra ACT 2601.

SkilledMigrationList@employment.gov.au

Dear Colleagues

Re: Methodology for the 2017 review of the Skilled Migration Occupation List

Universities Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Department of Employment's review of the methodology for the 2017 review of the Skilled Migration Occupation List.

As the peak body representing Australia's university sector, Universities Australia strongly advocates for a skilled migration framework that is conducive to the maintenance of a strong and dynamic university system, in recognition of the role it plays in contributing to Australia's prosperity as well as realising Australia's trade and investment potential. A poorly designed visa system will undermine the ability of universities to attract world-class academics into Australia, something which is crucial to the global collaborations that will help us to create new jobs and new industries for Australia.

We welcome the Department's move toward a transparent, evidence-based methodology. However, we do have concerns regarding the applicability of this methodology to knowledge workers particularly those employed in university-specific occupations such as university lecturer, life scientist and physicist.

Australia's universities operate in a global labour market, characterised by a two-way flow of academic talent. Universities seek to recruit global talent to Australia in a highly competitive environment. Academics are part of an international talent pool who compete for positions at the best institutions in the world.

Time served in an overseas institution is an important part of professional development. A significant number of Australia's highly trained academics will move to other countries, either on a temporary or permanent basis and this creates employment opportunities for both domestic and international academics to contribute to the intellectual capital of Australia.

The demand for knowledge workers is driven by a complex set of variables none of which are quantifiable through existing metrics. This includes domestic and international research priorities, state-based strategies, funding availability, changes to Government policy, such as those introduced through the National Innovation and Science Agenda, and continuously evolving technology trends.

Consequently, we ask the Department to consider an approach to reviewing the lists which takes into account those occupations where quantifying the absolute need for a specific occupation is impossible and where metrics may not provide an accurate representation of future workforce needs. This may include the use of international benchmarks to demonstrate the contribution foreign knowledge workers make to the academic enterprise in countries against whom we compete for academic talent.

We would also like to use this opportunity to raise the issue of other university-based occupations which do not feature on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, but are of vital importance to the long-term success of Australia's universities. Of particular importance are university advancement and philanthropy professionals where the recruitment of foreign expertise is vital in fostering the development of philanthropy capability in Australian universities. The lack of a specific category for such an important profession highlights the current disconnect between the ANZCO and the ever-evolving university sector. We will be raising this issue in more detail at the appropriate point in the consultation process.

The most successful nations are underpinned by strong, vibrant university and research systems that are characterised by a highly-mobile workforce and concentrated pools of research expertise from all over the world. If Australian universities cannot recruit the best and brightest academics internationally, Australia will experience a downgrading and isolation of our own system, unable to benefit from the cross-fertilisation that great research and higher education requires. One immediate and devastating result will be an overall reduction in the status of Australia's universities as a destination for international students and a significant drop in the associated economic benefits that in 2017 contributed \$28.6 billion to the economy.

Current geopolitical events have created a unique, once-in-a-generation opportunity to turn Australia's much-lamented brain-drain into a brain-gain. Australia offers some of the best opportunities for academic talent in the world through a combination of high-quality teaching and research. It is imperative that Australia positions itself as a world leader in the university sector by recruiting the best talent available.

We welcome the opportunity to further discuss this issue and any questions can be directed to Dr John Wellard, Policy Director International at j.wellard@unias.edu.au or (02) 6285 8135.

Yours sincerely,



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DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE