



Australian Computer Society
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Submission to inquiry into Australia's skilled migration program
31 March 2021
Response to Terms of Reference 1(b), 3, 4, and 5



The Australian Computer Society welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee's inquiry into Australia's skilled migration program.

Key messages ACS seeks to convey in this submission are:

- Aligning occupation definitions with industry standards
- Building flexibility into the skilled migration program to deal with evolving technologies
- Create an environment encouraging the world's best and brightest minds to consider Australia as home
- Adopt industry specific skill recognition programs alongside the established ANZSCO codes

This submission addresses questions 1(b) and 3, 4 and 5 of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, with 1(a) and 2 forming our previous 1 March contribution.

We appreciate the committee's consideration of this submission and would be happy to clarify or expand upon the points made in any future correspondence or hearings.

About ACS

ACS is the authorised Assessing Authority undertaking technology skill assessments for the purposes of skilled migration. Our role in this capacity is to assess the skills and qualifications of ICT professionals who are considering migration to Australia to work in the sector.

As the professional association for Australia's technology sector, ACS has more than 45,000 members working in ICT roles across the economy, including the private sector, government, education, and the community. ACS exists to create the environment and provide the opportunities for members and partners to succeed. ACS strives for technology professionals to be recognised as drivers of innovation in our society, relevant across all sectors, and to promote the formulation of effective policies on technology and related matters.

Executive Summary

ICT is taking an increasingly important role in the Australian economy as technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and autonomous vehicles become pervasive across industries.

To meet the demands of an increasingly globalised economy and remain internationally competitive, Australia needs to attract skilled workers to supplement locally available talent and fill gaps in the domestic workforce.

As governor of the Reserve Bank, Philip Low recently stated, "investing in data and our digital capability are critical to our future prosperity"¹, part of that national investment is a well-planned skilled immigration program.

In this submission, ACS outlines what it believes are the critical components of such a program to ensure flexibility during this period of great technological and economic change. Should Australia get the settings right, our skilled migration program can underpin the nation's continued prosperity.

¹ <https://ia.acs.org.au/article/2021/rba-says-it-is-key-to-economic-recovery.html>



Key to this submission are proposals to build flexibility into the skilled migration program to better meet the needs of Australian industry and society. In today's dynamic economic environment, it is essential we are basing our skilled migration intake upon current realities and rising technologies rather than outdated definitions and beliefs.

ACS would also urge the committee to propose more flexibility to skilled immigrants looking at changing roles or moving into new fields, it is also important the career prospects of partners and dependents are also considered in any reforms.

The skilled migration has played an important part in Australia's development over the past 70 years and ACS believes the ICT sector will be one of the key drivers of jobs and economic growth over the rest of this century. We thank the committee for the opportunity to make this submission.

Specific Issues

1b) Are long-term structural changes warranted

As stated in ACS' submission on March 1, the skilled migration program has been essential to Australia's economic development since World War II and has been largely successful.

Part of its success has been to adapt to the changing needs of Australian society and industry. In the 1950s, infrastructure projects such as the Snowy Hydro Scheme and the post war recovery drove the nation's immigration needs, while a decade later, developing the manufacturing sector was the focus of migration policy.

Over the past forty years, Australia's shift to a services based economy has seen a corresponding change to the composition of the skilled migration workforce and ICT workers have been a growing cohort within the program.

However, much of the basis for the current skilled migration program is based upon older criteria and assumptions of workforce participation and social norms accordingly ACS would urge the committee to consider the following changes:

- *More flexible skills assessment (to be addressed in ToR 3 below)*
- *Easier pathways for those already in Australia to change visas and workplaces as their skills, and industry needs, develop.*
- *Make the program more adaptable to fast moving industries.*
- *Provide better feedback on outcomes to assessment bodies such as ACS so we and other industry bodies are able to better calibrate our programs and processes.*

3. Skills lists and the extent to which they are meeting the needs of industries and businesses and keeping pace with Australia's job landscape

Currently the skills list is inflexible and reflects the realities of Australian industry in the late Twentieth Century. This is starkly illustrated by the outdated nature of the ANZSCO codes, resulting in confusion and uncertainty for skilled migrants applying for positions in the technology sector.



ACS appreciates the need for ANZSCO codes to stay relatively static in order for the ABS and other organisations to maintain statistical consistency, however relying on the codes to develop skills lists creates problems for fast changing industries such as ICT.

Importantly, the existing skills list cannot keep pace with development in the ICT sector. For instance, new and emerging industry occupations such as Data Scientist, Data Analyst, and Cloud Engineers which are currently in high demand and where Australia is seeking to attract overseas talent are not covered.

The recent draft Australian Skills Classification scheme released by the National Skills Commission² illustrated this point. While ACS commends the NSC for its work and finds the scheme good for placing long established skills under their appropriate categories, it still relies on ANZSCO codes and so fails to recognise emerging occupations.

Overseas, the EU has identified clusters of IT professional roles with 30 roles under seven 'families' in its European ICT Professional Role Profiles³ as part of the European e-Competence Framework that seeks to standardise the ICT skills landscape across the Union.

ACS would therefore urge the committee to adopt industry specific qualifications, such as the Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA)⁴ scheme for the ICT sector.

SFIA describes skills and competencies required by professionals in roles involved in information and communication technologies, digital transformation and software engineering. SFIA 7 is the current version of the framework, published in June 2018⁵.

Formally launched in 2000, SFIA's provenance can be traced back to the 1980s and a number of collaborative skills and competency projects. These led to the SFIA Framework and the formation of the SFIA Foundation which has become an international not-for-profit organisation that now brings together the global community to develop and maintain the SFIA Framework for the benefit of all.

ACS is a partner of the SFIA Foundation and sends a representative to sit on the organisation's Council, which also includes a representative from the Australian Public Service along with other Australian and Asia-Pacific ICT organisations.⁶

We believe adopting industry specific standards would go some way to addressing the current situation where many in-demand skillsets are not recognised under the current skills lists. ACS would be pleased to propose a specific SFIA-based classification and assessment framework. SFIA is recognised in increasing numbers of Australian workplaces including many federal government departments and agencies, and a SFIA-based certification would have an added benefit of helping skilled migrants to demonstrate their skills to Australian employers.

² <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/our-work/australian-skills-classification>

³ http://www.ecompetences.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CWA_Part_1_EU_ICT_PROFESSIONAL_ROLE_PROFILES.pdf

⁴ <https://sfia-online.org/en/about-sfia>

⁵ <https://sfia-online.org/en/sfia-7/sfia-7>

⁶ <https://sfia-online.org/en/about-us/the-sfia-council>



4. The administrative requirements for Australian businesses seeking to sponsor skilled migrants, including requirements to prioritise job opportunities for Australians and job creation

Anecdotally, ACS hears from employers that the administrative requirements are cumbersome, particularly fitting employees into categories.

Feedback from employers also indicates visa holders need the flexibility to move between streams without leaving the country or being affected with additional costs.

5. The costs of sponsorship to businesses seeking to sponsor skilled migrants.

ACS has no data on this matter.

6. The complexity of Australia's skilled migration program including the number of visa classes under the program and their requirements, safeguards and pathways

ACS would ask the committee to consider the simplification of the existing program and the importance of partners' visas. The ease of partners being granted the right to enter and to gain meaningful employment once in the country is a key consideration for many skilled workers in their choice of countries.

7. Any other related matters.

As the authorised Assessing Authority for ICT professionals, ACS has been concerned about the lack of feedback on the employment outcomes for those approved to enter Australia under the skilled migration program.

ACS would ask the committee to consider recommending improving feedback from the Department to assessing authorities on the employment and long-term residential outcomes of skilled migrants.

In recent years, the ABS has reduced its coverage of the ICT sector which leaves industry, policy makers and the profession somewhat in the dark about how this critical part of the Australian economy is performing.

This has seen the ABS not survey Business Use of Technology since the 2015-16 financial year and IT Use and Innovation in Australian Business since 2016-17⁷. Over this time there have been dramatic changes in the use of technology which have not been fully captured in official economic figures.

ACS urges the Committee to recommend the ABS receive increased resources to resume monitoring this critical sector of the Australian economy.

On a broader topic, Australia's broader technology policies are confused and this affects the nation's desirability to ICT workers. In many instances, Federal Parliament has proposed laws which give the international technology community the impression Australia is hostile towards the ICT sector.

ACS would strongly urge governments to consult widely with stakeholders before announcing laws aimed at the technology sector in order that Parliament fully appreciate the effects of legislation on the workforce and Australia's desirability as a technological hub.

⁷ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/technology-and-innovation>



There is a well-established need for digital skills across the workforce. There would be merit in considering a means of recognising those in other occupational areas who demonstrate digital skills. ACS would be happy to propose a means of offering assessments and certifications for specific in-demand SFIA skills at specified levels of attainment.

Conclusion

The skilled migration program is an important part of Australian society and industry, being essential for the continued growth of the economy and broadening the skills base of the ICT sector. ACS thanks the committee for the opportunity to make this submission and would be delighted to assist further in any way.