

# SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY AUSTRALIA

## POLICY SUBMISSION

31 MAY 2024

### DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS REVIEW OF THE POINTS TEST

Science & Technology Australia thanks the Department of Home Affairs for the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

Science & Technology Australia is the peak body for the nation's science and technology sectors, representing 140 member organisations and more than 225,000 scientists and technologists. We connect science and technology with governments, business and the community to advance science's role in solving some of humanity's greatest challenges.

Australia's STEM skills are vital to our nation-building projects, economic prosperity and to remain competitive in the global economy. Our long-term capability and development in this respect is dependent on a more targeted migration policy. A combination of home-grown and overseas talent is necessary to build a [Future Made in Australia](#), deliver on our net zero commitments, support our research and development (R&D) sector across industry and universities and drive existing, emerging and future industries like quantum computing, robotics, clean hydrogen, green metals and artificial intelligence (AI). Our migration system must align with our nation's future goals as well as bring world class talent to our shores. The points test needs considered reform to enable our long-term economic security. Our submission and four recommendations focus on points related to education attainment.

#### Key points

- Significant shortages in the STEM workforce already exist, and changes to the test must not compromise our short and long term workforce needs to deliver on key nation-building projects, including a Future Made in Australia, net zero targets and emerging critical technologies.
- Australia has a high performing and globally competitive research sector that, through its collaborative nature, involves skilled migration.
- The points test is a lever that can help align our long-term national goals with our need to boost productivity and secure our future.
- Formal measures to evaluate jobs and skills gaps aligned with Australia's future goals can inform the points test and support STEM workforce and nation building project participation.
- Changes to the points test must:
  - respond to current and expected skills and qualifications gaps in the STEM workforce, particularly those essential to national goals
  - maintain existing criteria for STEM-related qualifications and experience, and

- allocate additional points test assessment criteria to better support existing and future R&D and industry needs in Australia.

### Key considerations for Australia's skills needs

As noted in the discussion paper, a key focus for the migration points test should be to support Australia's skills needs. Australia requires a strong STEM-skilled workforce to progress initiatives such as a Future Made in Australia and to work towards our net zero goals. At present, those industries rely on migration.

The [Office of the Chief Scientist](#) noted that 56% of Australia's university qualified STEM workforce and 26% of our VET STEM workforce were born overseas. In key professions such as engineering, the overseas-born component of the workforce is [even higher at 62.7%](#).

A [Jobs and Skills Australia 2023](#) report outlined shortages in 54% of design, engineering, science and transport professional jobs. [AI](#), [robotics](#) and [cybersecurity](#) are also considered to be at critical risk of shortages.

Skilled migration should also consider long-term skills needs. Jobs and Skills Australia's [Clean Energy Generation report](#) highlights the emergence of new jobs, skills and qualifications in the sector over the next 30 years. With 26% of the existing clean energy workforce identified as migrants, a reformed points test informed by these realities can help to develop a sustainable STEM workforce.

### How can we better target points tested visas to meet Australia's skills needs?

Formal indicators to measure gaps linked to STEM disciplines and participation in major nation building projects can catalyse STEM workforce growth in critical areas. This data could be used to inform points test allocations, with a focus on workforce gaps in key STEM areas, including 'nation-building', emerging and future industries related to:

- a Future Made in Australia
- net zero goals
- Australia's science and research priorities (noting the refreshed priorities have not yet been released)
- AI, quantum computing, robotics and autonomous systems
- cybersecurity.

#### Science & Technology Australia Recommendation 1

Identify and use expected skills and qualifications gaps in the STEM workforce – particularly those essential to national goals – as indicators to contribute to points test allocations and optimise long-term national outcomes.

The current points test does recognise the value of STEM backgrounds through the following allocations:

- 10 points for Australian doctorate or masters research qualifications in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).



- 5 points for undertaking a year of professional training in Australia. Only available to graduates in accounting, engineering and ICT.

These elements should be retained.

Consideration should be given to:

- Allocating 5 points to STEM qualifications awarded outside of Australia.
- Allocating an additional 5 points to the 'Australian study' category for a degree, diploma or trade in STEM.

These additional points allocations should be considered in consultation with relevant R&D and industry stakeholders.

### **Science & Technology Australia Recommendation 2**

Maintain existing criteria for STEM-related qualifications and experience on the points test.

### **Science & Technology Australia Recommendation 3**

Implement additional points allocations to better support existing and future Australian R&D and industry needs, including:

- Allocating 5 points to STEM qualifications awarded outside of Australia.
- Allocating an additional 5 points to the 'Australian study' category for a degree, diploma or trade in STEM.

### **Science & Technology Australia Recommendation 4**

The migration points test allocations should be informed on an ongoing basis by relevant stakeholders and relevant analysis from Jobs and Skills Australia, to be refreshed at least every three years, or in alignment with significant government policy changes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this important policy matter. Please do not hesitate to be in touch if we can assist with any additional information or like further details of our four recommendations.

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