

POLICY SUBMISSION

16 JANUARY 2026

INQUIRY INTO THE VALUE OF SKILLED MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

Science & Technology Australia thanks the Joint Standing Committee on Migration for the opportunity to respond to its inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia.

Science & Technology Australia is the peak body for the nation's science and technology sectors, representing nearly 150 member organisations and more than 235,000 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.

Key points

- Migrant STEM professionals are essential to support greater productivity, economic and wellbeing outcomes in Australia.
- Australia is facing acute shortages across the STEM workforce and relies on highly skilled migrants to address these gaps.
- Australia's STEM workforce is under significant strain with almost half considering leaving their profession.
- The Australian Government must take a long-term, evidence-based approach in its evaluation of migrant STEM professionals for major nation-building projects.

Science & Technology Australia Recommendations

1. The Australian Government should ensure Australia's visa settings:
 - a. enable clear and easily navigable pathways to permanent residency for STEM professionals and researchers
 - b. enable the Australian STEM sector to draw more deeply on the talent pool offered by international students and graduates.
2. Australian Government policy should take a long-term, evidence-based approach that delivers the STEM workforce essential for major initiatives and our national prosperity – including AUKUS, cyber, quantum and artificial intelligence capabilities and net zero commitments.
3. The Australian Government should support organisations and programs with a proven track record of supporting migrants and people from diverse backgrounds gain work experience and employment in the Australian STEM industry.

Australia is facing acute STEM workforce shortages

Australia is facing a critical shortage of STEM professionals at a time when we must address acute global and national challenges. Science & Technology Australia's independent analysis of the [Jobs and Skills Australia Employment Projections](#) May 2025 to May 2035 data shows the number of STEM jobs requiring a Bachelor's degree or higher is expected to grow by 24% to 2,872,042 roles by 2035.

More specific projections indicate that Australia is expected to see a shortfall of [60,000 AI workers by 2027](#) and [60,000 engineers by 2035](#). These sectors and other STEM occupations underpin long-term economic and productivity outcomes.

Additionally, several national research infrastructure facilities face challenges in attracting the globally in-demand technicians for highly specialised facilities and equipment such as

supercomputers through to particle accelerators. Some of these positions are so specialised that there are only a handful of qualified people globally – yet as they are not classified as academic positions, visa pathways do not readily support institutions to attract such talent to Australia.

To support higher long-term productivity, it is necessary to ensure Australia remains an attractive destination for global talent. Clear, direct and easy-to-navigate visa pathways – including to permanent residency – for globally in-demand STEM professionals are needed to attract the best global talent.

Migrant STEM professionals are increasingly essential to Australia’s future

The [Migration Strategy](#) states that permanent migration has a clear role in supporting national prosperity. Indeed, over time, Australia has become increasingly reliant on the migrant STEM workforce to deliver world-class research and industry outcomes.

Data from 2021–22 indicates that [43% of workers in STEM and Health occupations](#) in Australia were born overseas, up from 38% of the STEM and Health workforce in 2012–13. This demonstrates Australia’s reliance on the skilled migrant workforce, and the important contribution STEM skilled migrants are already making across the sector in addressing key challenges including climate change, biosecurity, health, defence, agriculture and AI.

At the same time, our domestic STEM workforce pipeline shows signs of strain:

- The number of [students studying STEM subjects in year 12 fell 10% in ten years](#) from 400,020 in 2013 to 363,842 in 2023.
- In 2023, [8.4% of year 12 students participated in higher and intermediate mathematics – down from 10.9% in 2010](#). General mathematics participation also declined in this time period, down to 16.8% in 2023 from 21.5% in 2010.
- Participation in year 12 physics has declined from [14.9% in 2015 to 12.1% in 2023](#).

While Department of Education student data indicates university STEM and Health course completions have increased by 14% from 2020 (151,875) to 2024 (173,013), more than a third of completions in 2024 were international students.

Permanent settlement pathways for these students are critical if we are to retain this Australian-trained talent and sustain a high-performing STEM workforce. The [2023 Grattan Institute Graduates in Limbo report](#) found that year’s international student cohort who achieve permanent residency will deliver an added \$12 billion fiscal dividend over their lifetime.

STA and Professionals Australia’s Professional Scientists Remuneration Survey 2025 highlights key concerns about the existing workforce. Almost half (47%) of scientists surveyed are thinking about leaving their current role, with 72% thinking about leaving in the next 2 years. When asked about their next career move, 33% of respondents expect to leave the STEM and Health sectors. This will potentially exacerbate current skilled workforce shortages.

Australia’s current priorities of a Future Made in Australia, AUKUS, AI and digital technology, quantum and other future nation-building projects further underlines the need to not only sustain, but increase, STEM workforce capability. This can only be supported through long-term evidence-based intervention by the Australian Government to address critical shortfalls and boost much needed research and development outcomes.

A sound and nation-building pipeline of STEM capabilities requires sensible and integrated government policies that synchronise workforce planning, international students, and visa pathways that attract and secure overseas talent, including researchers and research infrastructure professionals.

Science and Technology Australia Recommendations:

1. The Australian Government should ensure Australia’s visa settings:



- a. enable clear and easily navigable pathways to permanent residency for STEM professionals and researchers
 - b. enable the Australian STEM sector to draw more deeply on the talent pool offered by international students and graduates.
2. Australian Government policy should take a long-term, evidence-based approach that delivers the STEM workforce essential for major initiatives and our national prosperity – including AUKUS, cyber, quantum and artificial intelligence capabilities and net zero commitments.

Supporting Australia's migrant STEM workforce

Many migrant STEM professionals often face multiple barriers to gaining employment in Australia. This includes unnecessarily bureaucratic visa application processes. Protecting Australia's capabilities in areas such as critical technologies, cybersecurity, AI, robotics, and defence oriented research is of paramount importance, but this can only be built by maintaining an open and globally collaborative and competitive research workforce.

Enhanced migration policies should include improved support for migrant professionals after immigrating to Australia – particularly in navigating the Australian labour market.

STEM employers also have a key role in supporting migrant employment outcomes. Often, they do not hire qualified migrant STEM professionals as they do not recognise overseas qualifications. Engineers Australia report that [48% or 133,000 of overseas-born engineers are not working in engineering roles](#) compared to 35% or 57,000 of Australian-born engineers. Better utilisation of migrant engineers would deliver a combined net \$6 billion benefit in industry output and a lift in Australia's GDP by 2030.

Migrant STEM professionals also require support to understand and navigate recruitment processes in Australia. Employers should work to ensure they have robust inclusion policies that support both recruitment and retention of migrant professionals. This could include cultural competence training for staff, particularly recruitment and human resources managers. The Government could consider supporting organisations such as [iSTEMCo](#), which seeks to give migrant STEM workers valuable experience in Australian workplaces through internship and mentoring programs.

Science and Technology Australia Recommendation:

3. The Australian Government should support organisations and programs with a proven track record of supporting migrants and people from diverse backgrounds gain work experience and employment in the Australian STEM industry.

Please do not hesitate to be in contact if the Committee requires any further information, or wish Science & Technology Australia to appear at a public hearing on behalf of the sector.

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