



**Submission to the Australian Government**

**Review of the Points test 2024**

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## **Forward**

Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA) is the representative organisation for postgraduate students at the University of Sydney. Established in 1970, SUPRA's constituency has grown to a point where in 2023, 28,431 students were enrolled in postgraduate degrees of which 56% were international students. The 2023 total enrolment of international students at the University of Sydney was 31,429 or 45% of the total student enrolment at our oldest university. (University of Sydney Annual Report 2023). SUPRA has for over 50 years provided professional casework and legal services to international postgraduate students, gaining valuable experience and insight into the aspirations and issues for international students.

## **Discussion and recommendations**

Australia has an aging population and migration is a central pillar to our planning for workforce, as well as for social and community needs. SUPRA agrees the current points test is no longer fit for purpose and a recalibration is needed to provide a better balance to and complement of employer-sponsorship in determining a fairer and effective permanent migration system. In today's job environment, prospective migrants, especially graduates from Australian universities like the University of Sydney, can still succeed if they meet key criteria for education, English language proficiency, skilled work experience related to a job on an occupation list, and so on, even if they do not have employer-sponsorship.

In a global competition for skilled young workers with English language proficiency, Australia must expand opportunities for those who wish to apply for permanent migration but do not have employer-sponsorship.

1. SUPRA recommends that onshore migrants should not be required to have a skilled job in order to apply for a points-tested visa as this undermines the goal of these visa subclasses which is to help meet Australia's future skills needs.

Transparency is important so aspiring permanent migrants have certainty and can plan for their future and if required or desired, apply to another country and not remain in Australia for years as the permanently temporary migrants referred to in the discussion paper. Current migration program planning levels lack transparency especially for Skilled Nominated and Regional visas which form two thirds of the permanent intake of skilled migrants and are allocated to states and territories who set their own requirements for nomination. When places are not filled, Australia misses out on much needed skills as well as permanent citizens of good character. This part of the program should be better aligned with national priorities (while retaining heavier weighting for states and territories) to maximise quantity and quality of nominations and provide prospective migrants and sponsors with greater clarity.

2. SUPRA recommends retaining the current points test criteria but calls on a more nuanced approach in allocation of points within criteria along with more transparency as to how points are allocated.

The current design of the points test means that international postgraduate students with overseas qualifications and/or work experience from countries where that targeted skills area is more advanced than the equivalent Australian area can be disadvantaged. For example, an international postgraduate student who may have worked in the cybersecurity industry in the USA for 2 years following graduation from their undergraduate degree would gain no points under the current system, despite having work experience in USA, the country currently ranked world first in cybersecurity. In comparison, a person completing 1 year of employment in Australia in the same field gains 5 points. Other examples include sustainable technologies. Under a reformed points test 'Skilled Work Experience' should differentiate experience in targeted skills areas gained overseas by providing that work experience with greater weighting and treating it equally with domestic experience.

3. SUPRA recommends reconsideration of the weighting given to education and overseas work experience in target areas.

Australian coursework masters should attract greater weighting than equivalent bachelor degrees since masters degrees tend to be in target skills areas and research suggests that postgraduates have better job prospects. Doctorates should also have greater weighting than masters for the same reasons, with the retention of the additional points available for research degrees in STEM.

4. SUPRA recommends a clear allocation of points where Australian doctorates gain the maximum 20 points, masters gain 15 points, and bachelors gain 10 points.
5. SUPRA recommends retaining the maximum weighting for Australian doctorate and masters research qualifications in STEM. However, this should be expanded to include all STEM subjects rather than merely the current narrow-specified fields within STEM.

Currently, a person can only claim points for employment if it is in their nominated skilled occupation or a closely related skilled occupation, which is an occupation listed under the same four (4) digit ANZSCO Unit Group. However, this is overly restrictive as the ANZSCO is slow to change in response to shifts in the labour market meaning that potential migrants, particularly in emerging or fast-changing industries of high demand, can be disadvantaged.

6. SUPRA recommends recalibration of the points test to give greater weighting to students who find work in an area of skill need after graduating and accumulate more than two years of domestic work experience.

The discussion paper raised this as a distinct disadvantage to this group and we agree the current 5 points available to this group is not fair.

The current points allocation by age band needs reform to more effectively give the most points to applicants in the peak age group of 25 – 35 years of age and awards fewer points by each year after 35 years until the maximum age cap.

7. SUPRA supports the Canadian approach of a nuanced scale for age where 30 + years of age attracts a sliding scale in weighting.

A skilled and qualified partner should be able to contribute maximum points available to the primary applicant rather than simply an additional 5 points, and only if they have a skills assessment in an occupation in the same list as the occupation of the primary applicant. Given that research suggests that one partner characteristic which is associated with success in the labour market is experience in skilled work, this should be expanded to include any occupation on one of the lists rather than it needing to be on the same list.

8. SUPRA recommends greater weighting for couples with characteristics that predicate for success in the labour market.

Occupation lists should be retained. However, Universities and vocational education providers, business, and industry peaks, as well as the trade unions should be consulted by federal and state governments to maintain relevancy of this list.

9. SUPRA recommends retaining occupation lists as appropriate for target skills required now and in the long-term.
10. SUPRA recommends a review of the points test each five years given the fast-paced changing labour market. A review should consider predictors of success as identified through consultation, and should also include the rate of applications and outcomes for women and recommend strategies to increase opportunities for this group.

## References

University of Sydney, University of Sydney Annual Report 2023, Sydney. [Annual report - The University of Sydney](#)

BBC Science Focus, *The 10 best (and worst) countries for cybersecurity*, 26 March 2024  
<https://www.sciencefocus.com/news/the-10-best-and-worst-countries-for-cybersecurity>