Overseas students: immigration policy changes 1997–2015

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Executive summary

• The nexus between Australia’s overseas student program and permanent skilled migration is complex and constantly evolving. The Howard Government, keen to take advantage of the significant economic benefit provided by the international education sector, sought to attract overseas students through immigration policy measures which provided a pathway to permanent residency. This period saw a rapid growth in the numbers of temporary migrants, including students, transitioning to permanent residency through the skill stream of the Migration Program.

• However, these measures also created unintended consequences. In particular, there was a rapid growth in the number of overseas students studying in the vocational education and training (VET) sector, and several commentators expressed concern that overseas students were exploiting the program as a pathway to permanent residency.

• In response to significant concerns about the integrity of both the overseas student program and the skill stream of the Migration Program, the Rudd and Gillard Governments moved to decouple the overseas student program from skilled migration.

• Concern about declining numbers of overseas students coming to Australia following the reforms of the Rudd-Gillard Government, and in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, resulted in reforms designed to restore confidence in the program and encourage overseas student enrolments, but these were largely limited to the university sector.

• The Abbott Government announced soon after being elected that it intended to encourage increased enrolments in the Vocational Education (VET) sector and restore confidence in Australia’s international education sector as a whole. While it has begun implementing further reforms designed to boost the VET sector, Australia has not seen a return to the explicit linkages between the overseas student program and permanent skilled migration that were a feature of the Howard era.
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All references accessed as of 17 December 2015.
Introduction
This paper provides a chronology that draws on ministerial press statements to trace changes in Australia’s immigration policy in relation to overseas students between 1997 and June 2015. Immigration policies introduced in this period fundamentally changed the nature of migration to Australia. Policy changes in this period were pivotal in facilitating the rapid growth of overseas student education in Australia by forging links between the temporary overseas student program and permanent skilled migration. Later reforms to both skilled migration and overseas student policy were also central to the decline in overseas student enrolments beginning in 2009–10. The paper begins its analysis in 1997 as this appears to be the point at which the Howard Government commenced making announcements about overseas students as an immigration issue.

The paper begins by briefly analysing the way in which the landscape of immigration policy in relation to overseas students has developed since 1997. This is followed by a summary charting key policy developments between 1997 and June 2015, and concluding observations on the consequences and possible impacts of recent immigration policy changes on overseas student education in Australia. Appendix A contains a detailed chronology of government media releases on immigration policy developments in relation to overseas students and skilled migration. As an aid to reading the paper, Appendix B identifies the visa classes referred to in the text of the paper, and Appendix C provides a glossary of acronyms and terms.

Overview
Australia’s immigration system has undergone significant shifts in the past two decades. Among the key changes are shifts in the focus of the Migration Program from family migration to skilled migration and, in the overall immigration program, from permanent migration to long-term temporary migration. In the context of these two changes, Australia’s immigration program has also seen a period of substantial growth in overseas student entrants. Indeed, by 2007, Australia accounted for 11 per cent of the international student market and had seen a three-fold increase in student numbers over the previous ten years.

The student visa framework
There are currently seven different visa subclasses for overseas students wishing to study in Australia, depending on the kind of study which is to be undertaken. Each visa subclass may have slightly different eligibility criteria, but generally, in order to be eligible for a student visa, applicants must have been accepted into a registered course offered by an education or training provider which is on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). Applicants must also meet financial and English language requirements, which vary according to the visa subclass and the relevant visa assessment level (see below). They must also meet the general health and character requirements which apply to all visa applicants, and must maintain health insurance during their stay in Australia.

Student Visa Assessment Levels are a measure of immigration risk for students from various countries across each education sector. There are currently three assessment levels in the student visa program, with assessment level 1 representing the lowest risk and assessment level 3, the highest. The higher the assessment level, the more stringent is the eligibility criteria for the grant of a visa.

The overseas student program is an uncapped, demand-driven program. This means that the government does not set any targets, nor place any caps on the number of visas available, and visa grant levels are determined entirely by the number of people who apply for, and meet the criteria for, a student visa. Figures published by the then Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) indicated that the number of student visa holders in

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1. While people who enter Australia as temporary migrants under the overseas student program are often referred to as ‘international students’ in common parlance, this paper largely adopts government terminology used within the Immigration Portfolio to refer to such entrants as ‘overseas students’.
3. For statistical information on overseas student enrolments and related data dating back to 2000 see the following website: Australian Government, ‘International student data’, Department of Education and Training website.
6. ‘Immigration risk’ is a measure of the perceived likelihood that a person will comply with his or her visa conditions, and return home upon expiration of the visa. Levels of immigration risk for particular groups are determined by the Department based on levels of visa compliance amongst that group in the previous year.
7. DIBP, ‘Student Visa Assessment Levels’, DIBP website.
Australia grew at an average annual rate of 13.9 per cent every year between 2001 and 2009, rising to a total of 386,523 student visa holders in the 12 months to the end of June 2009.\textsuperscript{8}

However, from 2009 onwards, Australia experienced a softening in the numbers of overseas student applications. At the end of June 2012 the number of student visa holders in Australia had declined to 307,050.\textsuperscript{9} This decline was a result of a combination of factors, including changes to available pathways to temporary and permanent skilled visas, negative student perceptions of safety, a strong Australian dollar and strong global competition for the overseas student market. These issues are discussed in further detail below. While the numbers have risen again, with 374,566 student visa holders present in Australia in June 2015, they have not seen a return to the peak levels of 2009. Similarly, as shown in Table 1, annual overseas student visa grants grew significantly from 1996–97 onwards, peaking at 319,632 in 2008–19, then declining each year for three years before gradually beginning to grow again in 2012–13.

\textbf{Table 1: Overseas student visa grants, 1996–97 to 2014–15}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Overseas students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996–97</td>
<td>113,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997–98</td>
<td>108,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998–99</td>
<td>110,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999–00</td>
<td>119,806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–01</td>
<td>146,577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–02</td>
<td>151,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002–03</td>
<td>162,575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003–04</td>
<td>171,616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004–05</td>
<td>174,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005–06</td>
<td>190,674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–07</td>
<td>230,807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007–08</td>
<td>278,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–09</td>
<td>319,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009–10</td>
<td>270,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010–11</td>
<td>250,438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–12</td>
<td>253,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–13</td>
<td>259,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013–14</td>
<td>292,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014–15</td>
<td>299,540</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textbf{The student-migration nexus}

Growth in both the skilled migration program and overseas student program over the last two decades was seen by successive governments as instrumental in contributing to Australia’s economic growth in the face of challenges such as skills shortages and an ageing population. The Howard Government sought to attract overseas students in response to changing global economic conditions and migratory trends. The rapid growth of both the skilled stream of the Migration Program and the overseas student program occurred in a climate of intense international competition for highly skilled young migrants and overseas students.\textsuperscript{10}

The recruitment of overseas students was a core element of the Howard Government’s strategy to remain competitive in this international environment. Overseas students were seen as both injecting significant amounts of money into the Australian economy and having the potential to yield returns by helping to meet Australia’s ongoing labour needs. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimated that the international education industry contributed $15.8 billion to the Australian economy in 2008–09, and up to $17.7 billion in the four quarters to December 2009, making education services Australia’s third largest export. From a labour market perspective, research shows that former overseas students perform well in the Australian labour market compared to skilled migrants who applied from offshore (although the relative labour market advantage enjoyed by former overseas students varies depending on the country of origin and field of study).

Through government statements and key policy decisions from the late 1990s federal governments have expressed a commitment to retaining successful overseas students with skills that are in demand, thereby encouraging such individuals to make the transition from temporary to permanent settlement through the skilled stream of the Migration Program. Such movements contributed to the rapidly growing trend of people coming to Australia on temporary work or study visas and applying for permanent residence onshore. Indeed, by 2007–08, approximately 40 per cent of visas granted in the skilled migration program went to temporary migrants who were already in Australia, largely overseas students and Business (Long Stay) (subclass 457) visa holders. By 2012–13 the proportion had grown even higher, with around 57 per cent of permanent skilled migration visas going to applicants who were already in Australia.

Demographers Andrew Markus, James Jupp and Peter McDonald have observed that ‘Australian immigration policy has facilitated the growth of the educational industry by offering the option of permanent settlement to those successfully completing courses in areas of high demand’. In particular, academics, parliamentarians and other commentators have argued that the possibility of attaining permanent residency following study in Australia, combined with the priority attached to trade skills from 2005, induced the burgeoning of the vocational education and training (VET) sector and a dramatic increase in students applying to undertake VET courses. The majority of the students driving this growth in the VET sector were from India. In 2009 the Immigration Department reported that ‘[t]he number of student visa holders from India increased by 44.6 per cent from 63,558 on 30 June 2008 to 91,887 on 30 June 2009, making it the top source country’ for overseas students coming to Australia in that year.

The global financial crisis in 2008 and the resultant economic downturn triggered changes to government policy on skilled migration. In March 2009 the skilled stream of Australia’s Migration Program was reduced for the first time in ten years, with the stated objective of protecting local jobs. A review of the Migration Program in 2008

11. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *International trade in goods and services, Australia*, cat no. 5368.0: Table 11a, credits (exports), ABS, Canberra. There is a great deal of debate surrounding this issue and estimates vary as to the value of the international education industry to the Australian economy. Estimates produced by the ABS have been queried by B Birrell in *Great expectations: a critique of the international education export industry*, *The Australian*, 2 April 2008, p. 34. Further discussion of these and international estimates is provided by G Maslin, in *Capacity to be competitive in this international environment. Overseas students were seen as both injecting significant amounts of money into the Australian economy and having the potential to yield returns by helping to meet Australia’s ongoing labour needs. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimated that the international education industry contributed $15.8 billion to the Australian economy in 2008–09, and up to $17.7 billion in the four quarters to December 2009, making education services Australia’s third largest export. From a labour market perspective, research shows that former overseas students perform well in the Australian labour market compared to skilled migrants who applied from offshore (although the relative labour market advantage enjoyed by former overseas students varies depending on the country of origin and field of study).

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also led to the Government announcing that it would move to a ‘demand driven’ model for permanent skilled migration, with a focus on delivering the skills most needed in the economy.  

This shift in policy focus was reflected in the introduction of a new Critical Skills List (CSL) and a revised order of preference for the processing of skilled visa applications which gave chief priority to employer sponsored visas. The CSL was limited to professional fields in health, IT, engineering and accountancy, and abandoned most of the trade occupations behind the growth of the vocational education sector. It was hoped that these policy changes would result in increases in employer-sponsored visas and in the numbers of temporary migrants already working in Australia being granted permanent visas onshore.  

In the months following the introduction of these changes there was an increase in visa grants to registered nurses, computing professionals, engineers and doctors, and a decline in visa grants to cooks, chefs and pastry cooks, accountants and hairdressers.

**Recent developments**

The evolution of immigration policy over the past 17 years has fostered the development of a complex nexus between the overseas student program and the skilled migration program. One observer has noted that, by 2009, ‘... would-be migrants and educational institutions had realized there was an almost seamless pathway for international students to attain permanent residence if they enrolled in a course of study which would qualify them for an occupation featuring on the MODL’.

A 2009 Senate Committee Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students found that ‘[w]itnesses who appeared before the committee, including DIAC, gave evidence that over time a perception has developed that a student visa can provide an automatic pathway to permanent residency’. Recent research confirms that many overseas students hope to remain permanently in Australia following completion of their studies, and that ‘post-study migration opportunities are a major factor behind choice of study destination’.

However, from approximately 2005 onwards it became evident that the interaction between the overseas student program and general skilled migration was producing unintended and problematic outcomes. Issues that emerged as a result of this nexus included: a concentration of overseas students in the vocational education sector in the pursuit of permanent residency; the failure of some former overseas students to achieve employment outcomes that were commensurate with their qualifications; and failure to obtain skill levels that would meet Australia’s skill needs. Concerns also emerged concerning the exploitation of students themselves. Witnesses before the 2009 Senate Committee Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students alleged that some private education providers were exploiting overseas students by explicitly using the promise of a permanent visa to attract them and, in some cases, not providing the course which had been paid for.

Similarly, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) observed in 2010 that ‘... there have also been concerns that some providers and agents have put migration outcomes before a quality education for students.’

Many of these and other issues surrounding the operation of international education and the welfare of overseas students in Australia came to a head in May 2009 when reports of violence against Indian international students triggered protests in Melbourne and Sydney. These events attracted much public attention, both domestically and abroad, and highlighted not only concerns about safety, but also many other issues facing...
overseas students, such as racism, workplace exploitation, and fraudulent conduct by private education providers targeting overseas students with the promise of permanent residency.  

The Australian Government embarked on intense diplomatic efforts to salvage Australia’s reputation as a destination for international students and to clarify the distinctions between the objectives of student visas and permanent residency. In particular, Australian Government Ministers on visits to India emphasised that studying in Australia was not a guarantee of a permanent visa. The Government established taskforces on international student safety and wellbeing and developed a National International Student Strategy through COAG. It also commissioned a report from the Australian Institute of Criminology to examine the extent to which Indian students were the victims of crime by comparison with Australian populations. The research found that attacks on Indian students were largely opportunistic rather than racially motivated.

Ultimately, these events served to catalyse the establishment of formal investigations into the operation of the international education sector in Australia. The links between international student education and Australia’s Migration Program were among the issues that were scrutinised in the course of these reviews.

One of the Australian Government’s key responses to the challenges emerging from international student education in Australia was to introduce significant reforms to skilled migration in February 2010. In making these changes the Government explicitly called for the attainment of overseas student visas to be decoupled from other migration outcomes, such as permanent residency, and sought to make access to permanent migration contingent upon the achievement of concrete employment outcomes.

While the 2010 reforms were welcomed by many who had been concerned about the link between the overseas student program and permanent skilled migration, the higher education sector was alarmed by the fall in international student numbers that was experienced in the wake of both these reforms and the global financial crisis of 2009—visa grants dropped by almost 16 per cent from 2008–09 to 2009–10. In light of these concerns, and ongoing concerns regarding the integrity of the student visa program, in December 2010 the Government ordered a strategic review (the Knight Review) of the student visa program. The Review was tasked with considering the quality, integrity and competitiveness of the program.

The report of the Knight Review was released in September 2011. It contained 41 detailed recommendations which centred on streamlined processing of visas for applicants in the university sector, and post-study work rights for university graduates. Since 2011 there have been several key changes to the overseas student program, largely focused on the university sector, as the Government has implemented the recommendations of the Knight Review. While these reforms were welcomed by education providers for whom international students are an important source of revenue, some commentators cautioned that the provision of post-study work rights to university graduates could result in further unintended consequences. Migration researcher Peter Mares argued, for example, that the policy was likely to lead to the creation of a group of long-term temporary migrants, many of whom would seek to remain in Australia permanently, thus placing excessive pressure on Australia’s permanent migration program and causing a blow out in waiting times for permanent visas.
Upon forming government in 2013, the Coalition indicated that it was concerned that the policy pendulum with regards to restoring integrity to the overseas student program had swung too far in the opposite direction, and that changes made by the previous Labor Government were threatening Australia’s position as a sought after destination for overseas students. By 2012–13 total export earnings from the international education sector had declined to $14.6 billion dollars.41

One of first announcements from the incoming Immigration Minister, Scott Morrison, was that the Coalition Government would ‘... move quickly to begin undoing Labor’s damage to Australia’s international education sector—and restore it as one of Australia’s most important economic contributors.’42 In this context, the Coalition has begun implementing measures designed to restore growth, particularly in the vocational education sector. It has not, however, advocated a return to an explicit linkage between the overseas student program and skilled migration, for example, through skilled migration policies which provide an advantage to graduates from Australian institutions, which were the hallmark of the Howard Government. Rather, the current Coalition Government has thus far limited its reforms to changes to the student visa framework aimed largely at encouraging student visa applications from VET students.

Key policy developments

The following section traces the key immigration policy announcements and changes under the Howard, Rudd–Gillard and Abbott Governments that facilitated the development of the overseas student program within Australia’s immigration system between 1997 and December 2014. A more detailed catalogue of relevant ministerial media releases is presented in Appendix A.

Howard Coalition Government

1997–2007

- In 1998 the Howard Government announced the provision of $21 million over four years for a major international marketing campaign to promote Australia’s education and training services industry overseas. The marketing campaign was focused on traditional Asian markets as well as relatively untapped student markets such as India, The People’s Republic of China (hereafter referred to as China), Europe, and North and South America. The campaign was run by the Commonwealth-funded body, Australian Education International (AEI).43

- The skilled stream of Australia’s Migration Program was increased from 29 per cent in 1995–96 to over 50 per cent in 2000, and continued to grow in subsequent years. The increase in skilled migration was central to the Government’s response to the challenges of skills shortages and an ageing population.44

- In August 1998 the Government announced that, from July 1999, the points test used to assess skilled migrants for General Skilled Migration (GSM) (applicable to skilled migrants who are not sponsored by an employer) was modified to grant five additional points where an applicant obtained their diploma, trade or degree from an Australian educational institution, giving such applicants a competitive advantage over applicants who had not obtained their qualification in Australia. This change enhanced the ability of eligible former overseas students to migrate to Australia on a permanent basis and was seen as increasing Australia’s global competitiveness in attracting more overseas students and skilled migrants.45

- In March 1999 the Government announced the introduction of the Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL)—a list of occupations that were deemed to be in national shortage. From May 1999 skilled migration applicants with occupations on the MODL were able to receive bonus points in a new selection test, and were

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42. S Morrison (Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) and C Pyne (Minister for Education), New streamlined student visas to grow Australian education, media release, Canberra, 29 October 2013.
43. D Kemp (Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs), $1.2 billion growth in education export industry, media release, Canberra, 11 May 1998.
44. P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), Australian immigration: grasping the new reality, media release, 23 November 2000.
45. P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), Skilled migration changes to boost economy, media release, 27 August 1998. For general information on the points test see DIBP, What is the points test?, DIBP website.
accorded processing priority. The placement of occupations on the MODL in coming years played a key role in spurring growth in overseas student numbers.  

- Government statements in 2000 indicated that the Government recognised the globalisation of the labour market and the growing importance of temporary residents in the Australian economy. Long-term temporary migration, such as migration for work and study, was seen as a touchstone for the future of migration internationally. The Government’s skilled migration and overseas student programs were developed in the context of intense international competition for skilled migrants and for overseas students.

- From July 2001 overseas students with key skills that were needed in the economy who successfully completed their course of study at an Australian institution, and met other general eligibility requirements, were able to make an onshore application for permanent residency through the Skilled-Independent (and related) visa categories of the GSM program (previously they had to leave Australia and apply offshore). Students were required to make their applications within six months of completing their Australian course. Unlike skilled migrants who applied offshore, former overseas students who made applications onshore were exempted from the requirement of obtaining work experience in their nominated occupation.

- The drawing of a direct link between the overseas student program and skilled migration attracted strong growth in overseas student numbers, leading to a 27 per cent increase in offshore student visa grants between 2001 and 2003. It also led to strong growth in demand for permanent migration from former overseas students who obtained qualifications in Australia, with former students comprising almost half of those granted independent skilled migration visas through the GSM. Due to the high demand for permanent migration from former students, the Government increased the pass mark for all skilled migration applications received after May 2002 from 110 to 115 points.

- From July 2003 former overseas students wishing to apply for GSM were required to complete a minimum of two years of study physically in Australia (rather than one year as previously required) in order to qualify for bonus points in the selection test, and to be exempt from requiring skilled work experience.

- In December 2003 the Government introduced changes to the overseas student program to allow greater flexibility on financial requirements (such as the need to have sufficient funds to live and study in Australia) and English proficiency requirements for some student visa applicants. The changes allowed for a greater range of acceptable financial evidence for student visa applicants from some high-risk countries. English proficiency requirements were modified to accommodate students who had previously studied in certain English-speaking countries, and to allow some students to undertake foundation English language courses before undergraduate study. These changes were aimed at aiding continued growth in the international student sector.

- The Government noted that there had been a recognisable shift in the way people migrate to Australia. Whereas in the past the majority of skilled migrants entered Australia after obtaining a permanent visa offshore, applicants for permanent skilled migration were now predominantly drawn from the ranks of those who were already in Australia under a temporary visa, largely skilled workers and overseas students.

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47. Ruddock, Australian immigration: grasping the new reality, op. cit.
49. P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), Student visa numbers increase to record high, media release, 19 September 2003. See also P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), Migration: benefiting Australia conference, opening speech, media release, 7 May 2002; P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), Record temporary entrants contribute to economy, media release, 7 January 2002; P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Minister announces 2002–03 migration (non-humanitarian) program, media release, 7 May 2002.
50. P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), 2003–04 migration program will increase benefits to Australia, media release, Canberra, 31 March 2003.
51. A Vanstone (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), Student visa numbers continue to grow, media release, 29 November 2003. For general information on student visa assessment levels see, DIBP, Student visa assessment levels, DIBP website. For general information on English language assessment for student visas see DIBP, Student visa English language requirements, DIBP website.
52. A Vanstone (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), Thousands of temporary entrants chose to call Australia home, media release, 20 January 2005.
• In recognition of an increase in student visa approvals and falling non-compliance levels among overseas students (indicating lower than expected compliance related risk amongst overseas students), from April 2005 the Government decided to lower student visa assessment levels, including English language requirements and financial tests for student visa applicants from certain countries and education sectors, making it easier for many applicants to meet the requirements for the grant of a student visa. 53

• From April 2005 the pass mark for selection under the GSM was increased from 115 to 120 points. This increase in the overall mark required to qualify for skilled migration heightened the importance of obtaining bonus points from an occupation that was listed on the MODL. Under the previous pass mark of 115 only 9 per cent of skilled migration applicants nominated an occupation on the MODL, but a year after the increase of the pass mark 42 per cent of applicants nominated an occupation on the MODL in order to acquire bonus points. 54

• In May 2005 the Government increased the number of trades occupations listed on the MODL, including cooking and hospitality. This change was instrumental in accelerating the growth of the vocational education sector and in the number of overseas students enrolling in vocational education courses. 55

• In 2005 and 2006 studies revealed that while, generally, skilled migrants were achieving high levels of employment, former overseas students may not have been achieving employment outcomes that were commensurate with their skills and qualifications. Evidence suggested that strong English language skills and relevant work experience were crucial to achieving good employment outcomes. 56

• In response to the findings of studies on the employment outcomes of skilled migrants the Government introduced changes to requirements for the GSM program, including an increase in the base level of English language proficiency and a greater emphasis on work experience in the points test. A temporary visa mechanism was introduced to enable overseas students, who were exempt from work experience requirements, but who may have needed some skilled work experience to qualify for skilled migration after the introduction of these changes, to gain the requisite experience. 57

Rudd–Gillard Labor Government

2008–2013

• The Rudd Government increased the permanent skilled migration program by 6000 places in February 2008 and by a further 31,000 places in May 2008. This represented a 30 per cent increase on the skilled component in the 2007–08 Migration Program. Skilled migration comprised 70 per cent of the 2008–09 Migration Program, with 133,500 places allocated within a total Migration Program of 190,300 places—the largest program on record. 58

• In April 2008 the Rudd Government reformed student visas to automatically grant overseas students the right to work for up to 20 hours a week while their course was in session. Previously, students were required to make a separate application for the right to work after being granted a student visa. The Government also introduced a streamlined visa process for student visa applicants from India, Indonesia, and Thailand to enable their visa information to be stored electronically, rather than requiring a visa label in their passports. 59

53. A Vanstone (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), Student visa reform success, media release, 12 January 2005.
56. A Vanstone (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), New migrants are entering the workforce faster, media release, 5 November 2005; DIAC, New migrant outcomes: results from the third longitudinal survey of immigrants to Australia, August 2007, accessed 4 September 2015.
58. C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Budget 2008–09—record skilled migration program to boost economy, media release, 13 May 2008.
59. C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Foreign students gain automatic work rights in Australia, media release, 25 April 2008.
• In response to a significant downturn in the global economic outlook in the latter part of 2008 the Government announced the shift to a ‘demand driven’ model for permanent skilled migration, with a focus on employer and government sponsored migration that would meet specific skills needs in the economy. Under this model, applications for employer sponsored visas (that is, from those applicants with a confirmed job offer in Australia) would be fast-tracked, and given priority over applications for independent skilled visas (applicants with no confirmed job offer in Australia).60

• In 2009 the Government reduced the planned level of permanent skilled migration by 20 per cent. It also introduced increased English language requirements and a targeted skills testing regime for trades-related occupations to ensure migrants were ready to enter the labour market. The Government indicated that fewer trade-based visas would be granted in 2009–10.61

• Reports of violence against Indian international students prompted intense diplomatic efforts to salvage Australia’s reputation as a destination for international students. The Government’s response included the launch of taskforces on international student safety and wellbeing, the development of a National International Student Strategy by COAG and reviews of international student education in Australia.62

• DIAC data revealed that, since June 2001, the number of student visa holders in Australia had grown by an average rate of 13.9 per cent per annum. Student visa applications grew by 20 per cent in 2008–09, while the number of student visas granted grew by 15.2 per cent, resulting in a total of 320,368 student visa grants in that year. The number of visa grants in the VET sector (subclass 572 visas) increased by 52.2 per cent in 2008–09, while the share of VET sector visas in the broader overseas student program increased from 25 per cent in 2007–08 to 32 per cent in 2008–09. India replaced China as the top source country for overseas students in Australia, with the number of student visa holders from India increasing by 44.6 per cent between June 2008 and June 2009. There was also a significant increase in the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) and Postgraduate Research sectors. However, 28,000 student visas were refused—an increase of 68 per cent on the number of refusals in 2007–08.63

• In August 2009 the Government responded to the rising numbers of student visa applications being made, and the number being denied by DIAC, by strengthening integrity measures in certain parts of the student program caseload to counter fraud and ensure that students had sufficient funds to live and study in Australia. These measures were supplemented by an increase in the financial requirement attaching to student visas to ensure that students were not heavily reliant on income from part-time work to meet their expenses in Australia. The Government reported that there was an increase in the number of student visa applications being withdrawn, immediately following the introduction of enhanced integrity measures in August 2009.64

• The Government introduced measures to assist around 4,000 international students who were affected by the closure of 12 private education providers in late 2009.65

• Major reforms were announced for the skilled migration program in February 2010, including the introduction of a new, more targeted, Skilled Occupations List (SOL), a review of the points test used to assess applicants, and the potential to cap visa grants to people in particular occupations. Through these changes the Government aimed to delink student visas from permanent migration status.66

• Bruce Baird’s report on the review of the Education Services for Overseas Students Act (2000), released in March 2010, found that migration outcomes had a significant impact on international student education in Australia. He welcomed the Government’s reforms to the GSM program, announced in February 2010, as

60. Evans, Migration program gives priority to those with skills most needed, op. cit.
61. C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Budget 2009–10—Migration program: the size of the skilled and family programs, media release, 12 May 2009.
62. C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Minister meets Indian community in Melbourne, media release, 19 June 2009.
63. C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Student visa checks strengthened, media release, 20 August 2009. See also, DIAC, Annual report 2008–09, Canberra, October 2009, accessed 13 August 2015.
64. Evans, Student visa checks strengthened, op. cit.; C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), New visa measures to assist international students, media release, 9 November 2009.
65. Evans, New visa measures to assist international students, op. cit.
66. Evans, Migration reforms to deliver Australia’s skills needs, op. cit.
going some way to addressing the deleterious impact of the relationship between the skilled migration and international student education.\textsuperscript{67}

- The Migration Program planning figures for 2010–11 increased the skilled stream by 5,750 program places. There was an increase of 9,150 places for employer-sponsored skilled migrants and a decrease of 3,600 places for the GSM program. These planning figures modified the composition of the Migration Program in favour of employer-sponsored migration, consistent with the Government’s focus on ‘demand driven’ migration. The change in the Migration Program planning figures reduced the number of places available to independent skilled migrants under the GSM program.\textsuperscript{68}

- The new SOL, released on 17 May 2010, contained 181 managerial, professional and trade occupations, but crucially removed occupations, such as hairdressing and cooking, which drove much of the growth in the VET sector in the previous five years. All applicants for independent skilled migration visas under the GSM must now have qualifications relevant to an occupation on the SOL. The new list was aimed at delivering a more targeted GSM program that was aligned with Australia’s overall workforce development strategy and driven by labour market demand.\textsuperscript{69}

- In releasing the new SOL, the Government again sought to explicitly disassociate student visas from permanent residency through the Migration Program. International students were cautioned against undertaking courses of study in the hope of achieving particular migration outcomes, as the SOL is reviewed annually and is subject to change in response to changing economic and labour market conditions.\textsuperscript{70}

- A new points test for independent skilled migrants, emphasising English, work experience and high level qualifications, was announced in November 2010, as part of the Government’s ongoing reforms to skilled migration. The Minister stated that the existing points test ‘… puts an overseas student with a short term vocational qualification and one year’s work experience in Australia ahead of a Harvard educated environmental engineer with three years’ relevant work experience.’ The test will apply only to independent skilled migrants, not employer-sponsored migrants. It will apply to applications lodged from 1 July 2011.\textsuperscript{71}

- In December 2010 the Government announced that there would be a review of the student visa program, with the aim of ‘enhancing the continued competitiveness of the international education sector, as well as strengthening the integrity of the Student visa program’.\textsuperscript{72}

- Also in December 2010, a package of measures aimed at streamlining the student visa application process for low risk groups was announced. These measures included: reducing the Student Visa Assessment levels (as of April 2011); enabling pre-paid boarding fees to be counted toward a student’s cost of living requirements in their visa application; improved information exchange between the Government and the international education sector, including provision of a quarterly statistical publication on the Student visa program; and enabling assessment Level 4 vocational education and training (VET) students to undertake a package of certificate level courses to meet visa requirements.\textsuperscript{73}

- In order to help create competition in the English language testing market, and provide more test places for student visa applicants, the Government announced in May 2011 that the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the Pearson Test of English Academic (Pearson) and the Cambridge English: Advanced

\textsuperscript{67} Bruce Baird was the former Federal Member for Cook in the House of Representatives from October 1998 to November 2007 and had previously held several ministerial positions in the NSW Legislative Assembly. He was appointed to head a review into international student education in Australia on 8 August 2009. See J Gillard (Minister for Education),\textit{ Bruce Baird to head up international students review}, media release, 8 August 2009; J Gillard (Minister for Education),\textit{ Baird review into international students final report}, media release, 9 March 2010; Baird,\textit{ Stronger, simpler, smarter ESOS: supporting international students}, op. cit.; C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship),\textit{ Minister welcomes Baird review}, media release, 9 March 2010, accessed 10 April 2015.

\textsuperscript{68} C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship),\textit{ Budget: government sharpens focus of skilled migration program}, media release, 11 May 2010.

\textsuperscript{69} C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship),\textit{ New Skilled Occupation List to meet Australia’s economic needs}, media release, 17 May 2010; DIAC,\textit{ The new Skilled Occupation List (SOL)}, Fact sheet, 2010; DIAC,\textit{ Frequently asked questions}, Fact sheet, 2010.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71} C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship),\textit{ New migration points test to better address Australia’s skills needs}, media release, 11 November 2010.

\textsuperscript{72} C Evans (Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations) and C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship),\textit{ Review of student visa program}, media release, 16 December 2010.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
In August 2011 the Government announced the introduction of the SkillSelect Register, to be introduced from 1 July 2012. Under this new two-stage process, potential skilled migrants are required to lodge an expression of interest on the SkillSelect register, and may then be invited to lodge an application for a skilled visa. SkillSelect was designed to help the Government manage applications for skilled migration more effectively. By inviting applications from people who have expressed interest on the register, the Government is able to target applicants who meet specific needs, such as possessing a certain skill, or being willing to work in a particular regional area. The two stage process also reduces the amount of time spent processing applications from people who do not meet these needs.

The report of the Knight Review, and the Government’s response to it, were released in September 2011. The report made 41 recommendations including recommending significant changes to visa processing and post-study work rights for students in the university sector, and minor changes to the student visa program across other education sectors, as well as reforms to the integrity measures applied by the department in monitoring and enforcing student visa compliance. The Government gave in-principle support for all 41 recommendations, and indicated that it would implement them all, with some modifications. The package of reforms announced in response to the Knight Review included: streamlined processing for students enrolling in Bachelor or higher degree courses, to commence in the first half of 2012; a new post study work visa, valid for up to four years, for Bachelor, Masters and PhD graduates; a reduction in the financial requirements for some student applicants; the introduction of a new ‘genuine temporary entry’ criterion for all student visa applications; and a comprehensive review of the student visa risk management framework.

The first stage of Knight Review reforms were rolled out in November 2011. These included: the introduction of an upfront ‘genuine temporary entrant’ requirement for assessing student visa applications; removal of the English language test requirement for Independent ELICOS (subclass 570) visa applications subject to Assessment Level 4 or above; visa extension for up to six months after thesis submission for Higher Degree by Research students; inclusion of pre-paid home stay fees in financial assessments on the same basis as pre-paid boarding fees; and the cessation of Pre-Visa Assessment arrangements.

In November 2011 the Government announced that post-study work rights, which were introduced for university graduates following the Knight Review, would be extended to Bachelor or higher degree graduates (who completed their degrees after at least two academic years’ study in Australia) from other education providers accredited to offer degree level programs as of 2013. The new arrangements extended the stay for Bachelor students from 18 months to two years, and allowed for Masters by research and PhD students to stay for three and four years respectively following completion of their studies.

Following a Departmental review of the student visa assessment levels in 2011, the Government announced in February 2012 that the visa assessment levels across a range of student visa subclasses would be reduced making the student visa application process simpler for prospective students from 29 countries.

The second stage of implementation of the Knight Review reform package was announced in March 2012. This included: streamlined visa processing arrangements for prospective students enrolled in Bachelor, Masters or Doctoral degrees at participating universities (effective 24 March); more flexible work conditions for overseas students came into effect on 26 March; improved access to English language study for schools sector visa applicants and for student guardian visa holders (effective 24 March); and removal of the

(CAE) from Cambridge ESOL (Cambridge) would be acceptable tests for Student visa application purposes, in addition to the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

74. C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), New English language test providers for student visas, media release, 20 May 2011.
75. C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Skilled migration reform supporting Australia’s growing economy, media release, 10 August 2011.
76. For more information on the SkillSelect register see DIJP, SkillSelect, DIJP website.
77. Australian Government, Strategic review of the Student Visa Program 2011, (Knight Review), op. cit.
78. C Evans (Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace relations) and C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Boost to international education sector in response to Knight review, media release, 22 September 2011.
79. C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Students to benefit as Knight review changes rolled out, media release, 8 November 2011.
80. C Evans (Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations) and C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Government extends support for international education, media release, 30 November 2011.
81. C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Simplifying student visas, media release, 15 February 2012.
requirement for higher risk schools sector visa applicants to provide evidence of an English language proficiency test (effective 24 March).  

- Also in March 2012, legislation was introduced providing for the abolition of automatic visa cancellation for overseas students who breach their visa conditions. This was also a recommendation of the Knight Review. The intention was to provide fairer outcomes for students by allowing the Department to take into account the individual circumstances of a student when considering a breach of visa conditions. The legislation was passed, and received Royal Assent on 12 December 2012.

- In July 2012 the Government announced the establishment of new advisory council on skilled migration, composed of 18 members drawn from business, industry, unions and academia. The Council was created to advise the Government on the role of skilled migration in the Australian economy, and to assist with the development of migration policies and programs.

- In February 2013 the International Education Advisory Council (IEAC) released its report Australia – Educating Globally (the Chaney Report). The IEAC had been established by the Government in 2011 to advise on the development of a long-term strategy for the international education sector. The Chaney Report made several recommendations relating to the regulatory framework regarding education providers, and services and support required by overseas students in Australia, along with some recommendations concerning Australia’s student visa framework. It suggested that the Government should expedite visa processing for students wishing to study at ‘low immigration risk providers’, and increase the points bonus in the skilled migration points test for having an Australian education qualification from five to ten.

**Abbott Coalition Government 2013–2015**

- Upon forming Government in 2013, the Coalition stated that it intended to restore the education sector to its peak of almost $19 billion in export income. The Government announced that it would extend the streamlining arrangements introduced for the university sector to selected non-university providers, and also streamline the visa assessment levels framework to simplify eligibility requirements for prospective students particularly in the vocational sector.

- In line with the October 2013 announcement concerning student visa assessment levels, the simplified assessment levels came into effect on 22 March 2014. Under the new framework, the number of assessment levels was reduced from five to three, and the evidence of finances requirement (that is, the period of time for which a prospective students must prove they can support themselves financially) for students assessed at Level 3 was reduced from 18 months to 12. This overhaul of assessment levels was an outcome of a Review of the Student Visa Assessment Level, which had been recommended by the Knight Review in 2011. The Report of the Review was released by the Government in October 2013.

- In May 2014 the Government announced that, subject to the passage of legislation in 2015, streamlined visa processing would be extended to students enrolled in advanced diploma level courses at ‘low immigration risk providers’, with eligible education providers being invited to participate in this arrangement.

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82. C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), Changes to boost international education, media release, 22 March 2012.
84. C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), New advisory council on skilled migration, media release, 2 July 2012.
85. C Evans (Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations), New Council to advise on future of international education, media release, 14 October 2011.
86. M Chaney, Australia – educating globally: advice from the International Education Advisory Council (IEAC), Canberra, February 2013.
87. S Morrison (Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) and C Pyne (Minister for Education), New streamlined student visas to grow Australian education, media release, 29 October 2013.
88. Ibid.
89. DIBP, Simplification of the Student Visa Assessment Level, DIBP website.
90. DIBP, Review of the Student Visa Assessment Level Framework 2013, DIBP, Canberra.
91. C Pyne (Minister for Education) and S Morrison (Minister for Immigration and Border Protection), More streamlined visas a boost for Australian education sector, media release, 26 May 2014.
Government stated that the purpose of this measure is to help the VET sector in attracting greater numbers of overseas students, in line with the Coalition’s objective of building the overseas student sector back up to the levels experienced under the Howard Government.92 This measure had been recommended by the Chaney Report provided to Government in February 2013.93

- The Government announced in November 2014 that test scores from the Test of English Language as a Foreign Language internet-based test (TOEFL iBT) and the Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE Academic) would be accepted by applicants for skilled, temporary graduate, work and holiday, and former resident visas, as evidence of their English language ability. These tests began to be accepted for student visa applicants in 2011.94

- A major overhaul of the student visa framework was announced in June 2015. The aim of the new framework is to support and encourage growth in international education, in line with the Coalition’s previously stated commitment to growing the sector.95 Under these reforms, the number of available student visa subclasses will be reduced from eight to two, and existing streamlined visa processing and student visa assessment levels will be replaced with a new single immigration risk framework for overseas students. Under this new framework, the evidence required to demonstrate sufficient finances and English language ability will be based on the immigration profile of the country of origin, and the education provider. The new framework is due to be implemented when the existing streamlined visa processing arrangements expire in June 2016.

Concluding comments

The trends in overseas student numbers over the last 20 years have shown that students are attracted to Australia by both the quality of education available and the possibility of permanent residency. Whilst opportunities for permanent migration can act as a drawcard in keeping the best and brightest international students in Australia and reducing critical skill needs, it can also result in unintended consequences. The large number of additional courses offered to international students in hairdressing, cooking and accounting, often marketed to students as a quick and inexpensive path to permanent residency, resulted in a significant cohort of fee-paying student enrolments, but did little to address labour shortages in these sectors.96

However, policy measures designed to remove the exploitation of the overseas students program as a pathway to permanent residency can also have unintended consequences. While largely supportive of attempts to address some of the distortions created in the migration program as a result of its interaction with the overseas students program, migration policy researchers Bob Birrell and Ernest Healy caution that the emphasis on employer-nominated places may render former overseas students who do not have qualifications relevant to occupations on the SOL vulnerable to exploitation by employers on whom they rely for sponsorship in their permanent residency applications.97 Additionally, the experiences of the Rudd-Gillard Labor Governments and its measures to reform the overseas students program have shown that, while they may be considered successful when measured against the desire to restore integrity to the provision of international education services, declining numbers of overseas students cause considerable concern amongst education providers, and harm to Australia’s education export industry.

The Coalition has made it clear that it considers significant damage has been done to Australia’s international education sector by Labor’s reforms, and has made moves to shift the balance back towards ensuring growth in the overseas students program. Whether this results in a return to the integrity concerns of the Howard era remains to be seen, but it is clear that finding a balance between maintaining integrity in education services and the permanent Migration Program on the one hand, and maximising the economic benefits offered by international students on the other, remains a significant policy challenge.

92. Ibid.
94. M Cash (Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection), More English test options for visa applicants, media release, 24 November 2014.
95. C Pyne (Minister for Education and Training) and M Cash (Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection), Simplified student visa process to boost Australia’s international education sector, media release, 16 June 2015.
### Appendix A: chronology of government media releases 1997–2015

(Please note: text which appears in bold in the ‘Details’ column below is intended to highlight a key point in précis form and does not necessarily replicate the text of the original source document.)

#### 1997–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Source Documents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 August 1997</td>
<td>The Minister for Immigration announces that visa grants for overseas students coming to Australia rose by 9 per cent in 1996. This included a 21 per cent increase in students from China and Indonesia, 17 per cent increase in students from Korea, 15 per cent increase in students from India and 10 per cent increase in students from Hong Kong. However, Taiwan and Singapore recorded full year declines after several years of strong growth. The Minister notes that one of the reasons for declined growth in international student numbers from some countries could be attributable to the fact that other countries, including the US, Canada and UK have been heavily promoting their own education systems in Asia and there is strong competition for international students. Australia is still seen as a desirable destination for overseas students.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), media release, Student visa numbers continue to grow</td>
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| 18 March 1998   | The Immigration Minister announces that as part of a review of the points test used in selecting skilled migrants, the Government is looking to provide bonus points for people who have studied in Australia. The Minister also states:  

> We are also looking closely at the Student visa program to ensure the controlled, sustainable growth of Australia’s international education and training industry.  

Among options I am considering is visa assessment streamlining for students from emerging markets such as China and India by introducing an effective partnership with education institutions to ensure that we receive bona-fide students, and not those wanting to jump the queue and achieve a migration outcome. | P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration), media release, Immigration reform: the unfinished agenda: speech presented at the National Press Club, Canberra |
| 11 May 1998     | **Launch of major international marketing campaign to promote Australian education**  

The Minister for Education announces the provision of $21 million over the next four years for a major international marketing campaign to promote Australia’s education and training services industry overseas.  

The Government estimates that the total number of overseas students studying in Australia is expected to rise by 19.55 per cent from 151,464 in 1997 to 181,000 in 2001. There is expected to be a 39 per cent, or $1.27 million, increase in revenue from the export of Australia’s education and training industry. | D Kemp (Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs), media release, $1.2 billion growth in education export industry |
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<td>27 August 1998</td>
<td><strong>Former overseas students granted additional points</strong>&lt;br&gt;Effective 1 July 1999, the points test used to select skilled migrants is modified to grant five additional points where an applicant has obtained their diploma, trade certificate or degree from an Australian educational institution.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), media release, Skilled migration changes to boost economy</td>
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<td>1 December 1998</td>
<td>Changes to the overseas students program to support the overseas educational services sector in attracting more overseas fee-paying students to Australia, and measures to ensure compliance with the system are to take effect from 1 December 1998. The changes are designed to ensure that there is a balance between the need to attract genuine students and to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the program.&lt;br&gt;In 1997–98 the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA), supported by an External Reference Group, undertook a review of the overseas student program’s legislation, policy and perspective. Following the review the Minister for Immigration and the Minister for Education announced the introduction of changes to the overseas students program. Key changes include:&lt;br&gt;• Temporary visa holders from gazetted countries will be able to apply for their first student visa in Australia&lt;br&gt;• Students will no longer be automatically granted work rights, but will be required to make a separate application to obtain work rights in Australia. Students are required to produce evidence that they have commenced studying at their institution and pay a $50 charge.&lt;br&gt;• Students must remain enrolled with the education provider that they originally enrolled with for at least the first 12 months of the course (or the duration of their course if less than 12 months), unless they obtain permission to transfer from DIMA. Transfers will only be granted in exceptional circumstances and students must pay a fee of $120 to apply for a transfer.&lt;br&gt;• Students must notify DIMA of a change of address.&lt;br&gt;• Student visas must be cancelled where the visa holder has not satisfied course requirements.&lt;br&gt;• Prospective students from non-gazetted countries are required to undergo a ‘genuineness assessment’ before confirming their enrolment or paying any tuition fees to education providers.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs) and D Kemp (Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs), media release, Changes to overseas student visas&lt;br&gt;See also, P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs) and D Kemp (Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs), media release, New measures to attract more overseas fee-paying students and improve immigration controls</td>
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<td>9 March 1999</td>
<td><strong>Introduction of Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL)</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Minister for Immigration comments on the release of the Report on the review of Australia’s independent and skilled-Australia linked categories, the first thorough review of the skilled migration categories in ten years.&lt;br&gt;A new points test will incorporate a number of changes recommended by the review, including, the introduction of</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), media release, Skilled migration changes contribute $2.4 billion boost Department of</td>
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minimum requirements, namely, the core criteria of skill, age and English language ability. The new points test also takes account of other attributes, such as relevant work experience, occupations in demand in Australia, spouse skills, Australian qualifications, work experience in Australia, and fluency in certain languages other than English.

The new points test includes the introduction of the Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) of occupations which are deemed to be in national shortage. Applicants with occupations on the MODL receive extra points in the new selection test from May 1999.

**Milestone Details**

**Source Documents**

**29 April 1999**

The Minister announces that skilled migration will comprise 50 per cent (35,000 places) of the Migration Program for 1999–2000. The Government also introduced a new ‘contingency reserve’ of 5,000 further places in the skilled stream of the Migration Program, in light of the excellent performance of skilled migrants, and calls from industry and some State and Territory governments for an expansion in the intake.

**Source Documents**

P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), media release, 1999-2000 Migration (non-humanitarian) program

**3 April 2000**

The Minister for Immigration announces a 5,000 place increase in the skilled stream of the Migration Program, made possible by the success of a new points test in attracting young migrants with strong English skills and qualifications in high demand occupations such as IT and accounting.

About 50 per cent of the of the people assessed under the new points test are former overseas students to Australia, who are seen as having the advantage of having qualifications easily recognised in Australia and having prior experience of life and work in Australia.

The Minister also notes that the introduction of the Migrant Occupations in Demand list (MODL) to target migrants in occupations that are in demand nationally has been a success.

Applicants for migration under one of the skilled migration points-tested categories, whose occupation is on the MODL, obtain up to an additional 10 points in their migration application. The MODL is reviewed annually to take into consideration existing and emerging skills shortages, identified by the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business.

**Source Documents**

P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), media releases, 2000-2001 Migration (non-Humanitarian) program to further increase focus on skills Migration Occupations in Demand List

**4 July 2000**

The Minister for Immigration announces a review of temporary residence visas and highlights the growing importance of temporary residents in the Australian economy, with the globalisation of the labour market and the increasing movement of people for short-term business, work and personal purposes. The Minister notes that there has been an increase in highly skilled temporary migration: 28 per cent increase in visas to people from India; 22 per cent increase to people from the Netherlands; 18 per cent increase from Ireland. In the face of rapid changes in internationally competitive industries it is essential that temporary residence visas mechanisms keep up.

**Source Documents**

P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), media releases, Review of temporary residence visas Skilled temporary residents visas increase for 1999–2000
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<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
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<tr>
<td>23 November 2000</td>
<td>The Minister for Immigration notes key developments in the international migration context and changes to immigration policy under the Howard Government. Claims and observations articulated by the Minister include:</td>
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<td>• The skilled stream has increased from 29 per cent of the Migration Program in 1995–1996 to over 50 per cent in 2000.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), media release, <em>Australian immigration: grasping the new reality</em></td>
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<td>• Long temporary migration is set to become the touchstone for migration’s international future as increasing numbers of young, highly skilled people move temporarily around the world in pursuit of opportunities presented by increased international trade and investment.</td>
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<td>• The Government is expanding Australia’s ability to attract ‘a highly mobile and lucrative workforce’ of skilled migrants through long–term temporary entry provisions. The number of skilled temporary entrants has been steadily rising over recent years and long-term temporary movements now make up around 50 per cent of net overseas migration. These individuals are seen as making a major contribution to Australia’s international competitiveness.</td>
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<td>• The Government has effected a ‘critical shift’ in the way greater numbers of successful overseas students are able to migrate to Australia after completing their studies. This gives Australia a significant advantage over competing countries in terms of Australia’s ability to attract more overseas students and more skilled migrants.</td>
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<td>2001–2004</td>
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<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), speech, <em>The Economic Impact of Immigration Seminar</em></td>
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<td>31 March 2001</td>
<td>Overseas students who are successful in key skill areas are seen as the ‘ideal migrants’ and since 1998 the Government has been pursuing a policy of encouraging such students to migrate to Australia.</td>
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<td><strong>Key reform—ability to make permanent residence visa applications onshore</strong></td>
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<td>From 1 July 2001 certain groups of successful Australian-educated overseas students with key skills, particularly ICT qualifications, will be able to apply and be granted permanent residence visas under the Skilled-Independent and related categories without leaving Australia. Australia will aim to maintain a competitive edge over other countries to attract overseas ICT workers through streamlined procedures and priority processing.</td>
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<td>The policy is helping to attract more overseas students and an increasing portion of overseas students are undertaking courses in areas that are experiencing a skills shortage such as accountancy, engineering and nursing.</td>
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<td>Around 50 per cent of principal applications in the Skilled Independent category are successful overseas students, with the</td>
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<td>1 July 2001</td>
<td>Measures announced to make the application process for student visas more transparent. Information for overseas students will be more precisely targeted based on an applicant’s country of origin and the education sector in which they want to study. This would allow potential students to more easily determine their likelihood of success before applying and ‘place Australia at the forefront of student visa processing arrangements in this highly competitive and growing industry’.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, New Visa Processes to help business, overseas students and skilled migration from 1 July 2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 July 2001</td>
<td>Record numbers of student visas were granted to citizens of China for 2000–01—the largest source of overseas students in Australia. The number of visas granted to students from China went up from 1,934 in 1996–97 to 8,886 in 2000–2001, representing an increase of 360 per cent. The Minister acknowledged that processing times remain lengthy due to high levels of fraud amongst student applications from China, but the Government is looking for ways to address this.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), media release, Record tourists and students from China</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 October 2001</td>
<td>The Minister notes that there are employment gains to be made from temporary migration, and the Coalition’s temporary entry, visitor and student policies resulted in a record number of temporary visas (more than 160,000) being delivered in 2000–01. The increased global mobility of goods, people and services is acknowledged as playing an important role in government decisions. As at June 2000, there were 440,000 people across all categories in Australia on temporary visas. There were 146,577 student visas granted in 2000–01—this accounts for a 23 per cent increase on the 1999–2000 figure of 119,103. The major source countries for offshore student applications were: China (8,886—up 46 per cent); USA (7,426—up 16 per cent); Malaysia (6,236 —up 6 per cent); Indonesia (6,070—up 12 per cent); and Hong Kong (5,740—up 26 per cent). The undergraduate sector showed particularly strong growth with an increase in offshore visa grants of 47 per cent from 26,233 to 38,555. Part of the reforms introduced in July 2001 included seven new visa subclasses for overseas students, including a vocational education and training sector subclass. The Government states that it is committed to encouraging sustainable growth in the international education sector by facilitating entry arrangements where there is a low risk that students will overstay or otherwise abuse their visa conditions.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Immigration – playing its role in Australia’s future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7 January 2002   | The Minister for Immigration states:  
- the record number of temporary entrants to Australia in 2000–2001 have contributed significantly to Australia’s economy. Offshore student visas reached 86,000 compared with 55,000 in 1994–95, and  
- the direct links now made between the overseas student program and skilled permanent entry have attracted strong | P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media release, Record temporary entrants contribute to economy |
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<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
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<tr>
<td>7 May 2002</td>
<td><strong>GSM pass mark increased</strong></td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media releases, Migration: benefiting Australia (conference, opening speech)</td>
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<td>The Migration Program for 2002–03 will be increased, with the skilled stream comprising 60,700 places, or 58 per cent of the total program.</td>
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<td>The Minister notes that there is continuing growth in overseas student numbers. Overseas students will remain an important source of long-term and permanent movement to Australia.</td>
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<td>Due to the high demand for migration, particularly from overseas students who have completed tertiary education in Australia, the Government has decided to increase the pass mark from 110 to 115 points for all independent skilled applications received from 8 May 2002.</td>
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<td>As part of the Government’s state-specific and regional migration strategies the Government is looking to attract more overseas students, who are considered a ‘very important skill stream feeder group’, to regional universities and TAFEs. Adjustments to the bonus points regime for successful overseas students applying to remain permanently could encourage a greater proportion of them to consider studying and eventually settling in regional Australia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 July 2002</td>
<td>The Minister for Immigration announces that the 2001–02 Migration Program was the largest and most highly skilled in a decade—the outcome was a total of 93,080 and contained the largest skill stream on record at 53,520, constituting 58 per cent of the program.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media release, Migration program highly skilled and largest in decade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 November 2002</td>
<td>The Minister for Immigration announces the launch of eVisa—an initiative that allows people to apply and pay for commonly sought Australian visas via the Internet. Online lodgement of eVisa applications and permission to work applications covers prospective overseas students from low immigration-risk countries applying to enter Australia for the first time, and overseas students who are already in Australia intending to continue their studies, including permission to work applications.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media release, Australian visa applications online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 March 2003</td>
<td>The MODL is updated to reduce the numbers of ICT specialisations listed, remove accountants and include health professionals.</td>
<td>T Abbot (Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations) and P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media release, Government responds to changing ICT labour market</td>
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<td>Milestone</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 March 2003</td>
<td><strong>Two-year in-country study requirement for GSM applicants</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Minister for Immigration states that Australia is continuing to achieve a ‘brain gain’ from skilled migrants quickly establishing themselves in the labour market and applying their skills and qualifications.&lt;br&gt;Given the successful labour market performance of migrants with Australian qualifications, a number of measures will target the upper end of the overseas student market.&lt;br&gt;• Graduating overseas students applying for general skilled migration on or after 1 July will be required to have completed a minimum of two years study physically in Australia before they qualify for bonus points or the work experience exemption (currently only one year is required).&lt;br&gt;• The points awarded for completion of an Australian upper second Class Honours (or higher) or Masters qualification following completion of an Australian bachelor level qualification, both obtained while studying in Australia, will increase from five to ten.&lt;br&gt;• The points awarded for completion of an Australian PhD with a minimum of two consecutive years of full time study physically in Australia will increase from 10 to 15.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media release, <a href="#">2003–04 migration program will increase benefits to Australia</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 May 2003</td>
<td>The Minister for Immigration announces transitional arrangements for overseas students wanting to remain in Australia after completing their studies. Overseas students studying in Australia on or before 31 March 2003 can have their application to remain in Australia considered under the current one year study requirement. They have until 1 April 2004 to lodge an application to remain in Australia under the General Skilled Migration category.&lt;br&gt;In future the period of Australian study required to take advantage of the work experience exemption for the General Skilled Migration category will increase from one to two years. The main aim of this increase is to ensure that overseas students have the right level of skills to obtain skilled employment in Australia. These changes are scheduled to commence on 1 July 2003.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media release, <a href="#">Transitional arrangements for skilled migration study requirements</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 July 2003</td>
<td>The Minister for Immigration announces that a record number of 66,050 skill stream visas were issued in 2002–03, forming 61 per cent of the total Migration Program outcome of 108,070.</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media release, <a href="#">Record numbers of migrants to boost economy</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 September 2003</td>
<td>Since the introduction of student visa reforms on 1 July 2001 there has been an overall increase in offshore student visa grants of 27 per cent. In the first year of reforms (2001–02) there was a 13 per cent increase to 97,650 offshore visas, and in 2002–03 there was a 12 per cent increase to 109,610 offshore student visa grants.&lt;br&gt;The major source countries for offshore visa grants were China</td>
<td>P Ruddock (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media release, <a href="#">Student visa numbers increase to record high</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Protection visa applications from students declined by 46 per cent and the total number of students unlawfully in Australia decreased by 19 per cent. Increasing and more effective compliance measures resulted in increases in the identification and location of students not complying with visa conditions, most notably due to non-attendance and failure to meet course requirements.

29 November 2003  
**Greater flexibility on financial and English language requirements**

The Minister for Immigration announces that Australia is a world leader in international education and international student numbers will continue to grow due to changes to come into effect on 1 December 2003. Changes include:

- The introduction of a new student guardian visa on 1 December 2003 to allow parents and other relatives to care for young students in Australia.

- Greater flexibility on financial requirements for student visa applicants from higher risk countries, which will allow for the range of acceptable financial evidence to be extended and made more transparent across education sectors.

- Changes to the English language proficiency requirements, including provisions to accommodate students who have previously studied outside Australia in certain English-speaking countries, and allowing some students to undertake foundation courses before commencing undergraduate studies.

1 April 2004  
**GSM pass mark increased**

A number of changes are made to the skilled migration stream of the Migration Program:

- The skills of migrants coming to Australia will be increased by increasing the pass mark for those applying for permanent residence under general skilled independent visa categories from 115 points to 120 points. However, the new pass mark will not apply to international students studying in Australia who apply before April 2005.

- 5,000 additional places on the new 2 stage skilled independent visa, available to those who can’t meet the new pass mark but do meet the 2002 standard, provided they commit to living and working in regional Australia.

- 1,000 extra places for doctors.

The Minister announces that the Government expects to deliver the largest skill stream in Australia’s history at around 77,000 people.

1 September 2004  
**Changes are made to skilled migration:**

- Skilled migration applicants must have an occupation on the Skilled Occupations List (SOL), which now includes a list of agricultural occupations.
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<td><strong>2005–2007</strong></td>
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<td>12 January 2005</td>
<td><strong>Student visa assessment levels lowered</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Minister for Immigration announces that changes to the student visa program since 2001 have been a success. Visa approval rates continued to rise—with a record number of 171,616 student visas being granted in 2003–04, while at the same time non-compliance levels have fallen. As a result student visa assessment levels, English language requirements and financial tests for student visa applications from certain countries and education sectors will be lowered from April 2005.</td>
<td>A Vanstone (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media release, <a href="#">Student visa reform success</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 January 2005</td>
<td>The Minister for Immigration announces that there has been a ‘profound shift in the way people migrate to Australia’, with almost one third (36,000 permanent visas) of the places in the skilled stream going to people who were already in Australia on a temporary visa. The change is being driven by skilled workers and students. The majority of these permanent visa recipients are coming from the UK, China and India. In 2003–04 over 13,000 permanent skilled migration visas were granted to students in Australia, a 50 per cent increase on 2002–03.</td>
<td>A Vanstone (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media release, <a href="#">Thousands of temporary entrants chose to call Australia home</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 April 2005</td>
<td>The skilled migration program for 2005–06 will be increased for the fifth successive year providing up to 20,000 additional places. The increase will target employer sponsored migration, state/regional sponsored migration, or migrants who have an occupation on an expanded and more responsive MODL. <strong>Addition of more trades to MODL</strong>&lt;br&gt;Changes to be made to the skilled migration program to make Australia more competitive internationally include:&lt;br&gt;• The addition of more trades and engineering related occupations to MODL.&lt;br&gt;• Occupational trainee visa holders will be allowed to obtain a Skilled Independent Regional (SIR) visa without having to leave Australia—like overseas students.&lt;br&gt;• A pilot program will be introduced to allow overseas students to undertake traditional trade apprenticeships in regional Australia on a full time fee paying basis and on completion of these to be</td>
<td>A Vanstone (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs), media release, <a href="#">2005-06 Migration (non-humanitarian) program</a></td>
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27 July 2005

The overall Migration Program for 2004–05 was the largest since the late 1980s, at 120,060 places. The 77,880 skilled stream migrants accounted for about 65 per cent of the total program. Improved targeting in the skilled stream has resulted in increases over the previous year’s numbers of doctors (294 per cent), nurses (40 per cent), accountants (48 per cent) and tradespersons, such as mechanical, electrical, construction and automotive tradespersons (38 per cent).

The number of overseas students migrating to Australia directly after completing their studies was also the largest ever, with some 16,490 visas granted to former overseas students in 2004–05.

31 October 2005

Changes to the Migration Regulations introduce a range of new options for overseas students:

- New Trade Skills Training Visa will give employers the opportunity to recruit young people from overseas to undertake an apprenticeship that combines both on-the-job training and classroom-based learning in regional areas of Australia.

- From 1 November, overseas students will also be able to apply, on completion of their studies in Australia, for an Occupational Trainee Visa to undertake up to 12 months of supervised on-the-job training in their area of expertise. Employers will also be able to offer overseas students practical employment experience on an occupational trainee visa where this leads to registration in their chosen profession in Australia.

- Professional Development Visa—provides tailored training to overseas professionals and executives.

Student visa assessment levels lowered

As a result of rising numbers of student visa approvals and declining levels of non-compliance with student visa conditions the student visa assessment levels (including the English language and financial tests) for a number of countries and education sectors will be reduced from 1 November 2005, providing for more streamlined visa processing.

Overseas education is one of Australia’s largest export industries, estimated to provide revenue in the vicinity of $7.5 billion. These changes are seen as encouraging the growth of the industry and its diversification into new regions.

5 November 2005

The initial findings of the Third Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia reveal that 93 per cent of business and employer-sponsored migrants and 82 per cent of skilled independent migrants are working within six months of migrating to Australia.

Employment outcomes of former overseas students

However, the Minister notes that while former overseas students are also achieving good employment rates, there are signs that
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<td>6 March 2006</td>
<td>Announcement that skilled migrants and overseas students will be able to list same-sex partners on their visa applications, as people have been able to do with their heterosexual partners. The Minister said that this change would keep Australia competitive in an increasingly intense global market for skilled migrants.</td>
<td>A Vanstone (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), media release, Recognition for same sex partners of skilled migrants and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 May 2006</td>
<td>The total Migration Program for 2006–2007 will be in the range of 134,000 to 144,000 places, including 97,500 places in the Skilled Stream. Employer-sponsored migration is up 22 per cent from the same period in the previous year, putting it at record levels in 2005–06. Growth in state-sponsored and regional migration visas was also up 50 per cent over the same period.</td>
<td>A Vanstone (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), media release, Budget 2006: Government successfully matching skilled workers to employers</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| 8 May 2006        | The Minister for Immigration and the Minister for Education comment on an independent evaluation of GSM categories conducted by Dr Bob Birrell, Associate Professor Lesleyanne Hawthorne and Professor Sue Richardson. The study reveals that good English and relevant work experience are essential to achieving good employment outcomes. Changes to GSM eligibility criteria (including skilled work experience) The Government will introduce a number of changes to maximise migrant success in the workplace, including:  
• increasing the base level of English language proficiency which must be demonstrated by applicants for GSM visas  
• increasing the allocation of bonus points to applicants who achieve English language scores at above the base level  
• placing greater emphasis on skilled work experience as a factor in the points test. Many former overseas students, who are currently exempt from work experience requirements when applying for general skilled migration, will require some skilled work experience in order to qualify for skilled migration. The Australian Government will provide temporary visa mechanisms which will enable such students to gain work experience in Australia. The Minister for Immigration reiterates that former overseas students are a very welcome part of Australia’s skilled migration program. The Minister for Education welcomes the new initiatives to enable international students to succeed in the Australian labour market. | A Vanstone, (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), media release, Evaluation of general skilled migration categories B Birrell, L Hawthorne, S Richardson, Evaluation of the General Skilled Migration categories, report prepared for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA), Canberra, 2006 |
<p>| 25 July 2006      | More than 68 per cent of visas under the 2005–06 Migration Program were issued to people in the skilled stream. Employer- | A Vanstone (Minister for Immigration and |</p>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>20 September 2006</td>
<td>The MODL has been revised to include 35 managerial and professional occupations, one associate professional occupation, nine computing specialisations and 41 trade occupations.</td>
<td>A Vanstone (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs) and K Andrews (Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations), media release, Government revises MODL to reflect the labour market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 May 2007</td>
<td>The 2007–2008 skilled migration stream is to include a modest increase of 5,000 places with a total of 102,500 places for those with workforce and English-language skills that will enable them to enter Australia and immediately contribute to the economy.</td>
<td>K Andrews (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Budget 2007: a prosperous cohesive nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 August 2007</td>
<td>The MODL has been revised to include 38 managerial and professional occupations, one associate professional occupation, 10 computing specialisations, and 46 trade occupations.</td>
<td>K Andrews (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) and J Hockey (Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations), media release, Migration Occupations in Demand List</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 August 2007</td>
<td>Skilled migration comprised 66 per cent of the 2006–07 Migration Program. The top occupation for skilled stream entrants is accountancy (10,688), followed by computing professionals (4,044) and registered nurses (2,088). Other top professions included mechanical engineers, civil engineers, marketing specialists and general managers. The top five countries of origin for skilled stream entrants were: United Kingdom (24,800), India (15,865), China (14,688), Republic of South Africa (4,293) and Malaysia (3,838).</td>
<td>K Andrews (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, A prosperous and cohesive nation – migration program outcomes 2006–07</td>
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<td><strong>2008–2010</strong></td>
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<td>17 February 2008</td>
<td><strong>Increase of skilled migration places</strong></td>
<td>C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release,</td>
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</table>
program, taking the skilled migration program to a total of 108,500 places in 2007–08. The increase will consist mainly of permanent employer sponsored visas and General Skilled Migration visas.

**25 April 2008**

**Student visa reforms (including work rights and streamlined processing)**

A number of reforms to student visas announced

- From 26 April, overseas students will automatically be granted the right to work up to 20 hours a week under their student visas, while their course is in session.
- New processing arrangements for international student visas, including cuts to all overseas visa fees by $40 to $450 and students no longer require a visa label in their passports – information will be stored electronically in the Visa Entitlement Verification Online (VEVO) system.
- A streamlined process is introduced for people applying for student visas from India, Indonesia and Thailand.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship granted 228,592 student visas to people from 191 countries in the year to June 2007.

**13 May 2008**

**Additional increase in skilled migration places**

Further to the increase of 6,000 places in the skilled migration program announced by the Minister for Immigration in February 2008, an additional 31,000 permanent skilled migration places will be added to the 2008–09 Migration Program. This represents a 30 per cent increase on the previous Government’s increase in the 2007–08 Migration Program.

Permanent skilled migrants will make up 135,500 of the total 190,300 places in the 2008–09 Migration Program. The increase in the intake of permanent skilled migrants is intended to ensure a better balance between temporary and permanent migrants in the overall skilled migration program.

**22 July 2008**

There was a 27 per cent increase in the temporary skilled migration (subclass 457 visa) program for 2007–08, highlighting the importance of these visas in meeting labour needs.

Eighty one per cent of 457 visa holders were employed in professional occupations and highly skilled jobs. Nearly a quarter of the workers came from the United Kingdom, followed by India (14 per cent), the Philippines (9 per cent), South Africa (6 per cent) China (6 per cent) and the USA (6 per cent).

There was a 30 per cent increase in 457 visa holders who became permanent residents in 2007–08.

**22 August 2008**

The skilled stream comprised 68 per cent (108,540 places) of the 2007–08 Migration Program. The Migration Program has increased annually over the past ten years and with an increase of 7 per cent on the previous year, the 2007–08 program was Australia’s largest Migration Program since the 1960s.
Review of Migration Program

The Migration Program for 2008–09 was reviewed in light of a significant shift in the global economic outlook, concerns about the outcomes of the skilled migration program in past years, and the changing nature of skilled migration. The review identified the need for a shift in the focus of the program towards ‘demand driven’ outcomes, in the form of employer and government-sponsored skilled migration, to ensure that the program is better targeted on the skills needed in the economy.

Reforms to the Migration Program

In response to the concerns raised the following reforms will be introduced:

• Move to a ‘demand driven’ model for permanent skilled migration; that is, focus on delivering the skills needed in the economy, with the existing 133,500 places in 2008–09 remaining as a ceiling. The Government will keep the program under review in light of economic circumstances.

• Increase the numbers of employer–sponsored visas. These workers bring the strongest and most immediate economic benefit and are directly driven by the skills demands of the business community. They are skilled migrants who are directly sponsored into a job that cannot be filled locally. Eighty per cent of employer sponsored visas are granted to people who are already living and working in Australia on temporary visas.

• Improve the ability of state and territory governments to sponsor in the skilled migrants to meet skill shortages specific to their jurisdiction. This measure recognises that there are now a number of regional economies operating across the country and that the skill demands vary across states, territories and regions within states.

• Where applicants do not have either an employer or government sponsor, those in occupations deemed to be in critical need will receive higher priority and those in other occupations will receive lower priority. The Government has developed a Critical Skills List (CSL) to apply to independent skilled visa applicants which is focused on medical and key IT professionals, engineers and construction trades.

Under these measures the skilled migration program will see more skilled migrants going straight into jobs and increased numbers of people already in Australia granted visas onshore.

From 1 January 2009, the following order of preference will apply in processing skilled visa applications:

1. Employer sponsored visas
2. State or territory Government sponsored visas
3. Occupations on the CSL
4. Occupations on the MODL
5. All other valid applications
Milestone Details Source Documents

International students

• The Minister for Immigration states that international students who have studied here are an excellent source of skilled applicants. There is a need to ensure a system that is not giving perverse incentives to students to study a small number of vocational courses, when they may have no intention of actually working in those occupations.

• International students who are enrolled in courses that are not on the CSL will still be able to apply for a permanent visa without a sponsor. However, if they want their application considered as a priority they will need to focus on finding an employer to sponsor them.

• International students graduating from courses will have access to the subclass 485 visa. The subclass 485 visa was introduced by the previous Government and provides students with a period of 18 months to find work in their occupation and improve their English language skills. They can also use that time to find an employer sponsor.

• These measures will provide an incentive for training providers to better link international students with employers and give students an incentive to study courses that will lead to employment outcomes in that field.

Migration patterns in Australia

• There is an increasing trend of people coming to Australia on a temporary work or study visa and then applying for permanent residence on shore. Approximately 40 per cent or more than 40,000 of the visas granted in the skilled migration program in 2007–08 were to people already here, largely Subclass 457 Visa holders and international students.

• The largest numbers of visas are granted in the ‘independent skilled’ stream where the person applying does not have a sponsor or a job offer before migrating. Almost half of these visas are granted to international students already in Australia.

• In 2007–08 for the first time the number of temporary skilled visa grants exceeded the number of permanent skilled visas granted. The Government’s decision to increase the skilled migration program in 2008–09 was in part aimed at restoring the balance between the permanent and temporary skilled programs.

16 March 2009  Announcement that the 2008–09 GSM program will be cut by 14 per cent to protect local jobs. In addition, building and manufacturing trades will be removed from the CSL. The list comprises mainly health and medical, engineering and IT professionals.  C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release,  Government cuts migration program

24 March 2009  DIAC officers, AFP and other agencies raid a migration agency in Melbourne where three migration agents were allegedly providing fake documentation to support permanent residency applications for foreign students. Students had applied for permanent residency based on their claimed skills in a range of occupations including  C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release,
12 May 2009

A further cut is made to the permanent skilled migration intake, from 115,000 places to 108,100 places for 2009–10, representing an overall drop of almost 20 per cent on previous planning levels. The reductions apply to the GSM category rather than the high-demand employer-sponsored category.

The non-sponsored independent skilled pathway for trades occupations will also be tightened:

- The English language threshold will be increased to ensure that applicants can demonstrate a competent level of English. This change will apply from 1 July 2009 for people applying offshore and from 1 January 2010 for people applying onshore.

- A job readiness test will be introduced to complement the testing arrangements already in place for offshore applicants in some trades. This will ensure that applicants have the skills claimed. This change will apply from 1 January 2010.

The Government states that under the priority arrangements, fewer trades–level occupations will be granted a visa in 2009–10.

The objective of Government reforms is to shift the balance of the skilled migration program in favour of employer and state sponsored migration rather than non-sponsored visas.

19 June 2009

Government responds to violence against Indian international students

The Minister for Immigration meets with the Indian community in Melbourne to reassure the community that the Australian Government welcomes students from India and takes seriously Australia’s reputation as a safe destination for international students.

The Prime Minister established a Taskforce on Crimes Against International Students under the leadership of the National Security Adviser to coordinate action across all levels of government.

The Minister also notes a number of initiatives announced by the Deputy Prime Minister, including:

- an International Student taskforce within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to develop strategies to support the wellbeing of international students

- a student hotline through which students can raise concerns anonymously

- fast tracking a review of the legal framework for the provision of education services to international students, as set out in the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2002

- updating the Guide to Studying and Living in Australia to help new students to settle into their Australian life and study.
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<td>1 July 2009</td>
<td>The Minister for Immigration announces changes to immigration processing and fees, which will come into effect from 1 July 2009. The cost of some visa application charges and citizenship fees will increase to offset wider costs associated with the operation of the migration and temporary entry programs. Student visas will increase from $450 to $540.</td>
<td>C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media releases, Migration changes from 1 July, Assessment changes for skilled migrants from July 1</td>
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| 23 July 2009     | The Minister for Immigration announces he will be the first Australian Minister to travel to India since concerns about the welfare of Indian students in Australia were raised domestically and abroad. The aim of the visit is to:  
• assure Indian people that the Australian Government is committed to providing a safe environment for international students in Australia, and  
• outline changes in Australia’s Migration Program, which reflect fluctuations in demand across occupations, in particular in the information and communication technology sectors.  
The Minister notes the rapid growth in the number of Indian nationals coming to Australia to settle, study, business and tourism: India ranks as the second largest source of general skilled migrants to Australia; the second largest source, after China, of students; and the second largest source, after the UK, of temporary business migrants.                                                                 | C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Immigration Minister to visit India and Sri Lanka |
| 20 August 2009   | Applications for student visas grew by 20 per cent to 362,193 in 2008–09, with almost 28,000 student visas refused, an increase of 68 per cent on the number of refusals in 2007–08. **Strengthened integrity measures for student visas**  
DIAC will strengthen checks on student visa applications to stamp out fraud and ensure students have the financial capacity to live and study in Australia. The measures to be implemented with immediate effect include:  
• upgrading the interview program to build a strong evidence base around fraud  
• removing or restricting eVisa access for some agents where there is evidence of fraud or inactivity, and  
• restricting access to eVisa for some segments of the caseload if analysis demonstrates restricted access would allow for better control of fraud.  
The measures will target parts of the student visa caseload in India, Mauritius, Nepal, Brazil, Zimbabwe and Pakistan.  
The next formal review of student visa risk framework is scheduled for 2010. The data obtained from the enhanced checking of student visa applications will help inform future reviews. | C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Student visa checks strengthened, DIAC, Annual report 2008–09, Canberra, October 2009 |
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<tr>
<td>9 November 2009</td>
<td><strong>Closure of education providers</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Minister for Immigration announces measures to assist 4,700 international students who are affected by the closure of 12 education providers in 2009.&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;From 1 January 2010, overseas students affected by the closure who require a new visa to complete their studies at another school or college will be exempt from paying the $540 student visa application charge.&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Students will be able to apply to DIAC for a refund of their visa application fee if they've been affected by the closure of an education provider in 2009 and have had to apply for a new student visa. <strong>Strengthened student visa requirements</strong>&lt;br&gt;From 1 January 2010, prospective overseas students will need to demonstrate that they have access to at least $18,000 a year to fund their living costs in Australia, instead of the current $12,000.&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;The new figure is consistent with information published for international students in Australian Education International's (the international arm of DEEWR) 'Study in Australia' guide. Financial requirements include living costs, funds for tuition fees, travel costs and costs of any dependents. DIAC will also make an assessment of whether the funds demonstrated by students will be available to them while they are in Australia. The Minister notes that while international students can supplement their income with part-time work, they should not rely on part-time work to meet their expenses.&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;The measures target parts of the student visa caseload in India, Mauritius, Nepal, Brazil, Zimbabwe and Pakistan. Since the introduction of enhanced integrity measures, there has been an increase in the number of applications being withdrawn, from five per cent in July to 17 per cent in September.&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;To date, more than 150 agents have had their eVisa access suspended due to evidence of fraud or inactivity.</td>
<td>C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, New visa measures to assist international students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 February 2010</td>
<td><strong>Reforms to skilled migration program</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Government announces major reforms to the permanent skilled migration program to ensure it is more responsive to the needs of industry and employers, and to ensure that the skilled migration program is driven by demand for skills from Australian industry, rather than supply. The reforms include:&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;• <strong>The tightening of the list of occupations in high demand so only highly skilled migrants will be eligible to apply for independent skilled migration visas.</strong>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;The MODL will be revoked immediately as it is outdated and contains 106 occupations, many of which are less-skilled and no longer in demand. A new and more targeted Skilled Occupations List (SOL) will be developed by the independent body, Skills Australia, and reviewed annually. The Critical Skills List introduced at the beginning of 2009 which identified occupations in critical demand at</td>
<td>C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Migration reforms to deliver Australia’s skills needs</td>
</tr>
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</table>
A review of the points test used to assess migrants.

A review of the points test used to assess skilled migration applicants will consider issues including: whether some occupations should warrant more points than others; whether sufficient points are awarded for work experience and excellence in English; and whether there should be points for qualifications obtained from overseas universities. The review will report to Government later in 2010.

The possible capping of certain occupations to ensure skill needs are met across the board.

Amendments to the Migration Act will be introduced to give the Minister the power to set the maximum number of visas that may be granted to applicants in any one occupation if need be. This will ensure that the skilled migration program is not dominated by a handful of occupations.

9 February 2010
The Minister for Immigration assures international students currently studying in Australia who hold a vocational, higher education or postgraduate student visa that, under the recently announced changes, they will still be able to apply for permanent residence if their occupation is on the new SOL.

Students currently studying a course in an occupation that is not on the new SOL will have until the end of 2012 to apply for a temporary skilled graduate visa which will enable them to spend up to 18 months in Australia to acquire work experience and find an Australian employer willing to sponsor them on completion of their course.

The Minister states:

It must be remembered that a student visa is just that: a visa to study. It does not give someone an automatic entitlement to permanent residence.

International students should be focused on obtaining a good qualification from a quality education provider in a field in which they want to work.

Similarly, Australia’s migration program is not and should not be determined by the courses studied by international students.

The Rudd Government’s view is that quality education providers will continue to prosper if they focus on their core business of delivering high quality courses to both Australian and overseas students.

Australia will continue to welcome international students and provide an opportunity for those who have the necessary qualifications and skills to find an Australian employer willing to sponsor them for a permanent visa.
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<th>Milestone</th>
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<th>Source Documents</th>
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<td>17 February 2010</td>
<td>Changes made to the permanent skilled migration program in 2009 resulted in an increase in visa grants to registered nurses (increase of 1,156), computing professionals (increase of 844), engineers (total increase of 2,067) and doctors (increase of 551). At the same time the occupations recording the biggest falls in primary visa grants were cooks, chefs and pastry cooks (decrease of 2,102), accountants (decrease of 1,851) and hairdressers (decrease of 767).</td>
<td>C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, <a href="#">Skilled migration changes deliver more workers Australia needs</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 9 March 2010           | **Release of Baird Review**  
Bruce Baird’s report on the review of Education Services for Overseas Students Act (2000) is released.  
The review includes consideration of the link between the growth in overseas student numbers and Australia’s migration program. The report states:  
Migration-skewed demand has undoubtedly impacted on the reputation of our international education sector but the recent changes to general skilled migration will go some way to address this.  
**Response to Baird Review**  
The Minister for Immigration welcomes the release of the final report of the Baird Review, and Mr Baird’s support for the Rudd Government’s changes to the Skilled Migration Program announced on 8 February 2010.  
The Minister states:  
The skilled migration program changes will encourage overseas students to focus on obtaining a quality education from a high quality provider by removing incentives for students to apply for a course simply in the hope of being granted permanent residence.  
The changes will in no way impact on international students coming to Australia to gain a legitimate qualification and then return home. | J Gillard (Minister for Education), media release, [Baird review into international students final report](#)  
C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, [Minister welcomes Baird review](#) |
| 27 April 2010          | **Student visa integrity measures**  
New measures are introduced to improve the integrity of the student visa program. These measures include the following:  
- Changes to the assessment levels of those studying more than one course, (they will now be required to meet the highest level of risk assessment within their package of courses).  
- Changes to the migration regulations to strengthen visa cancellation guidelines where a student is found to have deferred or suspended their studies for non-genuine reasons.  
- Visa requirements for postgraduate students have been streamlined to support growth in the sector, which has proven to have low levels of fraud and high levels of compliance. | C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, [Government closes student visa loopholes](#) |
These latest measures add to previous measures that have been introduced to strengthen the integrity of the student visa program since August 2009.

7 May 2010
The Government temporarily suspends lodgement of three classes of offshore GSM visas from 8 May 2010:

This measure is necessary to facilitate the transition from the current SOL to the new SOL and to ensure the occupational profile of applicants for GSM clearly reflects the needs of the Australian labour market.

... The Government will announce the new SOL later this month.

These changes do not affect international students applying for onshore GSM visas.

11 May 2010
Migration program planning figures 2010–11

The overall size of the Migration Program remains unchanged from the previous year. However, the skilled migration program has been increased by 5,750 program places. This includes an additional 9,150 places for employer-sponsored skilled migration and a decrease of 3,600 places for the GSM program.

17 May 2010
New SOL released

The new SOL lists a total of 181 managerial, professional and trade occupations—a reduction of 219 occupations from the 400 occupations previously included on the list. Crucially, the list omits cooking and hairdressing occupations, which had been two of the most popular courses of study for overseas students planning to transition to permanent residency. The new SOL will apply to all new GSM applications lodged on or after the date of implementation.

The SOL is intended to deliver a more targeted GSM program, as part of the Government’s larger package of reforms to move to a ‘demand–driven’ skilled migration program. The Government states:

The new list is intended to align the GSM program with Australia’s overall workforce development strategy, also developed by Skills Australia. The new list is focused on targeting specialised occupations that require a long lead time of formal education and training ... The list of occupations will be reviewed annually but it is expected that it will be relatively stable over time.

The Government affirms that international students will be valued as permanent migrants where they have the skills that are needed by the economy. The Government advises students:

It is strongly advised that you do not undertake studies with the sole purpose of obtaining a migration outcome. The student visa process is an entirely separate process to skilled migration and there is no guarantee that a student will be eligible for skilled
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 Australia’s net overseas migration rate (NOM) peaked in the 12 months to 31 March 2009 at 305,900. The Minister attributes this figure to the rapid growth of temporary migration.  
 The Government anticipates that the NOM will fall by approximately 20 per cent as a result of reforms to permanent and temporary migration visas.  
 The Minister states that the Government is ‘committed to ongoing reform to ensure immigration levels are guided by Australia’s needs and not by the desire of prospective migrants to come to Australia’.  
 **Population Flows—Immigration Aspects 2008-09**  
 There was a 60 per cent increase in onshore employer-sponsored visa grants as compared with 2007–08. It is anticipated that there will be an increase in the uptake of employer-sponsored places, especially among international students who have recently graduated from an Australian institution. | C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release,  
 Reforms result in 20 per cent drop in net overseas migration  
| 30 June 2010      | The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship confirms that Net Overseas Migration (NOM) will drop by about 20 per cent by the end of the financial year, compared to the 2008 level. This is explained as being a result of reforms to temporary and permanent migration, and economic conditions. | C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release,  
 Net overseas migration on track to fall by 20 per cent |
| 1 July 2010       | The new SOL, containing 183 occupations, comes into effect. Transition arrangements are put in place for people who were overseas students at the time of the announcement of the new arrangements on 8 February 2010. | C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release,  
 New skilled occupations list targets skills for national economy |
| 8 September 2010  | The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship announces that 2008–09 was the third largest program year on record in terms of student visa applications, with 291,128 visa applications lodged. | C Evans (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release,  
 Australia continues to welcome international students |
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Source Documents</th>
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| 27 October 2010 | **Report on Migration Program 2009–10**  
The total outcome for the 2009–10 Migration Program was 168,623 places, which was 0.05 per cent below the planning level. The skill stream accounted for 107,868 places, or 64 per cent of the total Migration Program.  
There was an increase in the proportion of employer sponsored skilled migrants, with these making up 38 per cent of the skill stream, compared to 33 per cent in 2008–09 and 22 per cent in 2007–08. The Minister stated that this was consistent with ‘the government's focus on high-demand, employer-sponsored professionals in areas where Australia has critical skill shortages.’ | C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Migration program targeting skills DIAC, Report on Migration program 2009–10, Canberra, 2010 |
| 11 November 2010 | The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship announces a new points test for independent skilled migrants, as part of the Government’s ongoing reforms to skilled migration. The new test will emphasis English, work experience and high level qualifications, and will complement the SOL.  
The Minister states that the existing points test ‘… puts an overseas student with a short term vocational qualification and one year’s work experience in Australia ahead of a Harvard educated environmental engineer with three years’ relevant work experience.’  
The test will apply only to independent skilled migrants, not employer-sponsored migrants. It will apply to applications lodged from 1 July 2011. | C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, New migration points test to better address Australia’s skill needs |
| 16 December 2010 | The Government announces a strategic review of the student visa program, with the aim of ‘enhancing the continued competitiveness of the international education sector, as well as strengthening the integrity of the Student visa program’. The review will be undertaken by Michael Knight AO, and will report to Government by mid-2011.  
The Government also announces a package of measures aimed at streamlining the student visa application process for low risk groups. These measures include:  
• Reducing the Student visa assessment levels from April 2011. As part of this decision, the higher education visa assessment levels for applicants from China and India will also be reduced.  
• Refining the rules to further enable pre-paid boarding fees to be counted toward a student’s cost of living requirements in their visa application;  
• Improved information exchange between the Government and the international education sector, including provision of a quarterly statistical publication on the Student visa program to allow the sector to track emerging student visa trends.  
• Enabling assessment level 4 vocational education and training (VET) students to undertake a package of certificate level courses to meet visa requirements. | C Evans (Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations) and C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Review of Student visa program |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Source Documents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 February 2011</td>
<td>The first report on the student visa program is published. The report provides comparative data showing student visa applications, grants and trends over the past seven years as well as application rates for the first six months of 2010–11. The report indicates that, while student visa applications have declined from the record high of 2008-09, application numbers for 2009–10 were at a level similar to 2007–08.</td>
<td>C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Student Visa Program Report published DIAC, Student visa program trends 2003–04 to 2009–10, Canberra, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 May 2011</td>
<td><strong>Migration Program planning figures 2011–12</strong></td>
<td>C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Budget 2011–12: Skilled migration reform to support Australia’s growing economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The 2011–12 Migration Program is set at 185,000 places, an increase of 16,300 places compared to 2010–11. The skilled stream will comprise 125,800 places, accounting for around two thirds of the total program.</td>
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<td>20 May 2011</td>
<td>The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship announces that the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the Pearson Test of English Academic (Pearson) and the Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) from Cambridge ESOL (Cambridge) would also be acceptable tests for Student visa application purposes. To date, the main English language test accepted by the Department for Student visa purposes is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Occupational English Test (OET) will also be accepted for specified countries where IELTS is not available. These additional English language test options are intended to help create competition in the English language testing market, while creating more test places for student visa applicants.</td>
<td>C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, New English language test providers for student visas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 June 2011</td>
<td><strong>Outlook for Net Overseas Migration</strong></td>
<td>C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, The outlook for net overseas migration DIAC, The outlook for Net Overseas Migration, Canberra 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>The first edition of a new annual report, the <em>Outlook for Net Overseas Migration</em>, is released. It outlines a predicted continued decline in NOM to about 160,000 people by June 2011. This is an almost 50 per cent decline from the peak of 315,000 people for the year ending December 2008.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10 August 2011</td>
<td><strong>Report on migration program 2010–11</strong></td>
<td>C Bowen Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Skilled migration reform supporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The report on the 2010–11 migration program is released. The final outcome is 168,685 places, just short of the planning figure of 168,700 places. The outcome for the skill stream is 113,725 places, which accounts for 67.4 per cent of the total migration program.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Milestone</td>
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| 22 September 2011| **Release of Knight Review**  
The Government releases the report of the *Strategic Review of the Student Visa Program 2011* (the Knight Review) and announces a package of measures to be implemented in line with the report’s recommendations.  
The report of the Knight Review makes 41 recommendations which include making some significant changes to visa processing, and post-study work rights, for students in the university sector. It also recommends some minor changes to the student visa program across other education sectors, and to the integrity measures applied by the immigration department in monitoring and enforcing student visa compliance.  
**Response to Knight Review**  
The Government response to the Knight review gives in-principle support for all 41 recommendations, and indicates that it plans to implement them all, with some modifications. Specific measures include:  
- streamlined processing for students enrolling in Bachelor or higher degree courses will commence in the first half of 2012  
- a new post study work visa, valid for up to four years, will be introduced for Bachelor, Masters and PhD graduates  
- the financial requirements for some student applicants will be reduced  
- a new ‘genuine temporary entry’ criterion will be introduced for all student visa applications, and  
- the student visa risk management framework will be comprehensively reviewed.  
All of the planned changes will be implemented by early 2013.                                                                                             | C Evans (Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace relations) and C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release,  
| 8 November 2011  | The first stage of reforms in response to the Knight Review are implemented, including:  
- Introduction of an upfront ‘genuine temporary entrant’ requirement for assessing student visa applications  
- Removal of the English language test requirement for Independent ELICOS (subclass 570) visa applications subject to Assessment Level 4 or above  
- Visa extension for up to six months after thesis submission for Higher Degree by Research students  
- Inclusion of pre-paid home stay fees in financial assessments on the same basis as pre-paid boarding fees, and                                                                                         | C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release,  
[Students to benefit as Knight Review changes rolled out](https://www.canberra.gpo.gov.au/publishing/2011/08/16/students_to_benefit_as_knight_review_changes_rolled_out)                                                                 |
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<th>Milestone</th>
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<td>30 November 2011</td>
<td>The Government announces that more students will be eligible for post-study work rights, in addition to university students as recommended by the Knight Review. Post-study work rights will be extended to Bachelor or higher degree graduates from other education providers accredited to offer degree level programs, in addition to university graduates. Graduates who complete their degrees after at least two academic years’ study in Australia will be able to access post-study work arrangements from 2013. The new arrangements extend the stay for Bachelor students from 18 months to two years, while Masters by research and PhD students will be able to stay for three and four years respectively following completion of their studies.</td>
<td>C Evans (Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace relations) and C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Government extends support for international education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 February 2012</td>
<td>The Government announces that it will reduce the visa assessment levels across a range of student visa subclasses, making the student visa application process simpler for prospective students from 29 countries. This implements one of the recommendations of a Departmental review of student visa assessment levels in 2011.</td>
<td>C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Simplifying student visas</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| 22 March 2012      | The Government announces the next stage of implementation of reforms recommended by the Knight review. These include:  
• Streamlined visa processing arrangements for prospective students enrolled in Bachelor, Masters or Doctoral degrees at participating universities comes into effect on 24 March.  
• More flexible work conditions for overseas students come into effect on 26 March.  
• Improved access to English language study for schools sector visa applicants and for student guardian visa holders comes into effect on 24 March.  
• The requirement for higher risk schools sector visa applicants to provide evidence of an English language proficiency test is removed as of 24 March.  

The Government also introduces legislation to abolish automatic visa cancellation for overseas students who breach their visa conditions. This was a recommendation of the Knight Review, and is intended to provide fairer outcomes for students by allowing the Department to take into account the individual circumstances of a student when considering a breach of visa conditions. | C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Changes to boost international education Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012 |
| 8 May 2012         | **Migration Program Planning figures 2012–13**  
The 2012–13 Migration Program is set at 190,000 places, an increase of 5,000 places from 2011–12. The additional places are allocated almost entirely to the skill stream, which is set at 129,250 places. This is intended to ‘help fill skills shortages in parts of the Australian economy’. | C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Targeted migration increase to fill skills gaps |
<p>| 2 July 2012        | A new advisory council on skilled migration is announced. The council will advise the Government on the role of skilled migration in | C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Targeted migration increase to fill skills gaps |</p>
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<th>Milestone</th>
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<td>Overseas students: immigration policy changes 1997–2015</td>
<td>the Australian economy, to assist with the development of migration policies and programs. It is composed of 18 members, drawn from business, industry, unions and academia.</td>
<td>Citizenship), media release, New advisory council on skilled migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 July 2012</td>
<td><strong>Report on Migration Program 2011–12</strong>&lt;br&gt;The report on the 2011–12 Migration Program is released. The final outcome is almost precisely on target, with 184,998 visas granted against a planning figure of 185,000. The skill stream accounts for over two-thirds of the total, with 125,755 visas granted, while 58,604 visas are granted in the family stream.&lt;br&gt;Notably, India is the source country for the largest number of permanent migrants for the first time, with 29,018 places (15.7 per cent of the total program). The second and third largest source countries are China (25,509 places) and the UK (25,274 places).&lt;br&gt;Within the skill stream, the employer sponsored category comprised 37 per cent, with 46,554 visas granted, while general skilled migration comprised 57.1 per cent of the skill stream. The majority of primary applicants in the skilled independent category (76.8 per cent) had an occupation on the SOL.</td>
<td>C Bowen (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Government delivers skilled migration on target DIAC, 2011–12 Migration Program Report, Canberra, July 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 May 2013</td>
<td><strong>Migration Program planning figures 2013–14</strong>&lt;br&gt;The 2013–14 Migration Program is set at 190,000 places, which is exactly the same as the previous year. 128,550 places are allocated to the skill stream, and 60,885 places are allocated to the family stream. This represents a reallocation of 700 places away from the skill stream and into the family stream compared to 2012–13 ‘in response to continuing high levels of demand for family stream places’.</td>
<td>B O’Connor (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release, Budget 2013: Migration program delivering for Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 October 2013</td>
<td>The newly elected Coalition Government announces that it will extend the streamlined visa processing available to applicants in the University sector (a recommendation of the Knight Review) to selected non-university providers. It will also streamline the student visa assessment levels against which student visa applicants are assessed, reducing the number of assessment levels from five down to three, and reducing the financial requirement for students assessed at Level 3.&lt;br&gt;These reforms are intended to restore education as one of Australia’s key export sectors, and undo what the Coalition terms ‘Labor’s damage’ to the sector.</td>
<td>C Pyne (Minister for Education) and S Morrison (Minister for Immigration and Border Protection), media release, New streamlined student visas to grow Australian education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 May 2014</td>
<td><strong>Migration Program planning figures 2014–15</strong>&lt;br&gt;The 2014–15 Migration Program is again set at 190,000 places—the same as the previous two years. As in 2013–14, almost 68 per cent of places (128,550) are allocated to skilled migration, with a focus on employer-nominated categories.</td>
<td>S Morrison (Minister for Immigration and Border Protection), media release, Budget 2014: Boosting the economy through Australia’s migration program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 May 2014</td>
<td>Streamlined visa processing, which was introduced for students in the university sector following the Knight Review, will be extended</td>
<td>C Pyne (Minister for Education) and</td>
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Overseas students: immigration policy changes 1997–2015

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<th>Milestone</th>
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<tr>
<td>9 June 2014</td>
<td>Chefs, bricklayers and wall and floor tilers are added to the SOL, reflecting a shortage in these areas and a predicted increase in demand for these skills. There are now 188 occupations listed on the SOL.</td>
<td>A Robb (Minister for Trade and Investment) and M Cash (Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection), media release, In-demand trades added to the skilled occupation list</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 12 September 2014  | **Report on Migration Program 2013–14**  
The 2013–14 Migration Program target of 190,000 places was achieved. In the skill stream, 128,550 visas were granted, with more than 63 per cent of these going to occupational professionals, 22 per cent to technicians and trade workers, and 9 per cent to managers. The employer sponsored, business innovation and investment, and state and territory government nominated categories together accounted for more than 60 per cent of skilled migration visas granted. | S Morrison (Minister for Immigration and Border Protection), media release, Government delivers 2013–14 migration program DIBP, 2013–14 Migration Programme report, Canberra, 2014 |
| 24 November 2014   | Visa applicants for whom English language testing is required are now able to use scores from the Test of English Language as a Foreign Language internet-based test (TOEFL iBT) and the Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE Academic) as evidence of their English language ability, as an alternative to the IELTS test. These tests have been accepted for student visa applicants since 2011, but will now also be accepted for skilled, temporary graduate, work and holiday, and former resident visa applicants. | M Cash (Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection), media release, More English test options for visa applicants |
| 12 May 2015        | **Migration Program planning figures 2015–16**  
The 2015–16 Migration Program planning figures remain steady at 190,000 places, of which 128,550 are allocated to the skill stream. | P Dutton (Minister for Immigration and Border Protection), media release, Budget 2015: Restoring integrity to refugee intake |
| 16 June 2015       | The student visa framework will be significantly overhauled and simplified, with the aim of supporting the international education sector. Key reforms include:  
• The number of available student visa subclasses will be reduced from eight to two  
• Existing streamlined visa processing and student visa assessment levels will be replaced with a new single immigration risk | C Pyne (Minister for Education and Training) and M Cash (Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection), media release, Simplified student visa |
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<td>framework for overseas students. Under the new framework, the evidence required to demonstrate sufficient finances and English language ability will be based on the immigration profile of the country of origin, and the education provider. A working group will be formed to guide implementation of the new framework, which will occur when the existing streamlined visa processing arrangements expire in June 2016.</td>
<td>process to boost Australia’s international education sector</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 17 June 2015    | **Migration Trends 2013–14**  
The *Migration Trends 2013–14* report shows that the number of student visas granted in 2013–14 (290,000) was the highest since the Global Financial Crisis. The Minister states:  
This is proof Australia’s Student Visa Programme continues to remain strong and appealing to the overseas market and keeps its place as one of Australia’s major export earners. | P Dutton (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship), media release,  
Migration Trends report highlights migration growth  
| 30 June 2015    | The SOL is updated to include panel beaters and cabinet makers, and remove urban and regional planners, dentists and dental specialists. | M Cash (Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) and S Birmingham (Assistant Minister for Education and Training), media release,  
Skilled occupation list updated |
### Appendix B: table of relevant immigration visa classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visa type</th>
<th>Subclass</th>
<th>Subclass Number</th>
<th>Eligibility</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student (Temporary)</strong></td>
<td>Independent ELICOS</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>For ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>For primary school; secondary school; and approved secondary exchange programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocational education and training</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>For Certificate I, II, III, and IV; diploma; advanced diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>Bachelor degree; associate degree; graduate certificate; graduate diploma; and Masters by coursework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postgraduate research</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>For Masters by research degree and Doctoral degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-award</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>For enabling courses; non-award foundation studies; other full-time courses or components of courses not leading to an Australian award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign Affairs or Defence</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>For full-time courses of all types undertaken by Foreign Affairs or Defence students sponsored by the Australian Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student guardian</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>Provides for certain persons to reside with a student in Australia, where that student requires a guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate Skilled (Temporary)</strong></td>
<td>Temporary graduate</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>This temporary visa enables former overseas students to complete a post-graduate professional year, gain skilled work experience or improve their English skills. To be eligible, applicants need to have recently completed an Australian degree, diploma or trade qualification as a result of at least 2 years study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C: glossary of acronyms and terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSL</td>
<td>Critical Skills List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIAC</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBP</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Border Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIMA</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIMIA</td>
<td>Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELICOS</td>
<td>English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSM</td>
<td>The General Skilled Migration program is a component of the skilled migration stream of the annual Migration Program. The GSM program is open to skilled migrants who are not sponsored by an employer. The options open to applicants under the GSM include, applying as independent applicants, sponsorship by a relative or nomination by a State or Territory government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration program</td>
<td>In this paper refers to the entirety of Australia’s annual migrant intake in both permanent and temporary categories. The reference to the immigration program in this paper is distinct from the official Migration Program, announced annually by DIBP. In addition to the entry of permanent migrants under the Migration Program, Australia also accepts various categories of temporary migrants, whose numbers are not fixed by the Government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration Program</td>
<td>Refers to the Government’s official, non-humanitarian, permanent migration program, comprising mainly of the skilled and family migration categories. The Migration Program operates within planning levels that are set by the Government every financial year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODL</td>
<td>Migration Occupations in Demand List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas student program</td>
<td>Comprises visa categories that enable foreign nationals to enter Australia on a temporary basis in order to undertake full time study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled migrant intake</td>
<td>Includes reference to both permanent and temporary skilled migrants entering Australia as part of the overall migrant intake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled migration program</td>
<td>Refers to permanent skilled migration under both the employer-sponsored and GSM categories of the annual Migration Program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOL</td>
<td>Skilled Occupations List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary migration</td>
<td>Refers to migrants who enter Australia on a temporary visa, such as business or student visa. Unlike the Migration Program, which is capped annually, the number of visas granted under temporary entry visa categories is not pre-determined by the government, but are rather driven by the supply of applicants under these categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>