

Dear Parliament and Senate Members,

I am kindly writing to you with regards of the current situation with the skilled visa system, and appreciate the opportunity to highlight how the recent visa reforms may significantly impact the Australian economy.

As you are aware, in 2016 more than 200 occupations were removed from the Skilled Occupation Lists (SOL). At that time, it reflected the current situation of the labour market very well, and allowed the regulation and limitation of the excessive migration demand within the particular occupation niches (such as Life Scientists, for example). This limitation was in line with lack of jobs in the sector and the considerable surplus of the job seekers.

I appreciate the challenges that must come with considering the large and varied stakeholder group when undertaking visa reform processes. I would like to propose a business case for international PhD students and graduates to remain in Australia.

The changes to the SOL impacted a relatively small group of international PhD candidates performing their doctoral studies in Australia. These highly-trained PhD candidates within certain occupation niches, alongside all others on the SOL, also lost an opportunity to contribute back into Australian society as a result of these visa reforms.

The Australian government commits \$20 million annually to the International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (IPRS) program, funding 300 highly-competitive PhD candidates to study at Australian universities ([reference](#)). These PhD candidates have honed their skills, learned how their science fits into the Australian context, made connections with Australian academics and industries, and have driven the production of intellectual property. Several recent reports have recently highlighted the economic benefits of investment into research, with the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes demonstrating each \$1 invested into medical research yields a \$4 return ([reference](#)). Similarly, a report by the Group of Eight (Go8) universities demonstrated not only a \$10 return on investment for each \$1 spent on research at these institutions, but for every job created at a Go8 university, 2.4 jobs are generated in the broader community ([reference](#)).

The current visa reforms are such that this small group of PhD graduates have lost access to Permanent Residency visa streams. This means, upon the completion of their PhD training, these highly-skilled research scientists are delivered back to their home countries, perfectly poised to drive innovation and discovery in their country of origin. This is an altruistic gesture on behalf of Australia, but a lost opportunity for the economy, job market and innovation potential here.

I am kindly highlighting this issue to you and your consideration. I sincerely hope that an amendment of this potential oversight could offer a pathway international PhD graduates to remain in Australia, and to help the Australian economy, industry and science grow.

Humbly and sincerely,