

Skilled migration inquiry
Submission No. 54

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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Department of House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

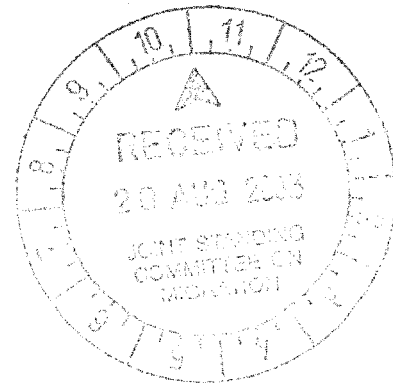
Dear Sir/Madam

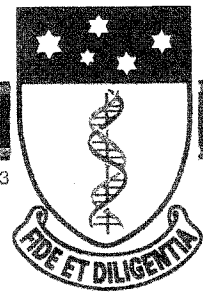
Attached please find a response from the Australian Institute of Medical Scientists to the Parliamentary Review of Skilled Migration.

If you have any questions relating to the submission, please contact me.

Sincerely

Jan Noble
Executive Officer





RESPONSE BY THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENTISTS TO THE PARLIAMENTARY REVIEW OF SKILLED MIGRATION

The Australian Institute of Medical Scientists thanks the Joint Standing committee on Migration for the opportunity to respond to the paper *Skilled migration issues and views*.

The Australian Institute of Medical Scientists (AIMS) is the professional association representing medical scientists working in hospitals, universities and private medical laboratories in Australia. Professional membership of the Association is restricted to qualified medical scientists. One of the benefits of membership of AIMS is that it is recognised by employers as indicating professional status.

AIMS is also the body to which the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR) has delegated the authority to assess the skills and qualifications of those people who are applying to migrate to Australia under the Commonwealth's General Skilled Migration Program as medical scientists or medical laboratory technical officers. AIMS carries out these assessments on behalf of NOOSR.

Medical scientists perform medical laboratory tests on blood and other body tissues to assist in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease.

Medical scientists work in hospital laboratories, private pathology laboratories, state health laboratories and universities. In larger hospitals and laboratories, medical scientists usually specialise in a specific discipline, such as immunology, cytology, haematology, microbiology or blood transfusion. Based on the Commonwealth Government's census figures there were 9,514 medical scientists in Australia in 1996.

Training and qualifications

The academic training for medical scientists in Australia is a Bachelor of Science or Applied Science degree in which the majors include specialised medical science subjects. There are currently eleven bachelor degree courses in medical laboratory science conducted by universities in Australia and New Zealand that have been accredited by AIMS. These courses are assessed against AIMS Minimum Standards for Professional Degree Courses in Medical Science by a team of specialist assessors; the accreditation is usually for a period of five years. Graduates of these courses are eligible for membership of the Institute upon graduation, and to be classified as medical scientists. Graduates of other relevant science degrees, both in Australia and

overseas, are assessed individually and normally require a minimum of two years' post graduate professional experience, in addition to a relevant degree equivalent to at least an Australian bachelor degree, before they can be classified as a medical scientist.

Although this information and details of the AIMS accredited degrees are available on the AIMS web site, a disappointingly small number of applicants who have studied in Australia and who apply to AIMS for assessment have actually undertaken an accredited degree.

Assessment process

The Australian Institute of Medical Scientists considers that its role in assessing the qualifications and skills of potential migrants is chiefly to maintain standards and to ensure that migrants who may gain entry as medical scientists have the qualifications and experience to work as medical scientists in the Australian health system. Maintaining the current high standards and ensuring patient welfare are paramount considerations.

Currently AIMS conducts these assessments based on certified documentary evidence of qualifications and experience provided by the applicant. There are a number of disadvantages with this system. Firstly, while the greatest care is taken to ensure the validity of these documents, the possibility of fraud is always present. Secondly, although the AEI-NOOSR *Country Education Profiles* provide a very useful comparison between Australian and overseas qualifications, it is not possible in the scope of such a publication to provide a detailed coverage of the content of each course; thus while an overseas qualification may be educationally comparable to, for example, an Australian bachelor degree, it is not possible to determine the quality of individual subjects. Thirdly, it is not always possible to determine by documentary evidence, the quality and currency of work experience obtained in some countries other than Australia. We know that the standards in clinical laboratories are high in certain countries, but suspect that in some countries it is unacceptably low.

For these reasons AIMS is considering a change to the procedure by which overseas applicants are assessed, to include a written examination and possibly a skills assessment for all applicants who have not graduated from an AIMS accredited degree.

Employment

Currently the greatest need for skilled medical scientists in Australia is in regional and country areas; a need that is held in common with most health professionals. AIMS does not have any information on the employment or place of residence of medical scientists who migrate to Australia. However anecdotal evidence would suggest that, as with other professions, there is a gravitation of medical science professionals to major cities on the eastern seaboard. There are many disincentives to maintaining skills in remote and rural communities, including difficulty of access to post graduate studies and general lack of support structures to further knowledge and skills. Increasing accreditation requirements within the sector also discourage services by increasing costs associated with small laboratories.