



australian nursing federation

Skilled migration inquiry
Submission No. 13 (a)

26 August 2003

Steve Dyer
Review Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Dyer

Review of Skilled Migration Issues Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Review of Skilled Migration Issues paper. As you would be aware from our previous submission to the Joint Standing Committee, the ANF fully supports career opportunities for nurses including international mobility. The ANF is opposed, however, to recruiting nurses from countries with significant resource shortages in their health care systems. I have attached copies of the ANF and the International Council of Nurses position statements on the ethical recruitment of nurses.

The ANF is also strongly opposed to the use of the skilled migration program as a primary strategy to overcome the current nursing shortage in Australia. The World Health Organisation Report, *International Nurse Mobility Trends and Implications* states that, *international recruitment of nurses is a symptom of global shortages of nurses but the underlying problems can only be solved by local level and country level improvements in the status of nursing and in the planning and management of the nursing workforce* (p.5). Some of these local solutions are identified in the final report of the National Review of Nursing Education commissioned by the Australian Government. The ANF would expect that the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs to work cooperatively with the NRNE implementation taskforce when developing recommendations in relation to the places for registered nurses and midwives on the Migration Occupation in Demand list.

I have also attached the ANF response to specific issues raised in the issues paper. Please contact Anne Douglas in the Canberra office (or anne.douglas@anf.org.au) if you require any other information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jill Iliffe".

JILL ILIFFE
Federal Secretary

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AUSTRALIAN NURSING FEDERATION



response to

REVIEW OF SKILLED MIGRATION ISSUES PAPER

1. How well do current migration arrangements handle the risk that recruiting skilled migrants could reduce opportunities for Australians?

As noted above Australia is currently experiencing a shortage of nurses. This is particularly acute in some specialty areas such as aged care, midwifery and rural and remote area nursing. The current level of migration of nurses to Australia is unlikely to reduce opportunities for Australian nurses. There has been little significant change in the number of nurses migrating to Australia either in a permanent or temporary capacity over the past decade. The number of nurses from Australia who seek nursing experience overseas has also not altered significantly over the same period.

	93-94	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00
Temporary migration to Australia	248	237	250	287	496	772	854
Permanent migration to Australia	847	1081	1166	955	994	1080	1158
TOTAL	1095	1318	1416	1242	1490	1852	2012
Temporary migration from Australia	720	725	786	807	815	851	932
Permanent migration from Australia	666	591	633	651	651	661	752
TOTAL	1386	1316	1419	1458	1466	1512	1684

Source: Australian Institute for Health and Welfare 2003 *Nursing Labour Force 2001* pp.109 and 110

2. Do Australian migration arrangements maximise the opportunities for migrants with skills to make a contribution?

Nurses who migrate to Australia under programs such as the Family Stream and the Humanitarian Program should be provided with assistance to apply for a nursing license with the appropriate nurse regulatory authority in Australia. Information provided to prospective nurse migrants should make it clear that nurse licensing is done at the State and Territory level. There are opportunities for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs to work with the nurse regulatory authorities, State and Territory Chief Nursing Officers (however titled) and the ANF to examine the way in which information is provided to nurses migrating to Australia.

3. How well do the present migration arrangements ensure that migrant's skills are accepted?

There are clear and transparent processes in place within nursing in Australia for the recognition of nursing qualifications of nurses educated overseas. These processes have been developed by the various nurse regulatory authorities and are nationally consistent. Nursing is a highly skilled occupation and in Australia the profession is regulated under State and Territory laws. Migrating nurses must comply with the national competency standards developed by the Australian Nursing Council (the national coordinating body for the State and Territory nurse regulatory authorities) and have a certificate of proficiency in the English language. The current arrangements for the recognition of overseas nursing qualifications are designed to protect the health and safety of the Australian public, however they are no more stringent than those that are required of nurses educated in Australia. The ANF strongly supports the maintenance of these professional standards.

4. If the problem is simply a shortage of skills why is permanent migration a solution?

Permanent migration is not a solution to the nursing skills shortage in Australia. As can be seen from the figures in Table 1, Australia does not attract sufficient nursing migrants to meet the current nursing workforce shortage in any event. Nurses who choose to migrate to Australia will, as they always have, contribute in a diverse way to the nursing profession in Australia and to the community in general. Migrants bring knowledge and skills that enhance the attributes of their Australian educated colleagues and they make a valuable contribution to the continuing development of Australia's multicultural society.

5. What should the role of government be in providing potential migrants with access to informal networks to inform them of job opportunities?

Government should provide potential migrants with access to any information that will facilitate their resettlement in Australia. This can be done through website links, development of information packs, and access to contact people to assist with employment and other professional queries.

6. Would it be more efficient to use a specialised recruiter rather than rely on a direct connection between prospective skilled migrant and the employer, or depend on informal networks to encourage skilled migration?

The ANF is aware that specialised recruiters can assist nurses to work through specific migration issues, but control mechanisms must be in place to protect both the nurse and the potential employer. Migration agents and recruitment agents need to be closely monitored and accredited to ensure compliance with Australian regulations. Reports from the UK and USA describe recruiters charging exorbitant fees and misrepresenting wages and terms and conditions of employment. There is reference to recruiters in the ICN position statement on ethical nurse recruitment.

7. The current skilled migration arrangements are designed to minimise abuse of migrant workers, yet cases of exploitation are reported.

It is the role of the Australian Government to ensure migrants are fully informed about industrial practices in Australia and to support them in their initial settlement period to access employment support systems such as trade unions and professional organisations.

8. How significant an issue is this and how might it be remedied?

The issue has not been raised with the ANF as being a problem in relation to nursing. Generally, registered and enrolled nurses who migrate to Australia learn quickly in the workplace about their industrial rights. Anecdotally, however, the issue has been raised at recent international forums held by the Commonwealth Nurses Federation and the International Council of Nurses where nurses, particularly those from African countries, have expressed a sense of exploitation when they have migrated to the United States or the United Kingdom, in that their salary and conditions were less than those received by nurses educated locally. Under nursing awards and agreements in Australia, that particular situation could not develop unless the nurse was on an individual contract, which is not common within nursing. Additionally, at the same international forums, nursing representatives from the Philippines described the situation where agencies recruited people into nursing courses, paid for their education, and then bonded them to work overseas. The nurse, as an employee of the agency, had no control over where they worked, what shifts they worked, or how much they were paid. This situation has not been raised with the ANF as occurring in Australia.

9. How well do existing migration programs encourage those with skills to offer?

Existing programs are sufficient to encourage nurses to apply to migrate.

10. How can migrants be encouraged to settle in specific areas?

There is a shortage of nurses in Australia in all specialist areas of nursing and in metropolitan, rural and remote areas. Incentives to encourage nurses to work in particular areas could include above award remuneration, the provision of accommodation or an accommodation allowance, a study allowance, clinical support and access to continuing education. The ANF does not advise nurses who are new arrivals to work where appropriate support and assistance is not available, particularly if it is the remote areas of Australia. The ANF recommends that employers provide structured ongoing support programs for nurses who have recently migrated to Australia.

11. How well does the points system serve Australia's interests?

Appropriate nursing qualifications and English language ability must remain minimum requirements in any assessment process, as they are essential to protect the health and safety of the public and to maintain consistent national standards for nursing in Australia.

12. Are the existing skilled migration programs sufficiently flexible to respond to changing local and international circumstances?

There was sufficient flexibility to put nursing as a priority on the skilled migration program. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs should work closely with the State and Territory Chief Nursing Officers (however titled), the Department of Health and Ageing, the Australian Health Workforce Officials Committee and nursing representative bodies such as the ANF. The processes for determining how long nursing remains on the Migration Occupation in Demand list and the number of nurses accepted through this process should be informed by effective workforce planning systems.

13. What is the migration programs role in the "brain drain"?

If the migration is of a temporary nature there is a potential benefit to source countries through the return of migrant workers, remittance of income earned and the establishment of links between the migrant and their receiving country. Nurses may gain additional skills in Australia, which they then take back to their own countries.

The greatest risk however is that Australia may be *draining the brain* of other countries through its skilled migration policy. It is likely that the benefits to receiving countries such as Australia far outweigh benefits to source countries. This is an important moral and ethical issue, which requires careful consideration and specific policy responses.

14. What role is there for a program designed to bring in unskilled labour?

Nursing is a highly skilled occupation that requires a comprehensive clinical and theoretical preparation for practice. Any recruitment of unskilled labour would require significant educational investment by Australia and the ANF considers that any investment should be made from within Australia's own population in the provision of additional higher education and vocational education places for undergraduate nursing students and pre-enrolment nursing students. Nursing is a popular course and according to the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee eligible applicants are being turned away every year.

The ANF is not opposed to the provision of education as an international aid program so that nursing students have access to an Australian education system in their own country.

Summary

The Australian Nursing Federation supports the rights of nurses educated overseas to utilise opportunities to further their careers in Australia. The ANF is opposed to the use of the skilled migration program to overcome current nursing shortages in Australia. The ANF is morally opposed to the recruitment of large numbers of nurses from countries where this has the potential to affect their ability to provide adequate health care to their own citizens.