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**AUSTRALIAN COMPUTER SOCIETY  
SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO OVERSEAS SKILLS  
RECOGNITION, UPGRADING AND LICENSING**

The Australian Computer Society (ACS) is the recognised association for Information & Communications Technology (ICT) professionals, attracting a large and active membership from all levels of the ICT industry. As a member of the Australian Council of Professions, the ACS is the public voice of the ICT profession and the guardian of professional ethics and standards in the ICT industry, with a commitment to the wider community to ensure the beneficial use of ICT.

Following amendment to the Migration Regulations 1994 in July 2002, responsibility for the establishment of skills criteria (qualifications and experience), became the responsibility of the designated professional bodies. The Australian Computer Society (ACS) is the designated professional organisation providing advice on ICT skills recognition for prospective migrants to Australia.

Under agreement between the ACS and the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) those seeking permanent migration to Australia as an ICT Professional must complete an assessment through the ACS prior to lodging a migration application.

The ACS sets the guidelines for skills assessment for applications it receives. These are set out in the Procedures Information Manual which is available to all applicants.

The ACS wishes to make the following comments on the Terms of Reference to the Inquiry into Overseas Skill Recognition, Upgrading and licensing.

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

- 1. Investigate and report on current arrangements for overseas skills recognition and associated issues of licensing and registration for:**

**Skills stream migrants who obtain assessment prior to migrating;**

**Families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants who seek assessment, registration or upgrading after arrival.**

Skills assessment for ICT applicants under the General Skilled Migration Program is undertaken by the ACS as the designated assessing body by DIMIA.

In 2004 the ACS processed just over 11,000 applications. This is down from a peak of nearly 16,000 in 2002. It takes between 6 to 8 weeks to assess an application and the result is valid for 12 months.

Of these 11,000 applications:

- 5400 were from within Australia. These applicants are primarily people who have studied an ICT related course at an Australian university and are applying for permanent residency on the basis of their Australian studies.
- 5600 were applications prior to migration.

## **Skills Assessment Process**

There are two assessment processes available.

### **1. Skills assessment**

Skills assessment undertaken by the ACS is based on both tertiary qualifications and experience in the ICT sector.

The ACS uses the current NOOSR Country Education Profiles (where a relevant country volume has been published) to establish the education level of qualifications held by the applicant.

Qualifications other than those listed in the relevant Country Education Profiles are assessed individually.

### **2. Recognition of Prior Learning**

Recognition for Prior Learning is an established practice in equating non formal learning with formal university/college courses. The objective is to establish whether or not the applicant has acquired the body of knowledge represented by the course concerned. This could vary from a single subject to a complete degree or diploma.

The Recognition of Prior Learning assessment allows applicants to demonstrate their knowledge so the ACS can assess the applicants to an appropriate standard under ACS guidelines. These guidelines have been developed in accordance with the National Framework for the Recognition of Training Agreement. In addition to the ACS RPL guidelines, the ACS has also developed Core Body of Knowledge Guidelines for ICT professionals that are used in assessing applicants.

Applicants are required to provide details of any relevant formal education qualifications they hold. Applicants who do not hold a recognised academic tertiary qualification will have deducted from their total work experience a period of relevant ICT professional experience deemed necessary to have reached the level of qualification allocated.

For example, if an applicant is allocated a qualification level equivalent to a 2-year diploma, they will have two years deducted from the total of

their recognized work experience, and therefore eight years in total will be needed. RPL Applicants are expected to be able to provide detailed work references.

The process for recognising prior learning allows for:

- Assessment or evidence of the learning acquired by an individual in relation to the required knowledge standard;
- Applicants to provide written evidence on how their prior experiences relate to the required knowledge standard;
- A range of methods and techniques to accurately assess their knowledge;
- Support mechanisms and dissemination of information to encourage and facilitate applicants' use of the RPL process.
- Clear criteria upon which recognised prior learning is based, including:
  - verification of the evidence provided;
  - that learning and knowledge is still current
  - that the claimed knowledge can be used at the standard required
  - their knowledge is relevant to the knowledge claimed
  - the knowledge can be applied outside of the specific context in which it was learned;
  - a sound connection can be made between learning acquired and the knowledge for which recognition is being claimed.

### **How can the program be improved?**

The ACS believes that the General Skilled Migration program can be improved by including a more detailed breakdown of occupations in the list of ICT occupations on the MODL and the SOL.

This would allow the General Skilled Migration program to be more responsive to the ICT labour market to reduce its impacts, particularly on graduate employment and in those areas of the ICT labour market currently considered to be in oversupply.

Specific ICT occupations/specialties can be added or removed from the SOL or MODL. This would mean that those areas in ICT considered in oversupply could be removed without affecting those areas where there is considered to be a skill shortage.

Skills assessment could then focus on the particular skills, qualifications and work experience of the applicant in relation to a more detailed breakdown of the list of ICT occupations on the SOL or MODL, identifying those with skills fitting into the relevant SOL or MODL ICT occupations categories.

The ICT labour market has been weak since around 2000 and has deteriorated markedly for graduates and postgraduates in particular.

ACS data indicates that the General Skilled Migration Program has contributed to the excess supply of computing professionals, especially those under 30, and does not appear to be making a significant contribution to those critical ICT skills currently missing from the Australian labour market.

Of the people granted permanent resident visas onshore:

- 50% were new graduates;
- 98% were classified as programmers (considered to be in oversupply);
- only 12% had skills in national shortage or were sponsored by and employer to fill a specific vacancy.

Between 2002 to 2004, the labour supply impacts of the program have been a contribution of between 6,100 to 9,300 people, equal to between 3.4% to 5.55 of the employed computing professional workforce each year. During this period, employment growth in the ICT sector grew by less than the annual supply of ICT graduates – for example in 2002 the ICT labour market grew by 5,900 but there were 8,300 ICT graduates.

Commencements and enrollments of Australian students in ICT courses have declined significantly in recent years and in 2004, were lower than they were in 1992. Indications are that poor employment prospects for ICT graduates are having a substantial impact on school leavers wanting to enroll in ICT courses.

### **Temporary Residents Needing Skills Assessment**

The long stay 457 visa program for skilled migrants is the most important program affecting the Australian professional workforce and is of particular relevance to ICT professionals.

In terms of 457 visas issued to ICT practitioners, ACS research indicates that these are predominantly granted to people:

- who are already in Australia on some form of other temporary visa; and

- are already working for their 457 visa sponsoring employer.

Unlike those applying for migration under the permanent residency program, ICT applicants for 457 visas do not need their qualifications assessed in the same way as for applicants for permanent residency.

The stated aim of the temporary residency programs is to bring talent into Australia that is not available from the Australian labour force. However, ACS research into ICT skilled migration suggests that many ICT temporary residents being sponsored into Australia are not providing skills that are considered in short supply within the ICT sector. Rather it would appear that the 457 program in particular is being used to provide the option of using overseas workers with limited job experience at a lower wage rate than employing Australian workers.

ACS research suggests:

- a proportion of 457 visa holders are being paid below market rates;
- this may be having an effect on undercutting the salaries and displacing Australian ICT workers, particularly graduates;
- firms employing 457 visa holders may be getting an artificial competitive advantage in tendering for large projects.

The result is that the ACS believes there has been a significant impact on young ICT professionals in Australia and particularly in the areas of programming and software design.

The ACS believes that the objective of the temporary residency programs should be to provide specific skills and experience to the labour market in a way that does not undermine Australian wages and conditions.

To do this the ACS recommends:

- that there needs to be greater granularity in the skill descriptions for ICT temporary resident 457 visa applicants and skill data collected by DIMIA. This way there can be a better comparison between the ICT skills in short supply and those in oversupply.
- That DIMIA should collect and publish information on the skill sets and specialization of temporary resident 457 visa holders (de-identified).
- There should be skills assessment for temporary resident 457 visa applicants to verify skill sets and ensure that only skills in short supply are imported into Australia. For time critical applicants temporary entry could be granted with the sponsor having to repatriate the applicant should the skills assessment be unable to corroborate the asserted skills.

Skills assessment and improved skill description data for temporary visa holders will allow migration policy and programs to be more refined to target skills that are in short supply. It will allow determination of any mismatch between those skills considered in oversupply and those in short supply and verification that those people being sponsored into the country on temporary residency programs do indeed possess skills that are not readily available in the Australian labour force.

### **Australian citizens returning after significant time overseas with overseas qualifications.**

The ACS skills assessment process is for people who need to have their skills assessed for the purposes of migrating to Australia. As such the ACS does not receive requests from Australian residents returning from overseas.

### **2. Consider how Australia's arrangements compare with those of other major immigration countries.**

The ACS has no input under this area.

### **3. Identify areas where Australia's procedures can be improved in terms of:**

#### **Communication of processes to users**

In response to requests and suggestions from ACS members, the ACS has recently upgraded the Skills Assessment section of its web site, which is the major source of information on the skills assessment process by both national and international applicants.

The updated web site contains additional information on the assessment process to better guide applicants through the process and includes additional avenues to appeal decisions.

Additionally the ACS has introduced a new web-based database that allows Assessors to gain quick access to the database no matter where they are located. This means that the ACS can use the best ICT Assessors in Australia because location is not an issue. The database also allows applicants (using a unique reference number and password) to access the current status of their application.

#### **Efficiency of processes and elimination of barriers.**

The ACS believes its skills assessment process is operating efficiently and we continue to address any barriers/impediments to achieving as quick a turn around for skills assessment applicants as possible.

The process is progressively being refined as technological and other changes allow. The timeframe for assessment has decreased from an initial 8 to 10 weeks to currently between 4 to 6 weeks.

Assessments requiring third party advice or confirmation of qualifications take longer to process, depending on the type of advice needed.

Assessing overseas qualifications relies on the Country Education Profiles (CEP). If the qualification or education institution is not listed in the CEP then the assessor usually has to undertake research on the qualification or institution. If this does not produce adequate results then information is sought from NOOSR.

If each country were to have a list of recognised institutes and universities with their associated degrees and other qualifications, this would greatly assist the assessment process and eliminate a major barrier to assessing migrant skills.

The ACS notes that its methodology for assessment (NOOSR CEPs) is the same as that followed by other comparable professional associations that undertake skills assessment for migrants (eg CPA and Engineers Institute). The timeframe for assessment of skills by these agencies is in the same range as that of the ACS (ie 4 to 6 weeks).

To assist applicants, the ACS has established an online application progress system that allows applicants to keep track of their application status.

The ACS believes the introduction of the Pre Application Skills Assessment process made a considerable difference to the overall timeframe for migration assessment. Under the PASA, the applicant sends their skills assessment application directly to the assessing body (the ACS for ICT assessments) rather than going through DIMIA. Only those whose qualifications and experience are assessed as being suitable (as opposed to unsuitable) can apply for migration to DIMIA.

**Early identification and response to persons needing skills upgrading (bridging courses).**

The ACS attempts to advise applicants as early as possible of any deficiencies or problems the assessor encounters in doing their skills assessment. However, it is then up to the individual to address those deficiencies or concerns to a satisfactory level so that the assessment process can continue.

**Awareness and acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers.**

The ACS has no input for this area.

**Achieving a greater consistency in recognition of qualifications for occupational licensing by state and territory regulators.**

ICT professionals are not required to be licensed, so this area does not apply.

**Alternative approaches to skills assessment and recognition of overseas qualifications.**

The ACS has no input for this area and believes the approach it takes, which is also used by other assessing bodies, is the best method of undertaking skills assessment for ICT professionals.