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The Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
Department of House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
By Post and Email: [jscm@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscm@aph.gov.au)

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Dear Committee Secretary

### **Inquiry into Skills Recognition, Upgrading and Licensing Joint Standing Committee on Migration – Submission by CPA Australia**

As Australia's largest professional association representing the interests of more than 105,000 finance, accounting and business professionals, CPA Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's Inquiry into current arrangements regarding overseas skills recognition.

Our comments against the Inquiry's Terms of Reference have been developed in consultation with CPA Australia's Board Education Committee which comprises eminent academics and practising members of the profession. CPA Australia is also a gazetted assessing authority for skilled migration.

#### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

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

CPA Australia receives applications for qualifications assessment from international students and potential skilled migrants. Demand for qualifications assessment fall into three categories:

1. International students seeking Associate membership of CPA Australia who therefore need an assessment of their overseas qualifications prior to admission to an accredited Australian university degree.
2. International students seeking an assessment for the purposes for skilled migration to Australia.
3. Individuals who have completed qualifications and professional experience overseas who are applying for Associate membership of CPA Australia and/or skilled migration.

Applicants who become Associate members prior to applying for skilled migration receive a free-of-charge assessment.

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

CPA Australia is not in a position to offer comment on this area.

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

- **Communication of processes to users**
  - We suggest that further refinement of some government agencies' web pages could be undertaken to make them more user-friendly for international students and potential migrants. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), and the web pages of the various assessing authorities. An interactive web tool could be developed that would visually represent each step in the process of applying for skilled migration with the relevant links (on [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)). For your reference, an example of such a tool has been developed by CPA Australia which illustrates steps to membership at [http://www.cpacareers.com.au/life\\_as\\_cpa/](http://www.cpacareers.com.au/life_as_cpa/)

- There is a high demand for information about skilled migration from international students. However universities are not currently in a position to provide such information. This information gap could be met through sessions being run by relevant government authorities through the International Students' Services of Australian universities.
- **Efficiency of processes and elimination of barriers**
  - The level of English language skills of candidates seems to be the greatest barrier to the skilled migration process. Our experience of skilled migration applicants tells us that important processes are often not met due to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of information. The required minimum English language level for skilled migration may need to be increased so as to assist migrants accessing employment in the longer-term. Information delivery with regard to skilled migration needs further improvement in terms of accessibility and comprehensibility in the early stages of the application process.
  - We understand that assessing authorities are experiencing resource issues in managing queue times. Qualifications assessments are subject to fluctuation and are impacted by changes in Government policies and the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) inclusion on the Migration Occupations in Demand List. Consideration needs to be given to options to assist assessing authorities to meet increased demand.
  - Improvements need to be made to streamline the flow of communication between DEST (Department of Education, Science and Training) Australian Education International (AEI), DIMIA and the assessing authorities to ensure authorities have ample time to prepare for periods of high demand and are aware of changes to government policies and regulations. To further illustrate the need for improved communication flow, CPA Australia has in some instances, been advised of policy changes by applicants or read about it in the media before formal notification was received.
  - Migration agents could be provided with ongoing training to ensure they are conversant with the latest information regarding skilled migration and are not unduly hindering applications through lack of understanding of procedures or requirements.
  - All AEI-NOOSR Country Education Profiles need to be regularly updated so assessing authorities have the means and resources to complete their tasks effectively and the education sector is adequately informed.
  - A centralised hub of information or call centre could be established so that a potential skilled migrant could obtain basic answers from one source. Such a service could provide information on visa types, ASCO definitions, assessing authority information, employment information, and study/university requirements.
- **Early identification and response to persons needing skills upgrading (eg. bridging courses)**
  - A self-assessment tool for users; i.e. migrants, agents, universities could be developed so that a person could determine whether they need to complete a bridging course to meet migration requirements. The tool could link to assessing authority resources such as CPA Australia's search facility found on the CPA Careers web page.  
[http://www.cpacareers.com.au/study\\_options/acc\\_course\\_search.asp](http://www.cpacareers.com.au/study_options/acc_course_search.asp)
  - Universities need to be further equipped to advise on the need for bridging courses instead of deferring the responsibility of determining further education and/or recognition of prior learning to the assessing authority. This can cause further extensive delays in processing time due to inflated queue times.
  - At present, skills upgrading (bridging courses) tend to focus primarily on technical knowledge. CPA Australia recently released a research report in this area *Migration and the Accounting Profession in Australia* authored by Dr Bob Birrell and Virginia Rapson. A copy is attached for the Committee's information. The research confirms that skilled migrants have difficulty obtaining professional accounting positions if they hold overseas degrees or English is not their first language. Given this, consideration could be given to offering transition to employment workshops focusing on generic skills to assist skilled migrants improve their chances of obtaining professional positions.

- **Awareness and acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers (and acceptance of migrants with Australian qualifications by Australian employers)**
- The *Migration and the Accounting Profession in Australia* research suggests English language skills are the key determinant for gaining professional accounting employment. Reluctance may exist on behalf of Australian employers to accept overseas qualifications and therefore employ migrants.
- Further assistance could be provided to equip migrants/International students with an understanding of Australian culture, ensuring soft skills and English language skills are at an appropriate levels to function in professional positions. Some not-for-profit agencies are trying to address this issue and CPA Australia is considering offering a program for its migrant members. Professional bodies could be supported to deliver skilled migrant transition to work courses.
- **Achieving greater consistency in recognition of qualifications for occupational licensing by state and territory regulators**
- There needs to be increased communication between assessing authorities to facilitate sharing of knowledge, processes, experiences, tools and resources. There is unnecessary duplication of effort occurring with isolated assessing authorities.
- It may be appropriate to establish agreements between assessing authorities on qualification recognition to ensure consistency of outcome for the applicant.
- **Alternative approaches to skills assessment and recognition of overseas qualifications**
- It would be appropriate to give additional points for relevant professional experience, attendance at English language and communication workshops. Recognition could be given for higher level generic/communication skills.

Please do not hesitate to contact Mrs Ann Johns, CPA Australia's Director of Education on Tel: (03) 9606 9609 or email: [ann.johns@cpaaustralia.com.au](mailto:ann.johns@cpaaustralia.com.au) should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission further.

Yours sincerely

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c.c. A Johns, H Nicholls