Online submission

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Australian Academy of Science submission to the
Inquiry into the Value of Skilled Migration to Australia

Australian science and innovation have been profoundly shaped by skilled migrants who have chosen to build their careers in Australia. To take just one indicator, since 2017, 47% of Fellows elected to the Australian Academy of Science were born abroad.

Scientists who migrated to Australia, such as Prime Minister's Prize for Science winners Professor Michelle Simmons and Professor Lidia Morawska, and Nobel Laureate Professor Brian Schmidt, have driven advances in quantum research, indoor air quality, and astrophysics. Their work has positioned Australia as a global leader and attracted further investment, collaboration and talent. In doing so, they employ Australian early-career researchers, nurture the next generation of scientists, and seed national capability.

Skilled migration is critical to boosting Australia's scientific capability, productivity and innovation. This capability is essential for Australia to prosper in an era of massive technological, geopolitical and environmental disruption. Investing in scientific and technological capability is an investment in today's currency of power and prosperity. To benefit from the global race for STEM talent, recruiting top-tier scientists will not only add immediate expertise and knowledge to the Australian pool but also boost the nation's ability to independently generate and apply vital scientific knowledge and skills in the future, while further strengthening international scientific links and networks.

Scientific skilled migration is an efficient way to boost our national capability, both immediately and over the long term, at reduced cost and amplified effectiveness.

Australia offers unique professional and personal benefits for scientists considering a new future in which their research is valued, respected and impactful.

The Academy recommends:

- Aligning skilled migration settings with the eight priority science capabilities highlighted in the Academy's Australian Science, Australia's Future: Science 2035 report.
- Supporting the Academy's Global Talent Attraction Program (GTAP) to attract and retain scientific talent.

Findings from Academy report highlight gaps and shortages in critical sectors

The recent Academy report Australian Science, Australia's Future: Science 2035 is the most comprehensive, evidence-based capability analysis of Australia's science system to support our national ambitions, informed by the forces shaping our economy. It identifies the eight science capabilities that will see the greatest increase in demand over the coming decade: agricultural science, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, climate science, data science, epidemiology, geoscience and materials science. The findings of the report indicate gaps in supply across all eight of these capabilities.

Of particular concern is that Australia is not training enough geoscientists, despite the economy resting heavily on resources, and critical minerals being a priority of the National Reconstruction Fund. Workforce shortages in geology and geophysics have already been identified at a national level, and the impact of these shortages will be compounded by a drop in skilled permanent migration for geologists and geophysicists.

The findings of the report indicate that Australia will need to find pathways for skilled migrants to help fill occupation shortages in critical areas.

The Global Talent Attraction Program is an opportunity to build Australia's science capability

The Academy has launched the Global Talent Attraction Program (GTAP), initially focused on United States-based scientists, where recent shifts in research funding have created opportunities to attract top talent to Australia. We are in a global race for STEM, and GTAP is a targeted and strategic mechanism for Australia to compete globally and attract stellar talent to our shores.

The Global Talent Attraction Program is a national coordinated strategy to fill key capability gaps in science in Australia. GTAP will bring world-class scientists to Australia, where they can drive innovation, strengthen research capability and deliver long-term impact on industry, policy and knowledge. Eligible candidates will be supported by the Academy to submit an expression of interest to the National Innovation Visa (NIV) pathway, a permanent visa for exceptionally talented migrants. GTAP and the NIV work together to identify top researchers and provide a streamlined pathway to permanent residency, strengthening Australia's ability to attract and retain global scientific talent.

The call for applications to the Global Talent Attraction Program Candidate Merit Pool closed on 29 August 2025. Applications are being assessed by a review panel, and the candidate matching process is underway.

Current initiatives in Australian states and territories such as the South Australian Global Researcher Attraction Program, Western Australia's FHRI Fund for Distinguished Fellows and Victoria's Global Talent Attraction Fund highlight the strategic value of investing in world-class researchers to strengthen local research and innovation systems. There is an opportunity for greater national coordination, where state and territory investments are aligned to ensure that Australia as a whole benefits from attracting and retaining top scientific talent.

Other regions have also recognised this opportunity and launched similar programs. The European Union's initiative 'Choose Europe' has a €500 million fund, and Canada is launching the Canada Global Impact+ Research Talent Initiative, investing C$1.7 billion to recruit world-leading researchers. Australia is now in a global race for scientific talent.

Through the Global Talent Attraction Program, Australia has an opportunity to strengthen national science capability through the integration of exceptional individuals into the scientific system.

To discuss or clarify any aspect of this submission, please contact Lauren Sullivan, Science Policy and Advice Manager at science.policy@science.org.au.