



MASTER BUILDERS
A U S T R A L I A

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Department of Employment and
Workplace Relations
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Submission to Consultation on the Draft Best Practice Principles for Skilled Migration Assessing Authorities

Master Builders Australia (Master Builders) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the discussion paper on the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' *Draft Best Practice Principles and Standards for Skilled Migration Assessing Authorities*.

Master Builders Australia is the nation's peak building and construction industry association. Our members are the Master Builders state and territory associations, which represent over 32,000 businesses nationwide, including the 100 largest construction companies. Master Builders Australia is the only industry association that represents all three sectors of construction – residential, commercial, and civil.

Construction in Australia continues to face workforce shortages at all levels, but predominantly those with qualified trades. Domestic workers cannot meet the demand alone – skilled migrant workers are essential to a flourishing industry and economy in general.

Skilled migration positively impacts business investment and productivity. It is vital to ensuring Australia can meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, particularly the goals of the 2022 National Housing Accord. Qualified migrants bring with them new skills and can assist in raising the skills of the existing workforce through the transfer of knowledge and expertise. They are beneficial in so many ways, but Australia must become better at attracting and retaining high-quality international workers.

Master Builders Australia welcomes the Government's recognition that the current visa processing systems are not fit for purpose. They are cumbersome, time-consuming, expensive and in many cases, difficult to navigate. They are disincentivising, rather than attracting high quality workers. A

review of the Best Practice Principles for Assessing Authorities associated with the visa system is a valuable step in making access to Australia easier for skilled migrant workers, but the government must continue to scrutinise the system in its entirety if meaningful change is to be made.

For employers in the construction industry, identifying and hiring skilled migrant workers is complex, costly and takes time. Most use a migration agent to assist in the process – another layer of burden. If an employee requires a skills assessment, the process becomes even more cumbersome with additional costs, a longer timeframe and more paperwork. The red-tape that comes with a skills assessment can be a deterrent, especially at a time when workforce shortages are stark. Australian construction employers need workers now.

The fee structures for trade and skills assessment, while transparent, are exorbitant and in many cases prohibitive. While a visa itself may cost somewhere between \$1,500 and \$5,000, the cost of a skills assessment may exceed \$10,000¹. The fee structures must be reviewed and costs reduced.

The United Kingdom, Germany and to an extent the United States of America have sought in recent years to develop higher and degree apprenticeships delivered by a combination of vocational and higher education training.² In some cases, that means qualifications like these are of a higher standard than the Australian requirements. In such instances, an assessment of qualification is seemingly redundant. These cases must be identified and exempted from skills assessment processes.

In cases where English language standards are assessed, thoughtful consideration must be given to the level of proficiency required as it relates to a particular profession, as well as the ease with which information on such requirements can be found. Currently, the visa system and language requirements are complicated to navigate. They act as a deterrent to Australian visas, not an incentive. It should be simpler to determine if a proficiency test is required, and how such a test can be accessed.

Finally, the way in which information is presented to potential applicants must be reviewed. Navigating the assessment process, and even simply determining whether assessment is required is complex. Plain English guides, simple flow charts or questionnaires and more accessible 'help' fact sheets are required to ensure the system is usable, understandable and directing candidates to the appropriate information.

¹ See, for example, <https://www.tradesrecognitionaustralia.gov.au/15-fees-1>

² Source: https://cdn.aigroup.com.au/Reports/2018/Imperative_of_Higher_Apprenticeships_July2018.pdf p. 3

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Master Builders welcomed the opportunity to provide input to this discussion.

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