



Australian Government
Department of Employment
and Workplace Relations



Discussion Paper

September 2023

Draft Best Practice Principles and Standards
for Skilled Migration Assessing Authorities

Contents

- Introduction..... 3**
- How to make a submission 4**
- Questions for stakeholder feedback..... 4**
 - Questions about the draft principles and standards 4*
 - Questions about the delivery of skills assessments 4*
- Beyond the scope of this paper 5**
- Overview of draft best practice principles and standards..... 6**
- Principle 1 – User-friendly and migrant-centric experience 7**
- Principle 2 – Reasonable and justified fee structures 8**
- Principle 3 – Evidence based occupational assessment standards 9**
- Principle 4 – Fair and equitable assessments 10**
- Principle 5 – Timely and efficient skills assessment delivery..... 11**
- Principle 6 – Meaningful employment outcomes are enabled 12**
- Principle 7 – Integrity and transparency in operations 13**
- Glossary..... 14**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and Elders past, present and emerging.

Introduction

The skilled stream of Australia's *Migration Program*¹ is designed to attract migrants who make a significant contribution to the Australian economy, and fill positions where no Australian workers are available. Skilled migrants have high participation rates in the workforce, which helps stimulate economic growth, resulting in more job opportunities and improved outcomes for all Australians.

A skills assessment is required for certain visa subclasses to ensure prospective migrants have the skills, qualifications, and experience to meet Australian occupational standards. This helps maintain trust, safety, and quality by ensuring skilled migrants are appropriately skilled and provides clarity for migrants on requirements for employment in Australia. Skills assessments are conducted by relevant *skilled migration assessing authorities*².

With critical skills shortages persisting across the labour market, skilled migrants remain a vital source of skilled labour to supplement Australia's domestic workforce. Increased global competition for skilled labour post-pandemic has resulted in a greater focus on making sure all elements of the skilled migration system, including skills assessments, are operating effectively.

The *Review of the Migration System*³ (the Migration Review) indicated that there are challenges for migrants to achieve skills recognition in the current system. The Government's *Migration Strategy Outline*⁴ states the need to improve and streamline skills recognition, to help more migrants enter the labour market at a level commensurate with their qualifications.

As a result, Government is seeking to support assessing authorities to raise the integrity, quality and timeliness of skills assessments and improve outcomes for migrants, employers, and industry.

Under regulation 2.26B of the *Migration Regulations 1994*⁵, the Minister for Skills and Training (the minister) is responsible for approving relevant assessing authorities to undertake skills assessments. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department) supports the minister and provides governance of assessing authorities. The Government's *Guidelines for Skilled Migration Assessing Authorities*⁶ sets requirements for organisations seeking to become assessing authorities and a framework for ongoing assurance of assessing authorities.

The department is currently reviewing the requirements and assurance framework for the assessing authority sector. Through an **enhanced assurance model**, government will monitor and manage the assessing authority sector more effectively, ensuring skills assessments are migrant-centric and being delivered optimally in terms of process, standards, timeframes, industry requirements and cost.

This model will focus on **continual improvement** for both assessing authorities and government. It will be designed around a shared understanding of **best practice principles** that skills assessment delivery will be monitored against and include **new standards for assessing authorities** to deliver optimised outcomes for Australian employers and migrants.

¹ [Migration Program planning levels \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/migration-program/planning-levels)

² [Assessing authorities \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/migration-program/assessing-authorities)

³ [A Migration System for Australia's Future \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/migration-program/a-migration-system-for-australia-s-future)

⁴ [The Migration Strategy \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/migration-program/the-migration-strategy)

⁵ [Federal Register of Legislation - Australian Government](https://www.federalregister.gov/?agency=australian-government)

⁶ [Guidelines for Skilled Migration Assessing Authorities 2021 - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government \(dewr.gov.au\)](https://www.dewr.gov.au/guidelines-for-skilled-migration-assessing-authorities-2021)

How to make a submission

This discussion paper is testing individuals' and organisations' views on the draft principles and standards for assessing authorities, and on the operation of the current system. It is also seeking feedback on some ideas for reform.

Your answers to the questions below are important to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach in shaping the future of the assessment framework, making it more effective and improving outcomes for skilled migrants.

Questions for stakeholder feedback

Questions about the draft principles and standards

- 1) Which standards will improve outcomes? Why/why not?
- 2) Which standards are achievable and why/why not?
- 3) What have we missed?

Questions about the delivery of skills assessments

- 4) What changes are needed to improve skills assessment processes to make them simpler and more migrant centric?
- 5) Are skills assessments appropriately aligned with domestic employment, visa, and licensing/registration requirements? Why/why not?
- 6) How could skills assessment processes be streamlined with occupational licensing and registration schemes?
- 7) What other functions could assessing authorities deliver to support employment and migration outcomes?
- 8) Should there be more than one assessing authority appointed to assess an occupation? Why/why not?
- 9) Should English language testing be a skills assessment requirement? Noting English levels are tested as part of the visa application stage.
- 10) Is there anything else you want to tell us about skills assessments?

Note: You can navigate back to these questions via links under each principle.

The department welcomes feedback on the Discussion Paper from interested parties and organisations by Tuesday, 31 October 2023. You can make a submission here [Consultation hub | Best Practice Principles and Standards for Skilled Migration Assessing Authorities - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations \(dewr.gov.au\)](#)

IMPORTANT: The department may publish your feedback on its website or cite your feedback in future reports. If you do not wish your feedback to be made public, please indicate this clearly.

General enquiries can be made to the department via AAPA@dewr.gov.au.

Beyond the scope of this paper

This paper is seeking input in relation to skills assessments for migration purposes. The following is beyond the remit of this exercise:

- The visa framework, migration regulations and policy settings for the various migration streams (Skilled, Family, Humanitarian). These are the responsibility of the Department of Home Affairs and were the subject of the *Review of the Migration System*⁷ (the Migration Review).
- International mutual recognition of occupational licences from different countries (allowing the registration or licence holder from an international country to practice in Australia without undergoing separate registration/licencing).
- Workplace relations policy as it pertains to migrants.

⁷ [A Migration System for Australia's Future \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au)

Overview of draft best practice principles and standards

The draft best practice principles and standards will provide an aspirational yet measurable foundation upon which assessing authorities will be expected to deliver skills assessments.

The following **seven draft best practice principles and standards** have been composed based on feedback to date and to stimulate discussion. They will be refined and changed according to your submissions.



Principle 1 – User-friendly and migrant-centric experience

Clear, accessible, and user-friendly skills assessment processes, guidelines, and communications enhance migrants' overall experience and understanding of the system. This supports more efficient and higher quality outcomes.

New standards for assessing authorities may include:

- 1.1 Offering diverse communication channels and adopting user-friendly platforms that are easy to navigate, expressed in simple language, and give helpful information about all aspects of the skills assessment process.
- 1.2 Providing timely, informative, and accessible updates regarding the status of an application.
- 1.3 Exploring options to incorporate alternative skills recognition methods into skills assessments.

Example

Assessing authorities use a variety of methods to communicate with applicants. Such as:

- Using visual aids like videos, infographics, storyboards, and cheat sheets to make complex topics easier to understand.
- Online candidate portals to flag missing or inadequate documentation and offer application status tracking for transparency and efficiency.
- Multiple interaction channels like live chat, webinars, information forums, and dedicated case managers.

[Click here to see questions for stakeholder feedback](#)

Principle 2 – Reasonable and justified fee structures

Fees are commensurate with the cost of conducting high-quality skills assessments, do not impose an unreasonable barrier for prospective migrants, and represent value for money for applicants.

New standards for assessing authorities may include:

- 2.1 Providing transparency in setting fees and inclusions.
- 2.2 Innovation through collaboration to identify and implement cost-effective strategies, opportunities, and practices, to remain cost-competitive in a global market.
- 2.3 Undertaking regular and strategic reviews of fees to ensure skills assessment services are appropriate and commensurate with demand in an evolving skilled migration environment.

Example

A current assessing authority demonstrates transparency on its website by providing a clear fee structure, outlining various service offerings that applicants can choose based on their needs. Applicants are able to benefit from selecting discounts for combined assessments including employment-only, qualification-only, or combined assessments.

[Click here to see questions for stakeholder feedback](#)

Principle 3 – Evidence based occupational assessment standards

Well informed assessment standards that are fair, sensible, and relevant, ensure prospective migrants have the requisite skills to secure meaningful employment and contribute to Australian society.

New standards for assessing authorities may include:

- 3.1 Ensuring occupational assessment standards do not go beyond what is required by industry and employers and any registration or licensing requirements for an occupation.
- 3.2 Aligning English language requirements with visa and industry standards to reduce inconsistencies and confusion for migrants.
- 3.3 Setting a schedule for regularly reviewing occupational assessment standards in close consultation with key industry stakeholders such as employers and unions, to ensure continued relevance and competitiveness in a global market.

Example

Various industry peak bodies informed an assessing authority that the Bachelor-level qualification requirement set for an occupation exceeded the skill level needed for employment in the Australian industry. In response, the authority revised the assessment standards for that occupation to an AQF Certificate IV or III plus relevant employment experience.

[Click here to see questions for stakeholder feedback](#)

Principle 4 – Fair and equitable assessments

An objective and unbiased assessment of an applicant’s skills promotes consistency and fairness, regardless of a migrant’s background.

New standards for assessing authorities may include:

- 4.1 Eliminating bias or discrimination in the assessment process by applying procedural fairness and objective, equitable and consistent assessment standards.
- 4.2 Offering flexible skills assessment processes, including appropriate adjustments and support for applicants with disabilities, refugees, or victims of exploitative employment arrangements.
- 4.3 Offering clear and fair complaints, review, and appeals processes.

Example

Practical-based assessments or alternative pathways are utilised when verifiable work experience and qualifications are unavailable due to exceptional circumstances.

[Click here to see questions for stakeholder feedback](#)

Principle 5 – Timely and efficient skills assessment delivery

The assessment process is optimised to reduce duplication and maximise efficiency.

New standards for assessing authorities may include:

- 5.1 Adopting efficient and streamlined assessment processes to minimise unnecessary delays or bottlenecks.
- 5.2 Using technology to monitor caseloads and systematise and simplify administrative tasks.
- 5.3 Developing robust contingency plans to handle fluctuations in demand and a constantly evolving skilled migration landscape.

Example

1. Implementing a client relationship team to ensure application completeness, regular communication, and assessment readiness management.
2. Removing redundant requirements, such as excluding exams duplicated in registration/licensing requirements for the occupation, to streamline the process.

[Click here to see questions for stakeholder feedback](#)

Principle 6 – Meaningful employment outcomes are enabled

Post-assessment assistance is provided to help migrants obtain meaningful employment, including vulnerable cohorts such as partners, migrant women, and international graduates.

New standards that assessing authorities could be required to meet include:

- 6.1 Providing end-to-end information and after care for migrants to support their post-assessment migration and employment journey.
- 6.2 Leading or participating in ventures that proactively educate employers and industry on the benefits of a migrant workforce and the hiring of international graduates.
- 6.3 Building an understanding of applicants' visa and employment outcomes post-assessment to inform continuous improvement of skills assessment processes and standards.

Example

1. Providing outcome letters to successful applicants which offer comprehensive information on job searching, labour market intelligence, registration/licensing requirements, and relevant unions, ensuring a seamless transition into the Australian employment environment.
2. Conducting surveys of successful applicants 6-12 months post-assessment and implementing necessary process changes based on the feedback received.

[Click here to see questions for stakeholder feedback](#)

Principle 7 – Integrity and transparency in operations

Integrity and transparency in the operations of assessing authorities facilitates quality migration outcomes.

In addition to being financially viable and having effective records and risk management practices, new standards that assessing authorities could be required to meet include:

- 7.1 Ongoing engagement and cooperation with government through data provision on skills assessment caseloads, trends, and outcomes, including gender-disaggregated data, and the development and testing of policy solutions to meet the needs of migrants and employers.
- 7.2 Providing applicants with transparency in how data is handled and protected to meet Australian Privacy requirements.
- 7.3 Implementing effective fraud awareness and control measures to safeguard the integrity of skills assessments.

Example

Proactive collaboration with government and third-party providers around fraud detection and awareness provides assessing authorities with clear guidelines for handling suspected or confirmed fraudulent cases. This has allowed authorities to build extensive data libraries to efficiently verify potentially fraudulent documents, further strengthening the integrity of the assessment process.

[Click here to see questions for stakeholder feedback](#)

Glossary

Term	Definition for the purpose of this Discussion Paper
Assessing authority	A person or body appointed as the 'relevant assessing authority' by the Minister for Immigration in respect to skilled occupation(s) under the <i>Migration Regulations 1994</i> .
Industry	Includes peak organisations representing small to large businesses, industries, and employers.
Labour Market	Means the supply of, and demand for, labour; in which employees provide the 'supply' and employers provide the 'demand', e.g., the supply of available employees in Adelaide North does not meet the demand by employers, which indicates that the local labour market is short on supply.
Micro-credentials	Are short certification courses that enable students to develop specific skills, as an alternative to full qualifications
Peak Body	A non-government organisation whose membership consists of smaller organisations from an industry area. e.g., an electrical peak body may have electricians and smaller electrical businesses as its members.
Registered training organisation	Organisations in the Australian VET system authorised to deliver and assess nationally recognised training, issue nationally recognised qualifications and statements of attainment, and apply for government funding to provide VET services.
Skills Assessment	An assessment of a person's skills, qualifications and/or employment history for the purposes of supporting a skilled visa application with Home Affairs.
The department	The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR)
Tripartism/Tripartite partnerships	The Australian Governments approach to genuine consultation, working with State and Territory governments, unions, and industry.
Vocational education and training (VET)	VET delivers competency-based, nationally recognised, industry-endorsed training. VET offers qualifications across Certificate I to postgraduate.

[Click here for instructions on making a submission](#)