

Contents

Introduction	1
Supporting migrant teacher pathways	2
Visa sponsorship	2
Information and help	2
Orientation and induction	3
Recognising career experience and career goals	3
Pathways to teaching in Australia	4
A temporary visa holder who wants to stay in Australia and has trained as a teacher overseas	4
An early career teacher from a non-Australian background with overseas initial teacher education qualifications	6
An experienced teacher or school leader from a non-Australian background with overseas initial teacher education qualifications	7
A graduate from a non-Australian background who studied their initial teacher education in Australia and now hopes to migrate permanently	8
Conclusion	10
Endnotes	11

Introduction

Australia has a considerable history of teacher immigration, which assists in broadening the workforce of appropriately qualified and experienced teachers. Teacher immigration within Australia has mostly been due to economic necessity and growth.¹

Overseas trained teachers bring a range of educational, cultural and language experiences that make Australian education richer.² Migrant teachers often have significant teaching experience and human capital in the form of teaching qualifications.³ The countries that employ them receive a 'brain gain'.⁴ Research highlights that a teacher workforce reflecting broader society promotes intercultural competence and gives students a balanced picture of society, so they can better compete in a globalised world.⁵ More can be done to assist and support migration for teachers who want to teach in Australia.⁶

An important stand-out theme that emerged, in the literature and through consultation, is that migrant teachers face challenges at all stages when they move into a new country's teaching service. There are difficulties when they first apply for teacher registration* but also well after. When migrant teachers were asked about their struggles, their answers suggested that the difficulties they face increase, and are more complex, once they start teaching in a new country's school or education system.

* In NSW, teacher registration is referred to as 'teacher accreditation'.

This resource brings together a review of research, the experiences of migrant teachers in Australia and around the world, and stakeholder insights. It has been developed for education systems and school leaders to provide a view of the likely pathways that those seeking to migrate to Australia and join the teaching profession will take.

It is important to be aware of a migrant teacher's unique circumstances, why they want to migrate, their life and professional experiences. This document seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the cultural capacities and skills that migrant teachers bring with them and the journey they take. *Pathways to teaching in Australia* helps show what schools and education systems can do to help attract and keep migrant teachers.

^{1.} Teacher migration to and from Australia and New Zealand, and the Place of Cook Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu teachers.

^{2.} Creating pathways for internationally educated teachers into the teaching profession: Practices, policies and problems in the Australian context'.

^{3.} International teacher mobility and migration.

^{4.} Professional lives under review.

^{5.} Seeing Ourselves at School.

^{6.} Cruickshank 2022.

Supporting migrant teacher pathways

Visa sponsorship

Visa considerations are fundamental to immigration. The Australian Government's skilled migration program has visas designed to attract migrants who will make a significant contribution to the Australian economy, and fill positions where no Australian workers are available. Skilled migration visas aren't the only way overseas teachers can enter Australia to teach – there may be others, depending on the person's circumstances.

Skilled visas have subclasses that best suit education systems and sectors who want employer-sponsored, targeted teacher migration. They are in line with Australia's skilled occupation requirements – some provide for temporary migration and others allow the visaholder to live and work in Australia permanently.

Suitable migrant teacher candidates can be offered visa sponsorship in line with Department of Home Affairs processes. Job descriptions for hard-to-staff positions and locations should outline the visa opportunities available, particularly those that lead to permanent migration. This can help those applying for a visa to consider the benefits and make informed choices. Hard-to-staff positions will be more attractive if they offer benefits such as housing, secure employment contracts, and provide support to understand the school system and sector where the person will work.

Review of Australia's migration system

On 2 September 2022, the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon, Clare O'Neil MP, announced a full review of Australia's migration system. The Review of the Migration System Final Report (the Report) was presented to the Australian Government on 21 March 2023.7 It was based on public submissions and consultation and included valuable insights, analysis, international comparisons and directions for change.

The Australian Government responded with its Migration Strategy: Getting migration working for the nation (Migration Strategy) on 11 December 2023.8 The Migration Strategy sets out a plan to build a migration system that better matches the needs of Australia to ensure that it is targeted to building Australia's economic prosperity and security.

As part of the Migration Strategy, the Australian Government has committed to several visa reforms in 2024. One change is the 'Skills in Demand' visa. It replaces the Temporary Skill Shortage Visa (formerly the 482 visa) and introduces several key reforms in the skilled migration rules. It has three tiers, to better match foreign skilled labour with what Australia's workforce needs.

The three tiers of the Skills in Demand Visa are based on annual earnings and occupation. The Core Skills Pathway will likely apply to most skilled migrants. Focused on occupations that Jobs and Skills Australia identify as in demand, it is likely that key teaching occupations will be included on the Core Skills Occupation List. The government have advised that the Skills in Demand Visa (Core Skills Pathway) will be available from the end of 2024.

Information and help

Migrant teachers need accurate, user-friendly information about their employment options and how to be employed as a teacher across Australia. This includes understanding the options available across all systems; government, Catholic and independent. Most research starts online so websites should be up to date. They need to be easy-to-understand for people who may have learned English as a second language, and simple to use across devices. It should be easy to find the exact information a person is seeking.

Stakeholder needs: Information

Discussions with migrant teachers found that they want to know about:

- How to get registered as a teacher
- Securing a teaching role
- Migration pathways available to them
- What teaching in Australia actually looks like, including things about their new life such as housing, transport and more.

For migrant teachers who prefer to deal direct, consider information sessions or in-person visits and provide contact details for responsive personnel who can deal effectively with their enquiries.



Did you know?

As part of the Migration strategy, the Australian Government has committed to several visa reforms in 2024. One change is the 'Skills in Demand' visa.

^{7.} Review of the Migration System Final Report.

^{8.} Commonwealth of Australia, 2023, Migration Strategy.

Orientation and induction

The literature shows that migrant teachers face problems in common. However, because they have different backgrounds and are recruited in different ways, their challenges and how hard the challenges are, vary a lot.⁹

The difference between a migrant teacher's original education system and Australia's can have a big impact. Two examples are finding their way around a different approach to classroom management and student versus teacher-centred instruction models. If a migrant teacher is filling an acute subject or location-specific teacher shortage they may find themselves in a hard-to-staff school with big classroom management challenges.¹¹

Research shows that a reliable, in-depth introduction to the new system can help migrant teachers. Once they understand the system, they benefit from school-specific orientation.¹² Providing detailed information early on can help migrant teachers build professional networks and feel less isolated and more connected, especially if they will be working in a regional, rural or remote area.¹³

It is important that migrant teachers get their information from people who know – not third parties. Employers can link migrant teachers to online and in-person forums – including webinars and events – where education professionals provide system or sector-specific information and explain curriculum, assessments, school policies and so on. These forums may also act as a social network-building opportunity for migrant teachers to meet and support each other to find solutions to any problems.

Recognising career experience and career goals

When overseas teachers receive a job offer, some struggle to understand that incentives like permanent residency may involve postings in regional, rural or remote areas. Subsequently, loneliness and separation from family may occur.¹⁴ Fixed-term contracts are also common and for migrant teachers they mean deciding to take the first available job or waiting for a more suitable, rewarding or longer-term position.¹⁵

Research shows that many migrant teachers don't know where to get advice on moving their career to Australia. ¹⁶ They place a high value on professional learning and working in a country as affluent and progressive as Australia. ¹⁷ Despite this, migrant teachers can be overlooked for professional learning opportunities because they are doing casual/relief teaching or are on short-term contracts. Making sure migrant teachers have fair access to professional learning and can share their knowledge with colleagues will help retain them.

Consultations show that employers know it is important to value and consider overseas experience. Each system and sector has a different approach but those who recognise it best, tend to attract the most migrant teachers.

- 9. Bense 2016.
- 10. Bense 2016, The complexity of professional integration, Getting teacher migration and mobility right, Bringing them in.
- The business of international teacher recruitment, Migrant teachers and the negotiation of a (new) teaching identity.
- Experiences of overseas trained teachers seeking public school positions in Western Australia and South Australia.





Did you know?

Research shows that a reliable, in-depth introduction to the new system can help migrant teachers. Once they understand the system, they benefit from schoolspecific orientation.

- 13. Globalisation and teacher movements into and out of multicultural Australia: Final report, The impact of mentoring on a non-native immigrant teacher's professional development' Teaching and Teacher Education, Immigrant teachers' experience of professional vulnerability.
- 14. Datta et al 2017.
- 15. Datta et al 2017.
- 16. Teacher stress and health.
- 17. Datta et al 2017.

Pathways to teaching in Australia

There is no single story of a migrant teacher. Each begins in a different place with each teacher's own portfolio of qualifications, culture, language, personal and professional experiences. There are those who set out on their journey not long after qualifying and others who do so much later in their career.

The reasons migrant teachers seek to work in Australia include the opportunity for a different lifestyle, travel, family reasons, professional development, or enrichment. Their reasons affect how long they'll stay and whether they'll seek permanent residency.

Migrant teachers relocate to a new country via different paths. In some cases, they respond to the recruitment campaigns of employers or recruitment agencies. Others, due to their partner's circumstances, or because their family members are relocating. Whatever the path, it is necessary to understand that migrant teachers are weighing the risks and potential rewards of this major life decision.

This section looks at four of the most common pathways to teaching in Australian classrooms.

A temporary visa holder who wants to stay in Australia and has trained as a teacher overseas

While in Australia, migrating teachers may have worked in an unrelated field on a temporary visa, due to work restrictions. Consultation revealed that they tend to seek casual teaching opportunities because the work is flexible and the salary higher than those offered to other casual positions. A casual teacher on a temporary visa is likely to bring international teaching experience, and exposure to various Australian schools and possibly different sectors. They may also bring new knowledge and fresh perspectives.

Those teaching casually will have had their overseas teaching degree recognised by a state or territory teacher regulatory authority (TRA), but may not be fully registered. They are mostly young, because work and holiday visa holders must generally be 18 to 30 years old. If they come from certain countries, they could be up to 35.

Consultation made it clear that teachers on temporary visas often experience added stress. This is due to finances, housing and relationship matters related to the complexity of the migration process. However, they still want to become permanent residents, usually because they have formed new positive relationships and enjoy the Australian lifestyle. Employee sponsorship, points-based visas or partner visas can aid permanent residency. The 2023 Migration Review highlighted that many individuals jump between temporary visas, hoping to extend their stay.

As noted earlier, a new Skills in Demand visa will soon replace the Temporary Skill Shortage (482) visa as Australia's main temporary skilled work visa. This new visa allows for temporary skilled migrant workers to have more time to find another sponsor if their employment ends and a clearer path to permanent residency.

Stakeholder insights: Promoting remote and regional work

- It's easier for migrant teachers without dependants to make career decisions and transition to life in regional, rural or remote Australia.
- Job ads highlighting opportunities for cultural immersion are very attractive.
- Migrant teachers may work in a remote setting because it can be easier to secure employment and a permanent visa.
- Offers of guaranteed or subsidised housing, and pathways toward permanent residency assist in attracting and retaining teachers to regional, rural and remote positions.
- When migrant teachers are given opportunities to be part of the community in their new regional, rural or remote area, they are more likely to adapt and stay longer.

Stakeholder insights: Contract flexibility

- Temporary visa holders often struggle to find full-time roles because employers prefer long-term employees they can invest in.
- Offering part-time or fixed-term contracts to accommodate teachers with work restrictions can provide more staffing flexibility.

An early career teacher from a non-Australian background with overseas initial teacher education qualifications

This migrant teacher may currently be overseas or have already arrived in Australia. They have teacher qualifications and one to five years teaching experience. Consultation showed that teachers on a temporary visa are likely to be under 45 due to visa age limits (most Australian visas have an age limit of 44) and without dependants.

As education system operations and teacher induction practices differ country to country, migrant teachers may lack, or possess more, skills and experiences than domestic teachers:

- They may have taught a language other than English or other specialist subjects. They likely bring knowledge of another culture, new ways of learning and may speak other languages well, which can benefit Australian students.
- On the other hand, they may not have experience teaching parts of the Australian Curriculum and will require further professional learning.

Consultation highlighted that many migrant teachers in this category are keen to progress their careers. Once they migrate to Australia, this is still a focus but they also want to achieve other key life events, like owning a home, building friendship groups and participating in the Australian lifestyle.

Stakeholder insights: Bridging initial teacher education and Australian workplace requirements

- Early career teachers may come with work experience but many will be recent graduates and new to the workforce. They need to learn the ins and outs of the Australian labour market as well as the steps to register to teach, which makes the gap between study and practice even harder.
- A focused induction and mentoring program to welcome and introduce migrant early career teachers would provide opportunities for them to get comfortable with the Australian Curriculum and offer the support they need to understand approaches to classroom management and how Australian schools operate.
- Helping migrant early career teachers to build professional networks, such as by pairing them with experienced mentors before they start work, could be both personally and professionally supportive.

Stakeholder insights: Career goals

- Targeted professional learning and experiences for migrant early career teachers, with active learning, will help them get more insight into, and knowledge of, Australian teaching.
- Explaining, in detail, the opportunities available to migrant teachers and possible career pathways supports ongoing success.
- Migrant teachers have a better chance of setting up a successful career in Australia if they receive clear information and guidance about seeking and obtaining opportunities.



^{19.} Overseas trained teachers (OTTs) in England: Surviving or thriving?.

An experienced teacher or school leader from a non-Australian background with overseas initial teacher education qualifications

This migrant is an experienced teacher who can introduce new ways of working, new culture and languages to a school. As they have worked in a different culture and probably different schools, they understand differences in how schools and systems operate. As an established teacher, they bring a wealth of knowledge to Australian schools and students.

Consultation showed that these migrant teachers start their careers by seeking to understand the workforce and deepen their professional networks. Once settled in, they are open to being flexible and accepting opportunities to re-establish their seniority and leadership. When in senior or leadership positions, experienced migrant teachers often act as role models for newer migrants – sharing tips and showing them how to succeed in the Australian teaching profession.

Consultation also showed that these migrants often plan to move to Australia to give their family opportunities, especially children. Teachers in this category proactively seek information about housing, lifestyle, education and extra-curricular options. This helps them decide if they will migrate.

Stakeholder insights: Acknowledging professional agency and identity

- Experienced migrant teachers with solid careers often have to rethink their professional values and practices to adjust to the Australian system.¹⁹ This can lead to frustration. They may feel that they are being micromanaged within school systems and by school leaders.
- Information about opportunities to become certified as a Highly Accomplished or Lead teacher (HALT), or to participate in other programs which recognise teaching expertise and excellence, sets out a proactive career pathway option.
- Supporting, rather than driving professional decisions, is a sign of equality in working relationships. Experienced migrant teachers prefer to navigate competing workplace demands and expectations and use their professional agency and motivation to make an impact. This builds trust and strengthens ties.
- Providing support and opportunities for experienced migrant teachers to share knowledge and practice, helps their sense of professional identity. They feel included by their employer.

Stakeholder insights: Career progression

- This group of experienced teachers often seek opportunities within middle and senior leadership. Support is very important, as research and consultation show that their careers often flatline in a new country, despite their best efforts to advance.²⁰
- Spotting migrant teachers with potential for leadership roles early, then supporting professional learning to bridge their knowledge or practice gaps, can help their career grow.
- Cultural differences mean some migrant teachers find self-promotion and selfadvocacy difficult. It is important to consider their experience and respect their professional standing, as leadership can look different in every country. Migrant teachers with different leadership experience can be asked to act as mentors or take voluntary leadership roles. It is an inclusive way to support their career goals.



Experienced migrant teachers often act as role models for newer migrants.

^{20.} Contextual experiences of overseas trained teachers before and after obtaining a teaching position in a public secondary school of Western Australia and South Australia in reference to their cultural perspectives, Datta Roy et al 2017; Washington Miller, 2018.

^{21. 30%} of Australia's Population Born Overseas.

A graduate from a non-Australian background who studied their initial teacher education in Australia and now hopes to migrate permanently

A graduate from a non-Australian background who has an Australian ITE qualification, has demonstrated the same practical skills and knowledge expected of all Australian graduate teachers.

If they retrained to become an Australianqualified teacher after prior work or study as a teacher, they bring overseas work experience, including knowledge of global pedagogy and curriculums. They also have experience with Australian culture, classrooms and behaviour management strategies through placements they did in their ITE program. This migrant teacher brings an understanding of other cultures, unique learning experiences from their time as a pre-service teacher in Australia, and possibly skills in other languages, which will benefit Australian students and schools.

Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD), published in 2022, shows that most international students studying ITE in Australia are in postgraduate programs.²¹ They likely have an undergraduate degree and possibly overseas work experience in teaching or another field. The ATWD data also shows that 15% of registered teachers born overseas hold an Australian ITE qualification.

Due to the requirements of temporary and student visas, these teachers are most likely under 45. They are not likely to have dependants because temporary visas are unstable and student visa work restrictions limit the income they can earn. Consultation found that this group often seek permanent residency for career and lifestyle opportunities and hope to sponsor family members to also migrate to Australia.

Stakeholder insights: Bridging ITE, workplace requirements and socio-cultural support

- These migrant teachers may be new to the workforce and need to learn both the ins and outs of the Australian labour market, and the steps to register to teach. Consultation showed these teachers find that the information offered does not explain the limitations on post-study work rights for international students.
- It would be beneficial to strengthen partnerships with ITE providers so international graduates get clear and useful information from them before they enter the teaching profession. This would include which working visas best suit their needs and searching and applying for employment. Stronger partnerships could help secure jobs for graduates within the ITE providers' partnering schools and in hard-tostaff regions.
- International graduates can complete their ITE program in-person or online:
 - If they studied in Australia and in-person, they should have a good understanding of Australian culture, values and classrooms.
 - Online students would benefit from information webinars before graduation and employment so they better understand work and life in Australia.
- Helping international teacher graduates build professional networks – for example, by hosting events for graduates entering the teaching profession and pairing them with experienced mentors before employment – supports their future success in Australia.

Stakeholder insights: Respect and autonomy

- To create great conditions for entry into the Australian teaching profession:
 - respect international graduates' culture
 - embrace their cultural capital, life experience, overseas work experience and qualifications
 - provide autonomy that matches their teaching experience.



Did you know?

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Conclusion

Recruiting and welcoming migrant teachers presents benefits to Australian schools. It helps build a diverse teaching workforce that represents the wider Australian community, where around 30% of people were born overseas.²² Data from the ATWD (2021) shows that 17% of registered Australian teachers were born overseas.²³

A research review, combined with consultation with migrant teachers, has revealed that this cohort of teachers face practical, professional and social challenges. These challenges can be eased if employers, schools and colleagues offer targeted support. Helping meet the needs of migrant teachers on different pathways creates an opportunity for multicultural capacity-building. It supports the growth of broader world views among Australia's student population and communities.

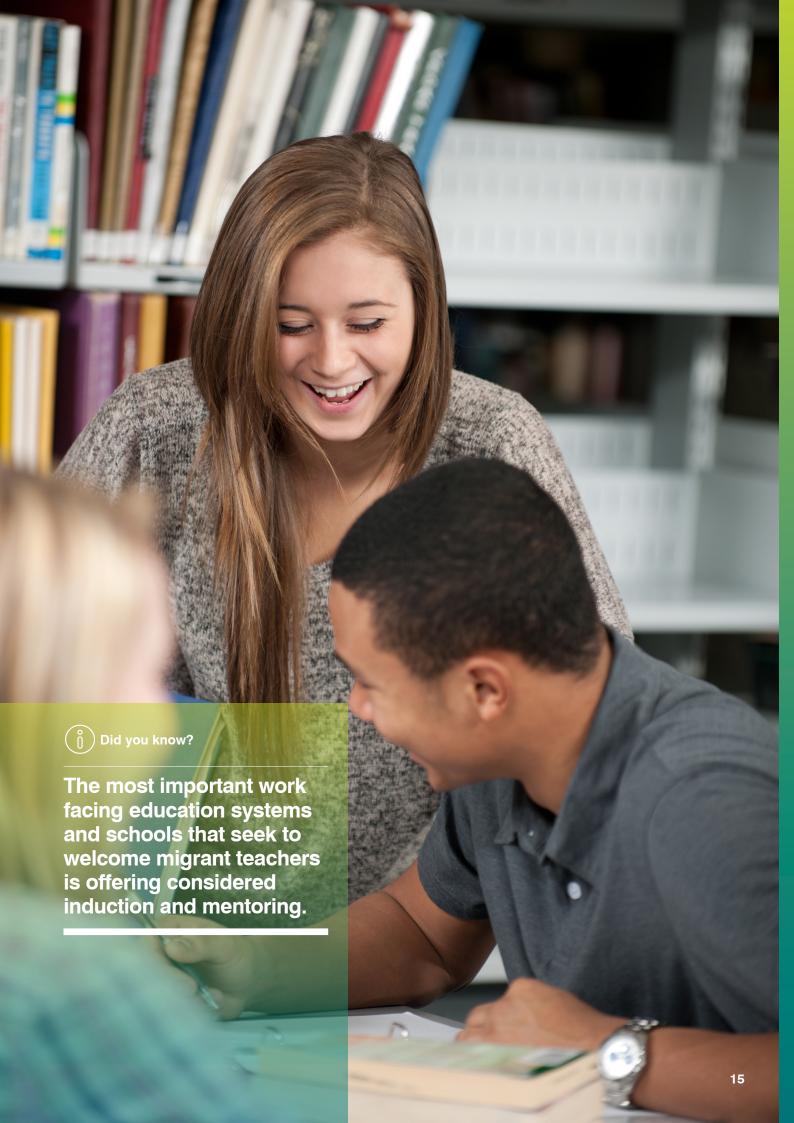
The most important work facing education systems and schools that seek to welcome migrant teachers is offering considered induction and mentoring. This provides an opportunity to celebrate the teacher's skills and experience, while supporting them to immerse themselves in Australia, its schools and community.

Key actions for systems and sectors

- Outline visa opportunities in job descriptions for hard-to-staff positions and locations, particularly those that lead to permanent migration. This can help applicants weigh up the benefits and make informed choices.
- Job advertisements highlighting opportunities for cultural immersion are attractive to migrant teachers.
- A focused induction program allows migrant teachers to immerse themselves, gaining an understanding of Australian classrooms and how Australian schools operate.

Key actions for school leaders

- Show an understanding of and value each migrant teacher's unique circumstances, their motivation for migration and their life and professional experiences.
- Support migrant teachers to build their professional networks, for example, pairing them with experienced mentors before employment. This can be personally and professionally supportive.
- Provide information and guidance to support migrant teachers in seeking and taking opportunities. This makes it more likely they will have a good career in Australia.



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