



Policy Platform

Four practical solutions to make overseas skills and qualifications recognition faster, fairer and more affordable

Prepared by Settlement Services International
on behalf of an alliance of 120+ organisations



The Australian Government's clear mandate for reform

The Australian Government has a clear mandate and expectation to fix the overseas skills and qualifications recognition system. This mandate stems from:

- **National economic consensus:** Skills recognition reform emerged as one of the areas of greatest agreement at the Treasurer's Economic Reform Roundtable, backed by unions, industry, and the community sector, and listed among the ten priority outcomes for national productivity reform.
- **Consistent expert advice:** A series of major government-commissioned and independent reviews – including the *Migration System Review*, *Multicultural Framework Review*, *Migration, Pathway to Nation Building inquiry*, and the *2025 Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee report* – have all identified serious flaws in the current system and called for urgent reform.
- **State and territory support:** State and territory governments are urging national leadership on this issue, with the Queensland Labor Party and South Australian Skills Commission formally endorsing the *Activate Australia's Skills* campaign and many more doing so informally.
- **Broad cross-sector coalition:** A national alliance of more than 110 organisations – including the ACTU, Master Builders Australia, CEDA, Property Council of Australia, Australian Council of Social Service and the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia – has united behind reforms proposed by *Activate Australia's Skills*.

Together, these factors give the Commonwealth a strong social licence to act. The time and mandate for reform have never been clearer.

Implementing the solutions proposed by *Activate Australia's Skills*

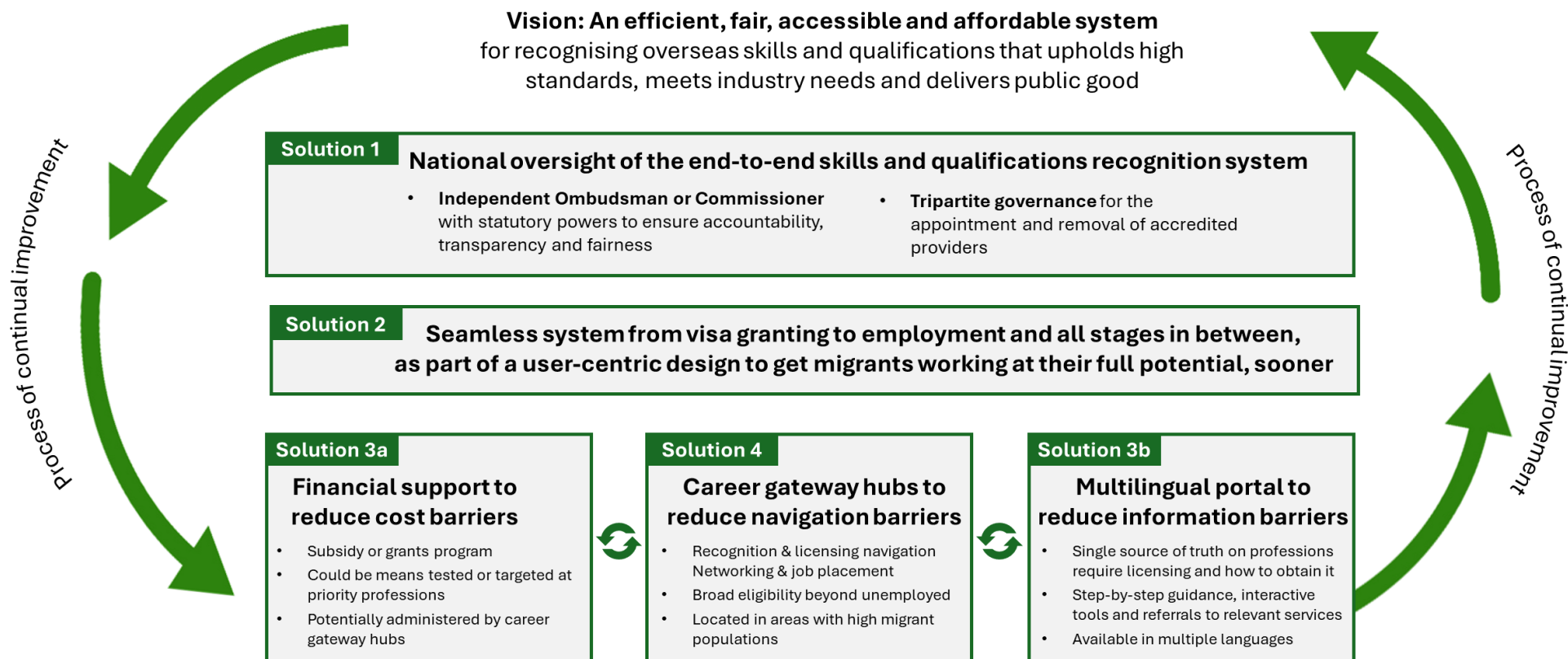
The *Activate Australia's Skills* campaign, convened by Settlement Services International, has put forward four practical, evidence-based solutions to improve Australia's overseas skills and qualifications recognition system, drawing on international best practice:

1. **Establish national oversight:** Create one national governance framework for all overseas skills and qualifications recognition, supported by an independent Commissioner/Ombudsman with regulatory powers to ensure efficiency, fairness, affordability and accountability.
2. **Create a more seamless system:** Integrate skills recognition for migration with licensing and accreditation for employment, removing duplication and streamlining pathways for skilled migrants to work in their professions.
3. **Reduce unnecessary barriers:** Provide targeted financial assistance to reduce cost barriers and develop a comprehensive online portal as a trusted and centralised source of information to reduce confusion.
4. **Rollout Career Gateway Hubs:** Establish career gateways – accessible, place-based employment hubs with broad eligibility – where specialist skills recognition navigators guide migrants through the recognition and licensing process and connect qualified workers with roles that match their skills.

Each of these solutions is outlined below, with a focus on practical considerations for implementation.

Plan on a page: Four integrated solutions to make overseas skills recognition faster, fairer and more affordable

The four proposals form an integrated, holistic framework for reforming overseas skills and qualifications recognition at the systems level. Rather than introducing industry-specific fixes that risk adding further complexity and fragmentation, these solutions are system-wide to address the root causes of failures in Australia’s skills and qualifications recognition system. It focuses on getting the policy settings and incentives right to create a system of continuous improvement, where barriers to fairness, affordability and efficiency are routinely identified and addressed — maximising outcomes for industry, the economy and qualified migrants alike.





Solution 1: Establish national oversight through accountability and transparency mechanisms covering all relevant processes and industries

Purpose: To improve the efficiency, fairness and affordability of the end-to-end overseas skills and qualifications recognition system, while removing unnecessary barriers to international and intra-state labour mobility without reducing quality or confidence in the system.

Rationale: Currently, no single body is responsible for governing or monitoring the full skills recognition and professional licensing ecosystem. This has led to duplication, inconsistent standards, high costs, long delays and opaque processes, producing uneven and often unfair outcomes. There is limited data transparency — no consolidated view of assessment costs, timeframes or success rates across occupations and jurisdictions — because no entity is accountable for ensuring that the system operates efficiently, effectively or equitably.

Description: A single national governance system should be implemented to oversee the end-to-end process for recognising overseas skills and qualifications, ensuring consistency, fairness and due process for migration and employment purposes. The oversight body would identify systemic barriers and coordinate reforms through a tripartite approach involving government, industry and unions. Building on existing structures such as Jobs and Skills Australia, the mechanism for driving continual improvement would: pinpoint blockages affecting workforce supply in priority sectors and work to resolve them without impacting quality standards; facilitate the harmonisation of licensing across jurisdictions; and identify and address training, education and recognition of prior learning (RPL) barriers through tripartite collaboration. This approach would strengthen transparency and accountability, uphold quality standards, and safeguard public and industry confidence in the system.

Mechanism: The preferred model is to establish an independent national Skills Recognition Ombudsman or Commissioner, similar to Canada’s Fairness Commissioner model. The Ombudsman or Commissioner would have the statutory power and resources to:

- collect, analyse and publish system-wide data on assessment timelines, costs, and recognition rates;
- monitor and report on systemic risks, inconsistencies and emerging issues;
- hold assessing authorities accountable for meeting government-mandated recognition standards and timeframes;
- review assessment and recognition decisions for reasonableness and fairness; and
- ensure transparency and accountability in the overall conduct and operations of accrediting authorities.

This would involve compulsory data collection across the system (from accreditation, licensing, industry, RPL, training bodies and state-run bodies) to identify inefficiencies and drive continuous improvement. These functions would be exercised collaboratively, using data insights and stakeholder input to promote ongoing reform. Enabling legislation would likely be required to grant the requisite powers to the Commissioner/Ombudsman to carry out these duties.

In terms of the machinery of government, there are several options. The Commissioner/Ombudsman could be a statutory appointment with a stand-alone office housed within the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations or Jobs and Skills Australia (for example, an independent ‘Office of the Skills Recognition Commissioner/Ombudsman’). Alternatively, the role could carry a dual mandate, serving as both Deputy Commissioner of Jobs and Skills Australia and Ombudsman, or be embedded within the Fair Work Commission. It is



recommended the Commissioner/Ombudsman be established within Jobs and Skills Australia where its function would best align with the skills mandate and the agency’s tri-partite architecture. This approach aligns with the *Migration, Pathway to Nation Building* inquiry which recommended that “the Australian Government considers providing Jobs and Skills Australia the statutory power to oversee the work of Australia’s skills assessment authorities and also provides an appeal mechanism for skills assessment decisions.” In this case, the powers of the Commissioner/Ombudsman should be assigned to the Jobs and Skills Australia Commissioner.

To complement the Commissioner/Ombudsman’s role, a tripartite model will be utilised bringing together industry, government and unions is recommended to ensure the system remains fit for purpose and trusted by all stakeholders. This could involve expanding the mandate of Jobs and Skills Councils to accredit skills assessment organisations (such as Registered Training Organisations) to strengthen quality assurance and eliminate unreliable or potentially exploitative providers. In parallel, the mandate of Jobs and Skills Australia could be broadened to provide oversight of recognition processes in occupations not currently covered by existing Jobs and Skills Councils, ensuring comprehensive national coordination and consistency.

Scope: The Ombudsman or Commissioner would have oversight of the end-to-end system, including assessing authorities for both migration and employment purposes. This would include oversight of the 39 assessing authorities for skilled migration, eight skilled migration assessors for trades, and 30+ professional and regulatory agencies responsible for occupational licensing and registration across states and territories. Under this single governance system, there would be recognition of differences between occupations/trades that are legislated (i.e. Medicine), self-regulated (i.e. Engineering) or unregulated (i.e. Marketing), but it would ensure that all types can be held accountable.

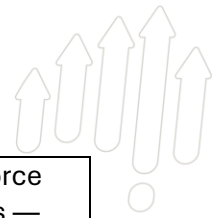
Why a system-wide solution is needed

The barriers in Australia’s skills recognition system – excessive fees, opaque processes, inconsistent standards, and confusing information – are not confined to any one sector. They are endemic across the system. This is a systemic problem, and systemic problems demand systemic reform. The solutions proposed in this policy platform are scalable and industry-agnostic. They focus on creating the right governance, incentives and accountability mechanisms to make the system faster, fairer and more transparent for all migrants — regardless of their occupation. This will have flow-on effects for all sectors, including where skills shortages are most acute such as health, construction and education.

Case study: Office of the Fairness Commissioner (Ontario, Canada)

The Office of the Fairness Commissioner (OFC) in Ontario is a leading international model of how independent oversight can make professional recognition systems fairer, faster and more transparent.

Established under the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act 2006*, the Fairness Commissioner works with occupational regulators to ensure registration practices are accountable and impartial. The Commissioner reports to the Minister for Labour (similar to the Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio in Australia).



Originally focused on fairness, the OFC's remit now includes labour mobility and workforce planning. It also advises on education and training alignment to address skills shortages — for example, ensuring universities offer sufficient places in professions such as optometry. The Commissioner can order fair access, refer systemic issues to the Minister for reform, and — where needed — the Government can override self-regulation to meet public policy goals. Professions must also process recognition applications within four months unless health or safety concerns apply.

Oversight is guided by a Risk-Informed Compliance Framework (RICF) focusing on higher-risk regulators. Each must submit an annual Fair Registration Practices report, published publicly within 30 days. This transparency creates strong reputational incentives and drives gradual, system-wide improvement. When barriers are identified, these are addressed through two main routes:

- Individual statutes (legislation or regulations) for bodies to achieve public policy goals (e.g. faster, fairer, cheaper recognition of individual or multiple professions).
- By-laws issued by the Fairness Commissioner in Ontario (or another example is the Superintendent of Professions in British Columbia) to specific professions to address barriers to recognition.

Ontario and other provinces using this model have achieved measurable improvements in recognition outcomes. In Manitoba, where a similar Fairness Commissioner was established in 2009, professional registration rates for overseas-trained workers nearly doubled, increasing from 25% in 2012 to 45% in 2020.

The Fairness Commissioner model provides several key lessons for Australia:

- Independent oversight improves accountability and transparency.
- Risk-based monitoring fosters continuous improvement and sector ownership.
- Strong ministerial links enable government to act where systemic barriers persist.
- Public reporting and mandated timelines drive fairer and faster outcomes.

Solution 2: Create a more seamless system from the point of view of the migrant

Purpose: To establish an integrated, end-to-end process that supports migrants from visa granting through to employment, ensuring a clear, coordinated and efficient pathway into work that matches their skills and qualifications.

Rationale: Currently, skills and qualifications assessments for migration purposes are separate from those required for employment and professional licensing. This disconnect creates confusion, duplication and delays. Many migrants assume their migration skills assessment also qualifies them to work in their profession, only discovering otherwise after arrival. The lack of coordination and communication between migration, licensing and employment systems results in frustration, wasted effort and lost productivity.

Description: A reformed system would treat the journey from visa to employment as one seamless process with greater coordination between migration assessors, licensing authorities and employers. Aligning these processes would ensure skilled migrants transition into their professions more quickly, allowing Australia to capture their full economic contribution sooner. While migration and employment requirements may differ, these differences must be communicated clearly and upfront, so that recognition pathways are clear.



Features: Delivering a seamless system requires cross-portfolio collaboration and removal of siloed responsibilities, so that migration, skills and employment processes function as a single, connected service rather than a series of disjointed steps. For example, licensing requirements for a migrant’s profession should be communicated at the visa approval stage, rather than leaving migrants to discover and navigate them after arrival. The lead agency responsible for coordinating the seamless system and identifying blockages would be the same agency in which the Commissioner/Ombudsman is situated.

Scope: Creating a more seamless system applies to all migrants with qualifications in accredited professions who are eligible to work in Australia, regardless of visa type. Access to skills recognition and associated supports should be universal and visa-agnostic, recognising that many highly qualified migrants enter Australia through secondary, family or humanitarian streams as well as through skilled migration, and that Australia should create a system that ensures every person can contribute to our workforce, economy and society to their full capacity.

Specific proposals are outlined below, but these are envisioned as part of one integrated seamless system. Each intervention should be user-centred, designed with overseas-qualified professionals in mind.

Solution 3: Make the system affordable and accessible

Solution 3a: Financial support to reduce cost barriers

Purpose: To reduce cost barriers so more migrants can go through the skills recognition system.

Rationale: Application fees and costs to get overseas-acquired skills and qualifications assessed can be prohibitively high (e.g. up to \$51,000 for GPs, \$8,000 for dentists, \$9,000 for skilled trades). There is currently no national subsidy or loan scheme to support newcomers with these costs. High costs mean some migrants don’t even apply to get accredited, while others spend years and months saving, during which they become de-skilled or lapse time-sensitive practicing requirements.

Description: Offer financial support for individuals requiring financial assistance to obtain overseas skills and qualifications recognition in regulated professions. This measure will complement the role of the oversight mechanism or Commissioner/Ombudsman which will ensure that fees charged by professional associations and accrediting bodies are reasonable and cost reflective. This will place downward pressure on costs across the system. Nevertheless, some financially disadvantaged people will still require financial support to go through the skills recognition process, in which situations the government should provide financial support to ensure financial barriers do not inhibit individuals from fully contributing to the economy.

Scope: Financial support could be means-tested and/or targeted to support migrants qualified to work in specific accredited professions with acute shortages. A subsidy or grants program would be readily scalable and could be ramped up depending on demand.



Solution 3b: Multilingual skills recognition portal

Purpose: To create a single source of truth on which professions in Australia require accreditation or licensing, and how to obtain it – improving efficiency, reducing exploitation and enabling migrants to work at their full potential sooner.

Rationale: Currently, no central or authoritative platform exists to help migrants identify whether their profession is regulated, or which authority they must contact for registration or recognition. This fragmentation creates confusion, delays, unnecessary costs, and exposes migrants to exploitation by unqualified intermediaries offering misleading services.

Description: The Skills Recognition Portal would serve as a comprehensive, user-friendly one-stop shop for information on how to get overseas skills and qualifications recognised in certain states/territories and professions, with referrals to relevant support services. It would include step-by-step guidance, interactive tools and referrals to relevant support services such as Career Gateway Hubs and financial support. To ensure accessibility, the portal would be available in multiple languages, designed to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse users.

Scope: The portal would ultimately cover all professions, clearly distinguishing between regulated and unregulated occupations. It could be implemented in stages, beginning with priority sectors facing critical workforce shortages, before expanding to encompass all professions and jurisdictions over time.

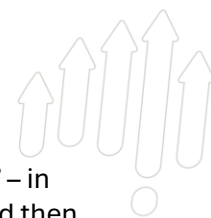
Case study: “Anerkennung in Deutschland” – Recognition in Germany portal

Germany’s multilingual skills recognition portal features an innovative ‘Recognition Finder’ tool that allows applicants to enter their profession and location to automatically receive tailored, step-by-step guidance on how to have their skills and qualifications recognised. The portal, designed to reflect Germany’s federated labour market, provides information on around 500 regulated professions, including doctors, nurses and teachers. It also includes a built-in referral service that connects users directly to their nearest recognition advice centre for personalised support. Within four years of its launch, the number of foreign qualification recognition applications in Germany more than doubled — demonstrating the powerful impact that clear, accessible information can have on participation and outcomes.

Solution 4: Rollout Career Gateway Hubs with skills recognition navigators

Purpose: To provide overseas-trained workers with personalised guidance and integrated employment support so they can gain recognition and work at their full potential as soon as possible, maximising benefits to the economy.

Rationale: Despite being an incredibly complex process to navigate, there is currently no national service dedicated to helping overseas-trained workers navigate the system for skills and qualifications recognition or to connect skilled migrants with jobs that match their expertise.



Description: Establish specialist, place-based employment hubs – or “career gateways” – in areas with high migrant populations to guide workers through the recognition process and then into jobs aligned with their skills and qualifications. These hubs would include skills recognition “navigators” to provide personalised guidance through the recognition process alongside wrap-around employment services located in one place. Eligibility would extend beyond the unemployed, ensuring overseas-trained professionals working below their skill level or outside their field can also access support. This would include those who have lived in Australia for some time and may not be receiving income support, to entry-level job seekers to mid- and senior-level professionals seeking to continue their careers.

Features: As an integrated initiative, the career gateways would feature a range of co-located services to help overseas-trained workers achieve their full economic potential, including:

- recognition and licensing navigation support through dedicated case worker ‘navigators’;
- specialised training to bridge cultural and language barriers to gaining employment;
- job placement, networking, mentoring and career advice programs; and
- education on workplace rights.

The hubs could also be integrated with other solutions outlined earlier, such as having a referral service to a local hub via the online recognition portal (Solution 3a) and/or administering recognition grants via hubs (Solution 3b).

The career gateway hubs could be piloted in a handful of metropolitan and regional areas to test models and provide a proof-of-concept prior to a national rollout.

Case study: Recognition advice centres in Germany

A similar model has worked effectively in Germany where advice service centres operate across all 16 states. These centres provide overseas-trained workers with personalised support including counselling on qualifications recognition, guidance on bridging courses, and access to mentoring and coaching. The advice centres are part of Network IQ – Germany’s flagship Integration through Qualification Program. The approach to skills recognition in Germany is underpinned by a robust legislative framework – the Recognition Act – which creates a legal right for individuals to have their overseas qualifications assessed and mandates recognition outcomes to be finalised within two to four months.