



**AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENTISTS
SUBMISSION
TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION STUDY POSITION PAPER
*ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF MIGRATION AND POPULATION GROWTH***

BACKGROUND

The Australian Institute of Medical Scientists (AIMS) is the professional association representing medical scientists working in hospitals, universities and private medical laboratories in Australia. Professional membership of the Association is restricted to qualified medical scientists. One of the benefits of membership of AIMS is that it is recognised by employers as indicating professional status.

AIMS is also the body to which the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR) has delegated the authority to assess the skills and qualifications of those people who are applying to migrate to Australia under the Commonwealth's General Skilled Migration programme as medical scientists ASCO 2115-11 (professional classification) or medical laboratory technical officers ASCO 3111-11 (technical classification).

Medical scientists perform medical laboratory tests on blood and other body tissues to assist in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease.

Medical scientists work in hospital laboratories, private pathology laboratories, state health laboratories and universities. In larger hospitals and laboratories, medical scientists usually specialise in a specific discipline, such as immunology, cytology, haematology, microbiology or blood transfusion.

Training and qualifications

The academic training for medical scientists in Australia is a Bachelor of Science or Applied Science degree in which the majors include specialised medical science subjects. There are currently twelve bachelor degree courses in medical laboratory science conducted by universities in Australia and New Zealand that have been accredited by AIMS. These courses are assessed against AIMS Minimum Standards for Professional Degree Courses in Medical Science by a team of specialist assessors; the accreditation is usually for a period of five years.

Graduates of AIMS accredited degree courses are eligible for professional membership of the Institute upon graduation, and to be classified as medical scientists. Graduates of other relevant science degrees, whether obtained in Australia or overseas, are assessed individually and normally require a minimum of two years' post graduate professional experience, in addition to a relevant degree equivalent to at least an Australian bachelor degree, **plus** successful completion of the AIMS professional examination, before they can be classified as a medical scientist.

Assessment process

The Australian Institute of Medical Scientists considers that its role in assessing the qualifications and skills of potential migrants is chiefly to maintain standards and to ensure that migrants who may gain entry as medical scientists have the qualifications and experience to work as medical scientists in the Australian health system. Maintaining the current high standards and ensuring patient welfare are paramount considerations.

AIMS conducts these assessments based initially on certified documentary evidence of qualifications and experience provided by the applicant, followed by a three hour written examination for eligible applicants. For applicants who have not completed an AIMS accredited degree programme, successful completion of the AIMS Professional Examination is mandatory for classification as a medical scientist. An applicant who fails the examination would be classified as a medical laboratory technical officer.

Since January 2006 proof of an IELTS test report showing an overall band score of 6.5 or better in the General Test has been a requirement for applications for assessment.

It is pleasing to note that independent research concludes that our and other assessment processes have seen an improved labour market performance of recent migrants.

ISSUES RAISED IN THE POSITION PAPER

9.2 English language proficiency

AIMS agrees strongly with the findings that English language proficiency is an important factor influencing labour market success and economic wellbeing of migrants and that it is important that the efficacy of the English language component of the migration programme be monitored to ensure that it continues to meet its objectives.

For many professions, particularly health professions, proficiency in the English language is essential and is usually required by the assessing authorities. For medical scientists working in diagnostic pathology laboratories such language proficiency is crucial for patient safety. The requirements of a satisfactory IELTS result and of successful completion of a written examination help to ensure that migrants who enter Australia as medical scientists under the Skilled Migration programme have an appropriate English language skills.

9.3 Distortions arising from the skilled migration program

The report identifies a number of areas where the skilled migration programme could be creating unintended distortions and outcomes.

AIMS has noted an increasing number of medical graduates (or students who have completed a bachelor of medical science as part of a medical degree) from Australian universities applying for assessment as medical scientists. One applicant stated that this was done in the hope that by receiving permanent residency before completing the course or the intern year, he/she might avoid being sent to work in an area of need.

The advantages to applicants of the Skilled Independent Overseas Student (SIOS) class have produced (possibly) unintended outcomes in relation to courses undertaken by students. As outlined above, AIMS accredits twelve medical laboratory science bachelor degree programmes in Australian and New Zealand universities. These courses include professional subjects such as haematology, histology, transfusion medicine and medical microbiology, as well as subjects such as human anatomy and physiology and general pathology. The courses also include a period of clinical practice. Graduates of AIMS accredited degrees are classified by AIMS as medical scientists on graduation. AIMS receives many applications each year from students who have completed Australian degrees in biomedical or medical science that are not accredited by AIMS and who expect that their degree will enable them to be classified as a medical scientist. Graduates of these non accredited degrees are required to have two years of clinical practice and to complete the AIMS Professional Examination before they are classified as medical scientists. It may be that enthusiastic marketing by some universities is attracting students into inappropriate courses.

9.4 Efficacy of skills assessment and recognition processes

Complexities and inconsistencies

AIMS is the body that assesses the skills and qualifications of people wishing to migrate to Australia as medical scientists or medical laboratory technical officers under the skilled migration programme. There is currently no registration of medical scientists or medical laboratory technical officers in Australia and the assessment by AIMS is recognised by employing authorities across Australia. Thus for these skills the assessment process is relatively simple, completely consistent and is recognised Australia-wide; no additional registration or State-based requirements need to be met by migrants seeking to enter the workforce.

Access to information on the skills recognition process

Information provided by assessing bodies and DIMIA has sometimes been fragmentary or incomplete. The proposed establishment of a national skills web portal is most welcome.

AIMS maintains full information about the assessment process, including an application form, facilities for on-line payment, and an email query facility, on its website at www.aims.org.au and provides regular information updates to the Migration Institute of Australia.

Gap between migration assessment and employment assessment

As outlined above, as there is no registration of medical scientists in Australia and assessment by AIMS is recognised by employers throughout Australia, there is no gap between migration assessment and employment assessment in the case of medical scientists and medical laboratory technical officers. AIMS has for some time advocated the introduction of a registration system for the profession and advocated that such a system should be consistent across States and Territories and with the overseas skills assessment process, such that a positive skills assessment would allow immediate registration.

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