



Fairfield Emerging Communities Action Partnership (FECAP)

Fairfield Migrant Interagency (FMI)

Assistant Secretary,
Labour Market Branch
Department of Immigration and Citizenship
PO Box 25
Belconnen ACT 2616

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission on General Skilled Migration Points Test

I am writing to you on behalf of Fairfield Emerging Communities Action Partnership (FECAP) and Fairfield Migrant Interagency (FMI). Both are interagency networks in the Fairfield Local Government Area. FECAP represents new and emerging communities and FMI represents migrants, refugees and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The FMI and FECAP bring together local workers, stakeholders, representatives from local ethnic organisations, service providers and government and non-government organisations. Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre and Fairfield City Council co-convene FECAP and FMI. Individually and collectively the member organisations engage in community development, capacity building, advocacy and information sharing. The overarching aim is to support new and diverse communities through innovative initiatives whilst being sensitive to and encouraging diversity.

FECAP and FMI support the move to make occupation a threshold criterion only and not to award any points for different occupations.

FECAP and FMI would like to see the English threshold requirements lowered from the current IELTS 6 to vocational English (IELTS 5) in all four components to enable tradespeople with that level of English to migrate. FECAP and FMI do not consider it necessary for tradespeople to possess more proficient English than at the vocational level and suggest they be awarded 15 points for IELTS 5. FECAP and FMI also suggest that a different test be developed for each different occupation to test English for specific purposes rather than relying on general and academic IELTS tests.

FECAP and FMI would like to see the threshold age increased to 50 and for that age group to be entitled to 15 points. This increase will attract more experienced workers and is in line with the expressed government expectations of Australians working longer that are reflected in the recent increase in the age threshold for the aged pension.

FECAP and FMI support points for a well qualified partner as it is a major bonus to get two skilled migrants in the same family unit, and suggest raising the points given beyond five.

FECAP and FMI oppose any move to cease allocating points for family sponsorship. We support retaining the current 20 points effectively given for family sponsorship (by enabling them to apply for skilled- sponsored [Class VE, visa subclass 176]) as this reunion helps families to settle and become more productive in the labour market themselves. Even when the new arrival is not working, s/he can add economic capacity to the family by freeing up other family members from household work and obligations such as child minding, to participate in the workforce. It is important to recognise that skilled migration is often the only option for family members such as siblings to migrate, as there is no family stream visa option for them.

The consolidation of migrant families through family sponsorship plays a vital role in their economic capacity, mental well-being, quality of life and capacity to participate in the broader community. These benefits may not always be measurable in terms of short term impacts on labour markets or the level of economic activity. Nor are they necessarily measurable in terms of individual employment outcomes (such as those noted by Birrell and quoted in the discussion paper). Such benefits nevertheless bring very significant benefits to the social and economic capacity of Australia in the long term. The allocation of points for family sponsorship is thus connected to one of the two stated objectives of the discussion paper: "to help address Australia's long term demographic and economic needs". The positive effect of family reunion and support is particularly critical for recently arrived refugee and humanitarian entrants (c.f *Economic, Civic and Social Contributions of Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants: A Literature Review*, Refugee Council of Australia, 2010, p.55).

FECAP and FMI support points for regional study as it benefits regional economies.

FECAP and FMI oppose any move to abolish points for community languages. The advantage of community languages and cultural knowledge (productive diversity) are well documented (c.f. for example, *Productive diversity: management lessons from Australian companies*, Bill Cope & Mary Kalantzis, 1997 and *Business Benefits of Productive Diversity-Case Studies*, Report to DIMA, Santina Bertone, Mary Leahy, October 2000) and include increasing overseas trade by using bilingual staff in negotiations and as market researchers, expanding domestic niche markets and forming new markets through advertising in community languages and developing culturally appropriate products. There are also obvious advantages in client service for both domestic (migrant) and international markets. Bilingual migrants from emerging communities with shortages of accredited interpreters and translators can potentially benefit those communities greatly by using those linguistics skills to help others in either a paid or voluntary capacity.

At the moment points are awarded for designated language only when the applicant has completed university and studied in that language. This requirement appears unnecessarily high as evidence that one is able to effectively comprehend and communicate in one's own native language. FECAP and FMI believe that successful completion of high school and the award of the equivalent of a high school certificate is sufficient, as the high school curriculum includes courses that focus on cultural knowledge as well as more general curricula. Therefore, we recommend that the requirement for points for community languages (designated language) be lowered down from Bachelor's degree level to High School Certificate level.

FECAP and FMI would like to see points retained for Australian qualifications as international students benefit the Australian economy. Given the recognised shortage of trade professionals in Australia and the length of time needed for Australians to be trained in these trades to meet current demand, FECAP and FMI would like the points given for an Australian qualification in a trade raised beyond 5 points.

Whilst acknowledging the benefits of ensuring the points test reflects the needs of the Australian economy, FECAP and FMI do not wish to see changes to skilled migration requirements that adversely impact current international students in Australia. No changes should be made to the Skilled Occupation List that lead to currently studying students becoming ineligible to meet skilled migration requirements that they could expect to have met based on the points test in place at the beginning of their studies. We recommend that prospective changes be flagged well in advance of their implementation to avoid adverse financial consequences for currently enrolled students. Families from developing countries in particular, have often had to make great sacrifices to send their children to study in Australia and we would not like to see those sacrifices wasted.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the General Skilled Migration Points Test.

Yours sincerely

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