TEMPORARY GRADUATIFICATION

Impacts of post-study work rights policy in Australia

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Executive Summary

Post-study work rights (PSWR) are becoming increasingly influential in international students’ decision of study destinations. The rights and opportunities to work in the host country post-graduation are integral to international students’ expectations about return on investment in overseas study, employment goals, life and migration aspirations. Policy makers and education providers regard post-study work opportunities in the host countries as a drawcard for international students. Accordingly, enhancing employment prospects and outcomes of international graduates who stay in the destination country is increasingly crucial both for host country’s sustainable growth of international students and commitment to delivering on promise.

Revised and introduced in 2013, the Australian government’s PSWR policy aims to provide international graduates from Australian universities with the opportunity to remain in Australia from two to four years and gain international work experience. The temporary graduate visa is often referred to as subclass 485 visa. The latest data from the Department of Home Affairs show that as of June 2019, there were 91,776 temporary graduates in Australia, which accounts for around 0.7 per cent of Australia’s 13.5 million labour force (Australian Government, 2019a). This research examines the effects of Australia’s temporary graduate visa policy.

This study (2016-2019) is based on analysis of policy and multiple secondary data sources, a survey of 1,156 temporary graduate visa holders from 35 Australian universities and in-depth interviews with 50 key stakeholders including current and past holders of temporary graduate visa who remained in Australia or returned to their home country, employers, university staff, education and migration agents, government and key industry representatives.

Summary of key findings

• The study shows that the PSWR policy has achieved some of its key intended goals. However, the gap between policy intention, international students’ expectations and the Australian labour market has been one of the primary reasons hampering the effectiveness of the policy. Importantly, there are several loopholes related to managing international students’ and graduates’ expectations and the roles of universities, education and migration agents and other stakeholders in the provision of advice and support for temporary graduates in relation to PSWR, visa application and career pathways.

• The PSWR policy has achieved its objectives in terms of creating destination attractiveness for Australia, growing its international enrolments, (especially in Masters by coursework programs), and decoupling the direct link between international education and migration. However, improvement is needed in some areas to enhance the employment outcomes for temporary graduate visa holders. Both the survey and interviews indicate many Australian employers either prefer international graduates with a permanent residency visa than those on the temporary graduate visa or are unclear about what the latter entails.
• There is little evidence that temporary migrants as a whole negatively impact on the Australian labour market or create competition with local workers and this likely the case with temporary graduate visa holders as not only they make up less than one per cent of Australia’s labour force but also most employers either prefer candidates holding permanent residency or citizenship or lack an understanding about the 485 visa.

• However, there is a risk of deskilling, precarity, financial stress and vulnerability of temporary graduates staying in Australia who could be exploited because they need work experience to enhance their employability and achieve their career goals, secure permanent residency, cover the costs of staying in Australia post-graduation and paying back their loans.

• Access to the temporary graduate visa is a very important factor in international students’ decision to choose Australia as their study destination. The overall rate of importance given to access to the temporary graduate visa was 76 per cent among the participants.

• Unlike permanent residency, which often acts as a ‘license’ for international graduates to gain access to the Australian labour market, the temporary graduate visa does not represent a substantial competitive advantage in job seeking. Rather, the 485 visa helps international graduates buy time towards building a network of contacts, gain some work experience and acquire some return on investment in overseas study, improve their English language skills and invest in their social capital in Australia, aimed towards securing stable employment or/and PR.

• The temporary graduate visa is a possible but not easy pathway to PR. There seems to be a ‘chicken or egg’ situation around the nexus between temporary graduate visa, employment and PR. On the one hand, the possession of PR helps to facilitate international graduates’ access to the Australian labour market as most employers prefer those holding PR or citizenship. On the other hand, without employment in their field of study, it means international graduates are unable to acquire five additional points towards their PR application, which helps increase their likeliness in securing PR. These five points will be given to applicants who could secure employment in their field of study for at least one year.

• The study highlights the transformation from the education-migration nexus to education-work-migration nexus for international students, following the introduction of the PSWR policy.

• Participants’ agreement rate with the usefulness of the temporary graduate visa for providing them with a pathway to PR was 74 per cent.

• Small and medium-size companies and branches of international companies provide up to 68 per cent of employment opportunities for current and past visa holders. Branches of small to medium-size companies and international companies are more open to hiring this segment of the workforce and benefiting from a highly-skilled pool of talent who really want to secure employment.

• Most temporary graduates were on two-year post-study work visa, and consider this too short to give employers’ confidence in hiring this cohort.

• The exploration of international graduates’ employment status and their length of stay in Australia indicate that graduates’ chance of securing a full-time job in their field of study improves with further stay in Australia post-graduation and with the transition to PR
status. 52 and 49 per cent of those who graduated in 2015 and 2016 respectively reported that they secured full-time jobs in their field of study in 2019. Notably, 87 per cent of the 485 visa holders who remained in Australia were on a permanent resident visa or a pathway visa to PR in 2019. Domestic graduates in Australia are also now taking longer to gain full-time employment (Australian Government, 2019g).

- International graduates who stay in the host country are more likely to experience education-job mismatch than those who return to their home countries. 36 per cent of current and past holders of the visa who stayed in Australia secured full-time employment in their field of study, compared to 49 per cent who returned to their home country.

- Of the current holders of the visa, 28 per cent worked full-time in their field of study and 21 per cent were looking for a job at the time of completion of the survey. These figures become 52 per cent and 11 per cent respectively for past 485 visa holders who remained in Australia on a different visa.

- Around one quarter of the visa holders either returned home or sought to undertake further study in Australia.

- The median annual income reported by current visa holders who work full-time in Australia was around $55,000, considerably less than a median of $67,000 for past holders of the 485 visa who remained in Australia on a different visa.

- According to the self-stated figures of visa holders’ annual income, on average, male participants earn around $9,800 per annum more than female participants in Australia.

- The three sectors of retail, restaurants and cafes, and education and training provide more than half of the employment opportunities that become available for the majority of the onshore participants who work outside their field of study.

- 74 per cent of the current visa holders who secured full-time jobs in their field of study work in private firms, compared to 22 per cent working in public organisations and 4 per cent working at non-government organizations (NGOs) in Australia. The majority of those in the public sector work in education and training.

- The highest proportion of full-time jobs in the field of study (47 per cent) for onshore participants belong to the field of Computing and IT, followed by of the fields of Accounting, Business Administration and Commerce (34 per cent) and Engineering (33 per cent).

- Survey participants overall reported a satisfaction rate of 66 per cent for the temporary graduate visa. The key reasons for satisfaction are linked with the broader and multiple benefits attached to having extra time in the destination country, through the temporary graduate visa, despite the risk of under-employment or de-skilling.

- Overall a mean score of 7.4 out of 10 was calculated for the responses on how likely participants were to recommend this visa to other international students.

**Gaps, loopholes and unethical practices**

- The relationship between universities, education agents and migration agents is a tenuous one. The fact that only migration agents are legally permitted to provide migration advice, which precludes universities and education agents from this, inadvertently contributes to the vulnerability of international students and graduates to unethical practices.
of some migration agents. Many universities avoid providing advice related to PSWR, 485 visa application and post-485 pathways for international graduates as the matter is deemed to be too sensitive and closely interrelated with migration issues.

- The separation of universities from the post-study migration process is understandable but the convergence of post-study work immigration regimes in many major study destination countries underlines the need to address this unintended consequence. Universities in Australia need to take on a more active role in guiding international students to achieve positive post-study work outcomes and ensure the university role in providing extended services to support transition from study to work if they want to remain competitive on the education export market.

Strategies to navigate the labour market

The common strategies used by international temporary graduates include:

- explicitly and proactively explaining their work rights to prospective employers
- being persistent and demonstrating to employers their willingness to work and their interest in the job
- targeting small businesses and their own universities
- using diversified and alternative job search channels such as Gumtree, Indeed or Glassdoor instead of seek.com.au or career.com.au
- vigorously applying for jobs and being willing to accept entry level jobs/lower pay
- reskilling
- being resilient by taking smaller steps and constantly striving to develop employability capabilities
- self-sourcing or seeking internships through undertaking Professional Year
- networking and strategically using networks
- developing local connections and increasing local cultural and social understandings
- creating jobs for themselves and their international peers.

The findings of this research confirm Australia’s revised PSWR policy has been a positive development but improvement is needed in some areas to enhance the effectiveness of the policy implementation. The research also underscores the importance to deliver on promise beyond simply allowing international students to remain in the host countries for a period of time post-graduation. As competing countries change their PSWR policy to be on par with other major study destinations, the effectiveness of post-study work programs needs to ensure both short-term and long-term employment outcomes for temporary graduates, which in turn helps to enhance sustainable growth in international student numbers and the competitiveness of destination countries.

The study shows that how to create a balance between gaining destination attractiveness, ensuring genuine entrants, retaining talent and maximising international graduate employment outcomes through post-study work rights policy is a critical question for host countries.

The research also indicates an urgent need to consider the impact of the rapidity of temporary graduatification [See page 10 for definition] not only on education export, labour force and migration planning in the host country but also on neighbourhoods as places of destination and dwelling and associated demands for services and accommodation and consumption practices.
It is urgent to establish a dedicated website providing information about post-study work rights, temporary graduate visa and post-485 visa pathways. It is important that this website is created in consultation with key stakeholders and hosted by a recognised organisation or regulatory body.

State governments through their respective initiatives such as Study Sydney or Study Adelaide, should strengthen support for international graduates staying in their state through study/post-study centres and run services that provide information sessions, advice and consultations on:

- post study work rights and pathways
- temporary graduate visa application
- developing professional connections, acquiring local work experience and enhancing employability

It is critical that best practices need to be shared across the states and better promotion of these services is needed.

Universities should provide international graduates with continuing access to career guidance resources and career support and more investment is needed to ensure career and employability support services are adequately resourced to cater for international students beyond graduation.

Universities should have staff who is trained and qualified to provide information on the 485 visas and post-study pathways.

The Federal Government should introduce a regulation that permits the renewal or extension of the temporary graduate visa for an additional one or two years based on criteria related to: 1) job status (for those who are in fulltime employment in their field of study for at least six months) and 2) level of income.

The Federal Government should have a regulation that allows international students enrolled in approved courses for at least two academic years to obtain an automatic 485 visa extension after they graduate.

The Federal Government should consider to have a regulation around advice provision for temporary A (976) visas onshore and offshore agents to provide about issues related to post-study work rights and temporary graduate visa application (but not about migration).

The Federal Government should manage off/onshore agents more closely, with respect to advice being provided on eligible courses for the 485 visa and entitlements and on the visa not being a guaranteed pathway to PR or employment.

The Federal Government should organise consultation processes with key stakeholders, through a Reference Group, and set up an Independent Committee in charge of continuing monitoring and review of the implementation of the PSWR policy.

It is urgent to have a coordinated approach involving different key stakeholders: Government sector, professional organizations, university, communities, employers, and student associations; for example, Austrade, state government initiatives (i.e. Study Melbourne, Study Sydney), IEAA, Victorian Working Group on International Student Employability (VicWISE), ISANA, AMES Australia, City and local Councils and Council of International Students (CISA) and Asia Society Australia.

The Federal Government should organise consultation processes with key stakeholders, through a Reference Group, and set up an Independent Committee in charge of continuing monitoring and review of the implementation of the PSWR policy.

Policy Recommendations

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Recommendations for key stakeholders

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- post study work rights and pathways
- temporary graduate visa application
- developing professional connections, acquiring local work experience and enhancing employability

It is critical that best practices need to be shared across the states and better promotion of these services is needed.

Universities should work in tandem with related stakeholders to establish specialist support groups to create a sustaining community of support for temporary graduates such as International Graduate Talent or International Graduate Achieve. This could be connected to state-based initiatives.

There should be a partnership between University’s Student Association/Student Union and community Legal Centres (for example Eastern Community Legal Centre) to provide international students and graduates with guidance and advice on temporary graduate visa and post-study work rights.

There is a need to educate employers and raise their awareness about the intent and nature of the temporary graduate visa and the potential contributions of international graduates on this visa and on visa options post 485.

It is urgent to have a coordinated approach involving different key stakeholders: Government sector, professional organizations, university, communities, employers, and student associations; for example, Austrade, state government initiatives (i.e. Study Melbourne, Study Sydney), IEAA, Victorian Working Group on International Student Employability (VicWISE), ISANA, AMES Australia, City and local Councils and Council of International Students (CISA) and Asia Society Australia.
Introduction

In a competitive global labour market, the opportunity to acquire experience in the host country labour market is a key driver of international student choice, interconnected with their return on investment in international education, career pathways and migration decisions. At the institutional level, data and knowledge about international students’ post-study employment outcomes and work arrangements inform their positioning on the international education market and the policies to enhance employability for this cohort. At the national level, this issue of post-study work arrangements is therefore critical to the competitiveness of the education export sector and has significant implications for the nation’s migration and talent acquisition agendas.

Therefore, top provider countries in the world including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and European countries including Germany, Ireland, Sweden and the Netherlands have implemented different PSWR policies to provide international graduates with the opportunities to gain work experience in the host country and project themselves as attractive destinations to international students. In particular, the UK has recently announced the re-introduction of a PSWR policy which allows international graduates to stay in the UK for a two-year period and look for employment. This policy change is welcome by the UK international education sector and by universities which have long campaigned for the extension of PSWR in order to be on par with other competitive countries and increase their destination attraction.

Over the past decade, the Australian government has introduced different temporary graduate visa arrangements to provide international graduates from Australian universities with the opportunity to join the Australian labour market and acquire relevant work experience. Revised and introduced in 2013, the Australian government’s post study work rights policy aims to provide international graduates from Australian universities with the opportunity to remain in Australia from two to four years and gain international work experience. Data released by the Australian Department of Home Affairs (Australian Government, 2019b) show an over sevenfold increase in the number of visas under the post-study work visa (subclass 485) scheme granted to international graduates between 2013-2015, from 1,140 to 8,586 (see Figure 1). This was followed by a significant growth between 2015 and 2018, especially in the number of granted temporary graduate visas, which reached 63,994 in the 12 months between the end of June 2018 and 2019. As of June 2019, there were 91,776 temporary graduate visa holders in Australia (Australian Government, 2019a).

Temporary graduate visa holders are a segment of the temporary skilled workforce who contribute to Australia’s taxation revenues but are not entitled to any subsidised government services (CEDA, 2019). In particular, temporary graduates are a global highly skilled workforce for Australia with distinctive strengths - being educated in Australian universities with transnational knowledge and networks, multilingual capabilities, intercultural skills and global experiences. Therefore, this temporary graduate cohort can be regarded as desirable
skilled workforce for Australia with a strong potential to deliver benefits to the country’s local businesses, community and broader society and economy. There is however a risk to miss a potential pool of skilled transient workforce and maximize its potential benefits if the structural barriers around the temporary graduate visa and international graduates’ access to the Australian labour market persist.

To develop nuanced understandings about the effects of the PSWR arrangements, this research aims to explore:

- how Australia’s temporary graduate visa has impacted international graduates’ employment and its implications for the workforce
- what strategies international graduates have used to navigate the Australian labour market
- the pathways post temporary graduate visa for international graduates
- how Australia’s PSWR policy has affected international student enrolments
- the perceptions towards and use of the PSWR policy by key stakeholders including universities, employers, professional organisations and agents.

In this report we refer to the phenomenon of international graduates being granted temporary graduate visas to remain in the destination country and acquire work experience as temporary graduatification. Temporary graduatification has significant implications for not only education export, international and internal migration dynamics but also local labour markets, workforce planning, neighbourhoods as places of destination and dwelling, associated demand for services and accommodation and consumption practices. There is an urgent need for these factors to be taken into account in policy planning and research about the rapidity of temporary graduatification, the exponential growth of temporary graduates staying in the host country, and its impact on population change and urban and regional transformation. The pathways after the temporary graduate visa, including transition into PR, also need to be factored in policy planning about international education, skilled migration and workforce.

![Figure 1: Temporary Graduate Visas granted between 2007 and mid 2019 (Compiled based on data from Australian Government, 2019b)](image-url)
Post-study work rights and international student commencements

While review suggests that international evidence on how post-study work programmes influence international student recruitment is mixed (Trevena, 2019), existing data in Australia shows a substantial growth in international student commencements since the introduction of the revised PSWR policy. The biggest growth since the introduction of the revised PSWR policy in 2013 has been in Masters by coursework enrolments with the top five countries of PSWR visa holders (India, China, Nepal, Pakistan, Vietnam) matching with the top five source countries of international enrolments in Masters by coursework (China, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Vietnam; See Figures 2 and 3).

There were 80,903 international commencements in Masters by coursework programs in 2018, an increase of 15% compared to 2017 and more than double the figure of 37,989 commencements in 2013, when the revised PSWR policy was introduced.

Figure 2: Top five countries of Temporary Graduate Visa holders (Compiled based on data from Australian Government, 2019b)

Figure 3: Five countries of Masters by coursework commencements: 2007–December 2018 (Compiled based on data from Australian Government, 2019c)
Background and Context

The objectives, policies and procedures regarding international education in Australia have changed significantly in the last three decades from the time when the bulk of international students in Australia were either sponsored or subsidised by international aid programmes (prior to 1986) to the trade-oriented approach adopted since.

The nexus between international education and migration is a complex one underpinned by the fact that the evolution of higher education policies with international students as an important source of income has occurred alongside a shift in immigration policy with growing participation of international students in Australia’s skilled migration programme. Until the turn of the century, international students were required to leave Australia upon the completion of their studies. Reforms were implemented in 1999 to encourage international students to apply for PR after their studies. Soon after, the Commonwealth Government reversed its policy which required international students to return to their home country for a minimum of two years before applying for PR. Bonus points were also allocated to applicants with an Australian qualification which made it easier for students who favoured a move (Hugo, 2002). In addition, the requirement for applicants to have 3 years of work experience was waived for students, further easing the application process. The growth of international students in Australia was largely attributed to shifts in immigration policy which provided pathways to PR (Birrell, 2005). However, the requirements to qualify for PR have been increasingly stringent over time.

A number of changes in 2007, which stemmed from a 2006 independent evaluation on General Skilled Migration (GSM) categories (Birrell, Hawthorne and Richardson, 2006) led to a significant impact on the PR aspirations of international students. Some of these changes required international student graduates applying for PR to demonstrate higher levels of English language proficiency and more notably, some skilled experience which they previously were exempt from possessing. The most significant change in 2007, with which the current PSWR has its origins in, was the introduction the Skilled Graduate Temporary visa (subclass 485).

This visa was not points tested and instead focused on the English language ability and work experience of applicants. International students who failed to meet the pass mark for the points test for a permanent or provisional GSM visa had the option of applying for this Skilled Graduate Temporary visa which provided a pathway to PR. This visa provided opportunities for graduates to remain in Australia for 18 months and travel, improve their English language skills and/or gain skilled work experience in the Australian labour market. Alternatively, holders could complete a Professional Year, a structured professional development programme to help participants become accustomed to working in an Australian workplace. Moreover, after having fulfilled relevant Australian employment requirements, holders of the 485 visa were awarded points in their application for a PR visa (Jackling, 2007).

The introduction of the Skilled Graduate Temporary 485 visa resulted in an increase in the number of international students remaining in
Australia (Hall, 2019). However, there were also a number of unintended consequences such as the rapid increase of international enrolments in the Vocational and education training (VET) sector linked to a significant proportion attending courses with the primary objective of securing PR, and at the same time the widespread stereotype that international VET students are merely “PR hunters” and not interested in learning (Tran and Nyland, 2011; Tran and Vu, 2017). A number of reforms in 2009 and 2010 such as stronger integrity checks for student visa applications and the increase in the financial resources demonstrable by students for each year of their study impacted on international enrolments. In particular, the introduction of the Skilled Occupation List (SOL) in place of the Migration Occupations in Demand List (the MODL) removed a key element for international students seeking PR in Australia as graduating with qualifications associated with occupations listed in the latter was perceived as a straightforward route to PR. Further, a range of other factors such as incidents of violence against international students (Jakubowicz and Monani, 2010), the global financial crisis, the strength of the Australia dollar, which increased the cost of tuition fees and the cost of living in Australia, as well as increasing competition from other countries essentially created a perfect storm of events that resulted in a 11.5 per cent decline in higher education visa grants and a 23.4 per cent decrease in combined offshore visa grants for higher education from 2008-9 to 2009-10 (Phillimore and Koshy, 2010). Consequently, a strategic review, the Knight Review, of the international student visa program was ordered by the Commonwealth to assess the integrity, quality and competitiveness of the program (Spinks, 2016).

The Knight Review, released in 2011, included 41 recommendations which focused on streamlining visa applications for the university sector and the introduction of PSWR for international student graduates. The PSWR, which was not available to VET student graduates, replaced the Skilled Graduate Temporary 485 visa. This shift also represented the attempt to decouple the link between international education and permanent migration. The Knight Review also resulted in the Genuine Temporary Entrant (GTE) test which assessed whether a prospective international student had genuine intentions for temporary stay in Australia; a key determinant for visa approvals. The Temporary Graduate visa (subclass 485) replaced the Skilled Graduate visa (subclass 485) on 23 March 2013 as a part of the implementation of post-study work arrangements (Hall, 2019; Spinks, 2016).

The Temporary Graduate visa now has two streams: the Graduate Work stream and the Post-Study Work stream. One of the key features of the Temporary Graduate visa is the ability for international students under the Post-Study Work stream to live and work in Australia for 2 years after graduating with a Bachelor degree or Masters by coursework degree, 3 years if graduating with a Masters by Research degree and 4 years if graduating with a Doctoral degree, with no requirements to nominate an occupation on the Medium and Long-term Strategic Skills List (MLTSSL) nor have their skills assessed by the relevant assessing authority (Australian Government, 2019d). Conversely, the Graduate Work stream imposes the aforementioned requirements as it caters for those graduating with skills relating to a listed occupation on the MLTSSL – this stream allows holders to remain in Australia for 18 months (Australian Government, 2019e). The Post-Study Work stream has proved to be the more popular option making up a significant 84.2 per cent of 485 visa grants in 2017-18, moreover, the number of visa grants in this stream grew from 1,140 in 2013-14 to 43,507 in 2017-18. It must be noted that this is not only due to the growth of the international student program but also because of the increasing number of students qualifying for the Post-Study
In March 2019, the Post-Study Work stream was modified due to the Commonwealth Government’s efforts to address issues relating to population pressures and buckling infrastructure in Melbourne and Sydney by channelling more migrants to regional defined parts of Australia.

The current iteration of the post-study work stream under the Temporary Graduate visa now allows international student graduates from universities in regional defined areas to extend their stay in Australia by applying for an extra year after their initial 485 visa (Australian Government, 2019f).

Table 1: Comparison of post-study work rights across nine destination countries (Table from Berquist, et al., 2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTRACTION RANKING</th>
<th>IN-STUDY WORK</th>
<th>POST-STUDY WORK (Years)</th>
<th>MINIMUM STUDY (Years)</th>
<th>BACHELOR (Coursework)</th>
<th>MASTERS (Coursework)</th>
<th>PhD</th>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>3. Australia</td>
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Methodology

The research project addresses a critical gap and examines whether and how the post-study work visa arrangements have affected international alumni’s employment outcomes and experiences in Australia. The project commenced in 2016 and comprises three key components: (1) an analysis of policy texts and secondary datasets relating to the temporary graduate visa; (2) qualitative inquiry through in-depth interviews; and (3) quantitative dimension through a questionnaire survey.

First, critical analysis of policy and secondary datasets provides insights into national policy scapes with regard to international students and alumni, visa arrangements, access to labour market and skilled migration. An examination of the secondary data maps out the key trends in the uptake of the post-study work visa.

Second, 50 in-depth interviews were conducted with temporary graduate visa holders (including those who remain in Australia and those who have returned to their home country), university staff, employers, education and migration agents, government representatives and key industry groups. The in-depth interviews provide rich data on individual international graduates’ expectations and experiences with the post-study work arrangements in Australia, their motivations to apply for the visa, their employment outcomes, their strategies to navigate the labour market and how their visa is perceived by Australian employers with whom they interact. Interviewees’ identity and organizations have been kept anonymous in this research.

Third, the quantitative survey involves 45 questions that aim to explore the experiences, perceptions, employment outcomes and pathways of temporary graduate visa holders (both current and past). The survey also investigates temporary graduates’ strategies to navigate the Australian labour market and the levels of support provision for temporary graduates by their respective Australian universities. We also sought their recommendations for improving the efficiency of the post-study work arrangements. We drew on the preliminary results of in-depth interviews with current and past holders of 485 visa, including those onshore and have returned to their home country, and key informants to inform the design of the online survey. The online survey was delivered via Qualtrics secure platform and distributed on our behalf via multiple channels such as universities, international student organisations and professional organisations involved with international graduates. The survey responses were confidential and anonymous.

The survey commenced in December 2018 and closed in July 2019. There were 1,156 respondents who commenced the survey. However, the number of responses to different questions varies in accordance with the survey flow which specified the question to different participant’s categories and also the number of participants in each flow who completed the survey.
Findings

Of the participants who commenced the survey, 47.8 per cent were female (n=554), 51.7 per cent were male (n=597) and 0.5 per cent identified as other (n=5). Approximately 49 per cent of the participants aged between 25 and 29, 24 per cent aged between 18 and 24 and approximately 26 per cent aged 30 or above (see Figure 4). 84.5 per cent of the respondents who have held a post-study work visa remain in Australia while 15.5 per cent have left Australia at the time of the survey (14.2 per cent returned home and 1.3 per cent relocated to another country).

The biggest group of the survey respondents (59.4 per cent) have a Masters by coursework degree as their highest qualification, followed by 27.2 per cent with a Bachelor or Bachelor with honours degree, and almost 9 per cent with a higher degree by research or a Masters (extended) degree. The majority of the survey participants were from Asia (see Figure 5). Participants with an Indian background, followed by the Vietnamese and Chinese, were the top three subsamples of the survey. This is largely comparable with national data (see Hall, 2019, pp.17-18) showing the high growth in postgraduate enrolment particularly in Masters by coursework programs in IT and Accounting and Engineering. Additionally, graduate visa granted since 2013-14 were overrepresented (70%) by international student graduates from five source countries - India, China, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam - somewhat reflecting the composition of the main birthplace countries of our survey respondents.

Figure 4: Survey participants’ age groups
Impacts of post-study work rights policy

Importance of access to post-study work rights

According to the survey results, the availability of temporary graduate visa was seen as a very important factor in participants’ decision to choose to study in Australia. The overall rate of importance of access to the temporary graduate visa was 76 per cent among the participants (Figure 6). There was no difference between the male and female participants’ overall rate for the importance of the post-study work rights arrangements. The importance of access to visa was indicated slightly more important for the participants of an Indian background (82 per cent), followed by those of Vietnamese (78 per cent) and Chinese (76 per cent) backgrounds. This finding echoes previous research that found Indian students to be more responsive to immigration policies in study destinations (Choudaha, 2018; Tan and Hugo, 2017).
Usefulness of the visa

As shown on Figure 7, participants who remained in Australia at the time of the survey showed high levels of agreements on the ranked statements that the temporary graduate visa has been a pathway to permanent residence and that the visa enhanced their employability. In contrast, temporary graduate visa holders who returned to their home country showed high agreements on the ranked statements that the visa enhanced their social network and professional network in Australia.

Among participants who remained in Australia, the statement that the temporary graduate visa has been a pathway to permanent residency was ranked the highest. This trend was similar among the study levels of a Bachelor degree, Bachelor (honours) degree, Masters by coursework degree and Masters (extended) degree.

Male and female participants were similarly indicating high levels of agreements on the ranked statements that the temporary graduate visa has been a pathway to permanent residence and that the visa opportunity enhanced their employability in the second rank.

Post temporary graduate visa pathways

For past holders of the 485 visa who remained in Australia, PR and TR visas leading to PR were the most common categories reported in the survey, which was followed by student visa (subclass 500). PR visas reported by the participants include Skilled independent visa (subclass 189), Skilled Nominated (subclass 190), Employer nomination (subclass 186) and Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (subclass 187). TR visas as a pathway to later apply for PR once the visa holder has met the PR visa requirement include Skilled Regional Provisional (subclass 489), temporary skill shortage (TSS) (subclass 482) and Employer sponsored visa (subclass 457). It is worth noting that subclass 482 Temporary Skill Shortage has three streams, of which stream 1 (Medium and long) and stream 3 (Labour agreement) can be a PR pathway but not stream 2 (Short).

A small proportion were on spouse visa and on tourist visa (see Figure 8) while those on bridging
Visas are in the process of transiting to another visa, including student visa. Interviews with agents also confirm a growing number of 485 visa holders are switching back to student visa to extend their stay in Australia or commence a new study program to enhance their employability or their chance to secure PR. This illustrates how international students can transition from an international student visa to a 485 visa and onto a range of other visas to extend their stay in Australia. It also highlights the link between international education and permanent migration which resonates with the axiom that there “is nothing more permanent than temporary foreign workers” (Martin 2001).

Notably, some returned to their home country when their temporary graduate visa expired but later on applied for skilled regional visa (subclass 489) as a pathway to PR:

*Even though I held 485, it did me no favours in finding a job in my field, which compelled me to move back to my home country, worked there in my field and then applied for 489, which took three years to arrive but that became the pathway to come back to Australia.*

![Figure 8: Main visa pathways post temporary graduate visa for past 485 holders who remained in Australia (2007-19)](image)

**Employment Outcomes**

Since the primary purpose of the temporary graduate visa arrangement is to provide international graduates an opportunity to remain in Australia for a limited time and to access the Australian labour market, the initial step of the analysis shapes around an exploration of visa holders’ employment status and the ways they navigate the labour market.

Despite international graduates’ overall perception that the temporary graduate visa does not provide them with a competitive advantage on the Australian labour market, 51 per cent of the survey respondents who have held the 485 visa (past and current visa holders) and remain in Australia are in full-time employment, with 36 per cent and 15 per cent working full-time in and outside their field of study respectively (see Figure 9). 16 per cent of the respondents are working part-time and another 15 per cent as casuals. 18 per cent are still looking for a job.
Of those who are engaged in casual work in Australia, the average hourly salary is $27 recorded among the casuals in this survey; compared to the average hourly earnings of $30.50 for domestic undergraduate and $41.65 for postgraduates employees across Australia for 2018.1

In terms of the employment sector, 76 per cent of onshore participants reported that they were working in the private sector. This figure for those who returned to their home country was around 70 per cent. Only 18 per cent of onshore participants and 26 per cent of returnees had jobs in public/government organisations. 5.6 per cent of onshore and 14.3 per cent of returnees reported that they secured jobs in non-profit organisations.

Education-job mismatch
International graduates experience a higher risk of education-job mismatch when they stay on the 485 visa and remain in Australia. Data from the Australian Census and Temporary Entrants Integrated Dataset (ACTEID-2016) (see Table 2) highlights how occupations such as ‘Sales Assistants and Salespersons’ as well and ‘Cleaners and Laundry Workers’ employed the second and third highest number of 485 visa holders across all occupations. Looking closer, it was not uncommon for 485 visa holders with qualifications in popular fields of study such as Engineering, IT and Management and Commerce also appear to work in occupations unrelated to their studies in Australia (see Table 3).

1 Based on the median graduates’ salary of $61,000 for undergraduates and $83,300 for postgraduates by coursework in 2018 (Australian government, 2019g).
Table 2: Top 10 occupations of 485 visa holders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation (sub-major group)</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business, Human Resource and Marketing Professionals</td>
<td>2,845</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Assistants and Salespersons</td>
<td>2,463</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaners and Laundry Workers</td>
<td>1,773</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carers and Aides</td>
<td>1,481</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality Workers</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT Professionals</td>
<td>1,333</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Professionals</td>
<td>1,058</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numerical Clerks</td>
<td>1,027</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Trades Workers</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality, Retail and Service Managers</td>
<td>936</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 26,239 (100.0)


Table 3: Comparing field of study with top 10 occupations (sub-major group) of 485 visa holders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Technology (n=4,108)</th>
<th>Engineering and Related Technologies (n=2,560)</th>
<th>Management and Commerce (n=11,301)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICT Professionals*</td>
<td>Design, Engineering, Science and Transport Professionals*</td>
<td>Business, Human Resource and Marketing Professionals*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Assistants and Salespersons**</td>
<td>Automotive and Engineering Trades Workers*</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaners and Laundry Workers**</td>
<td>Sales Assistants and Salespersons**</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering, ICT and Science Technicians*</td>
<td>Road and Rail Drivers**</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Support Workers**</td>
<td>Cleaners and Laundry Workers**</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road and Rail Drivers**</td>
<td>Engineering, ICT and Science Technicians*</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Preparation Assistants**</td>
<td>Hospitality Workers**</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality, Retail and Service Managers**</td>
<td>Food Preparation Assistants**</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Labourers**</td>
<td>Factory Process Workers**</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storepersons**</td>
<td>Sales Support Workers**</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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2 Occupations marked with * indicates a likely match with the field of study and marked with ** indicate a likely mismatch. However as the level of detail for occupation data was only available down to the sub-major group there is a possibility that occupations identified as a match could have jobs that could actually be a mismatch and vice versa.
From our survey, around 36 per cent current and past 485 holders remaining in Australia work in their field of study as compared to almost 50 per cent for those returning to their home country.

Among the seven named categories, retail sector (23 per cent), restaurant and cafes (14 per cent) and education and training sector (15 per cent) provided more than 52 per cent of employment opportunities for the majority of those onshore participants who reported they were working in an area non-related to their field of study at the time of conducting the survey (Figure 10; n=249). According to further explanations provided by participants, majority of the casual/part-time recruitments at the education and training sector were in the tertiary education institutions. Interviews with employers in the tertiary education sector show that recruiting international graduates is seen as a win-win situation because they are able to employ hard-working and reliant international graduates who are well-qualified for the job and at the same time help to provide employment for their own students. An international graduate who could secure a job at their former university mentioned:

Most of the employers don’t know what post-study work visa is. Because when I was applying for a job as soon as I finished my course and then the recruiter liked my profile but in the last stage, when I told them I am on Temporary Graduate visa, they don’t know what exactly is it and they don’t care for the explanation you give about the same. They behave like blind horses wanting only PR holders and citizens. 50% of the good jobs out there ask for PR and citizenships when the term they offer employment for only 1 year. But my current employer being The University of A, everyone knew the visa system, they knew Post-Study Work (emphasis added).

Services (e.g. baby-sitting, aged care, cleaning), Fast food and Accounting and Finance with 7 per cent, 6 per cent and 5 per cent respectively, contributed to the provision of near to one quarter of employment opportunities for those who reported they were not working in an area related to their field of study. Only 2.4 per cent of this category of the respondents reported that they work in Transportation (e.g. taxi, Uber) industry. Around 27 per cent named other industries they were working in (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Onshore participants’ employment outside their field of study
Despite challenges facing temporary graduates on the Australian labour market, a majority are participating in the labour force, 89 per cent for past 485 visa holders and 79 per cent for current 485 visa holders, as compared to almost 92 per cent and 96 per cent for Australian graduates from undergraduate and postgraduate coursework program respectively in 2018 (Australian Government 2019d). ACTEID data (see Table 4) also shows that the majority of 485 visa holders (76.3 per cent) are employed (ABS, 2019). But concerns tend to be more about the nature and status of employment of international graduates staying in the host country.

From our survey, in total, 51 per cent of past and current visa holders either work outside their field of study (33 per cent) or are unemployed (18 per cent). This figure was 56 per cent for current visa holders. Except for those working in the education and training sector, most of this segment of the temporary graduate workforce are either under-employed or vulnerable to under-employment and exploitation. As shown in Figure 10 above, these Bachelors or Masters graduates are likely to work in relatively low or unskilled occupations in the fields of retails, restaurants and cafes and services.

Table 4: Labour force status of 485 visa holders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour force status</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed, worked full-time</td>
<td>15,154</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed, worked part-time</td>
<td>10,354</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed, away from work</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed, hours of work not stated</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed, looking for full-time work</td>
<td>2,758</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed, looking for part-time work</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in the labour force</td>
<td>4,580</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34,643</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of those who work in restaurants, café and fast food are under-paid for their level of qualification with an average hourly rate of $20.5 per hour, compared to an average hourly rate of $30 for graduates in Australia (ABS, 2018), if they secured jobs in their field of study.

There is a pipeline of low skilled workers coming from the temporary graduate visa pool and as a result of the rapidity of *temporary graduatification* because up to 56 per cent could not get employment in their field of study. This resonates the ACTEID data (see Table 5) which shows 54.4 per cent of 485 visa holders who worked in lower skilled occupations (Skilled levels 4 and 5) (ABS, 2019). Hence, there is a risk of deskilling, precarity, financial stress and vulnerability of temporary graduate visa holders who could be exploited and continue to be because they need work experience and do not want to compromise their career goals or PR outcomes.

There is little evidence linking negative employment outcomes of domestic workers to immigrants in major migrant destination countries such as the US, Canada and the UK. This is similarly the case in Australia with research finding that immigration has had little to no impact on the labour market outcomes of Australians (D’Souza, 2019) for more than a decade since 2001 (Breunig, et al., 2016). The literature suggests that the point for discussion here is not so much whether 485 visa holders are increasing competition for the local workforce. Rather, this raises questions on how the often cited precarity of employment for international students experiencing wage theft (see: Berg and Farbenblum, 2017; Campbell, et al., 2016) can persist after they transition onto the 485 visa.

Table 5: Occupation skill level of 485 visa holders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill level</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill level 1</td>
<td>7,507</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill level 2</td>
<td>2,660</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill level 3</td>
<td>1,515</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill level 4</td>
<td>6,852</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill level 5</td>
<td>7,518</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill level not ascertainable</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26,415</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time lapse between Post-graduation and Employment in Australia

As shown in Figure 11, graduates’ chance of securing a full-time job in their field of study has improved with further stay in Australia post-graduation. While 52 and 49 per cent of those who graduated in 2015 and 2016 respectively reported that they secured full-time jobs in their discipline (see Figure 12). The figure drops to only 18 per cent of full-time employment in a relevant field for those who graduated in the first half of 2019. Comparing the figures of full-time employment in a field relevant to the graduates’ field of study for 2017 and 2016 reveals that full-time employment in their field of study increased by 11 per cent with one further year of stay in that period.

However, as explained in the section on post temporary graduate visa pathways, it is likely that a majority of the 2016 cohort remaining in Australia were on a form of permanent resident visa in 2017 and that their position on the market were improved by their permanent resident visa. Yet, the figures are significantly less than national figures of the 72.9% of undergraduates and 86.9% of postgraduates in full-time employment, reported by 2018 Graduate outcome survey (Australian Government, 2019g).

Figures for unemployment and working in a non-related field follow a reverse pattern, with highest rates of unemployment (33 per cent) and part-time employment in a non-related filed (22 per cent) for 2019 graduates who were granted a post-study work visa. Research on Australian graduate employment outcomes also indicates that since the Global Financial Crisis, domestic students have taken longer to secure employment, especially in their area of expertise (Australian Government, 2019g). Many never work in their field of study as career pathways have increasingly diversified, various occupations are changing and new ones are emerging.
Sectors and types of business where international graduates work

As shown on Figure 13, the majority of past and present visa holders, who stay in Australia and secure full-time employment, work in the private sector. Public/government organisations provided 24 per cent of the positions for those full-time in their field of study and 15 per cent of the jobs for those working full-time in a field different from their field of study.

However, the comparison of the figures indicate that higher proportion of past visa holders (27 per cent) compared to current holders of the visa (15 per cent) were recruited by public organisations. It is likely that becoming a permanent resident has given past holders of the 485 visa better access to employment opportunities in the public sector. The tertiary education sector is a common destination of those present holders of the 485 visa who could secure employment in the public sector (Figure 14).
Overall, 45 per cent of the participants who secured a job in Australia reported that it was with a small/medium-sized business not owned by someone from their home country. This figure was similar for male and female participants. Recruitment in branches of international companies was reported by 23 per cent of the participants, (26 per cent of the male participants compared to 20 per cent females). Higher proportion of female participants (13 per cent) compared to males (7 per cent) were recruited in businesses owned by someone from their home country. This figure was 10 per cent overall. Only 1.6 per cent of participants (more males) reported that they established their own businesses (Figure 15).

Gap between policy intention, graduates’ expectations and the reality of the labour market

Even though Australia has one of the most attractive and progressive PSWR among destination countries, with international graduates being entitled to between two to four years post-study work rights, the dissonance between policy and reality highlights an issue that undermines the effectiveness of the temporary graduate visa in delivering its intended goal to provide international graduates with the opportunity to test the Australian labour market.
and acquire relevant work experience. The key issue surrounding the implementation of the temporary graduate visa policy is how it is received by employers. There are five significant barriers when it comes to the interaction between PSWR policy, international graduates and employers on the ground.

First, the research found employers are ambiguous about or have limited understanding of international graduates’ work entitlements through the 485 visa. In particular, international graduates in the study mentioned:

> The 485 visa does provide a potential pathway to employment with local companies. Yet, successfully securing one appears to be a slim chance in reality. As local companies are not well educated or aware of the visa, they are often not prepared to employ the holder. In fact, some even exclude 485 visa holders from the initial hiring process implicitly.

> There is absolutely no problem [with the] visa, but [with] the awareness of it. Still most of companies have no idea the rights we get in this subclass visa.

Second, the term ‘temporary’ tends to trigger a sense of uncertainty, hesitation or risk among employers. Some employers think that they might risk investing on training international graduates who might not stay long enough on the job due to the duration of the visa. For many international graduates who are still looking for work a couple of months or a year after graduation, the time remaining on their 485 visa would be less than the minimum two years many employers seek, and current policy does not allow graduates to extend or review their visa. As one of the international graduate interviewees put it, “Of course some companies especially in my major, finance, they will hesitate to hire you. They don’t want to train you and after two years you can leave the job and go back to your home country”.

Accordingly, another graduate stressed the need:

> …to inform Australian employers about the 485 visa and see that it’s an opportunity to gain qualified professionals [on] a contractual basis where they would be able to assess international graduates’ fit with the company. Rather than seeing candidates with 485 visa as a risk and providing less security for the company.

Thirdly, the key barrier is around employers’ preference for those holding PR, which is better understood among employers. One of the employers we interviewed mentioned the metaphor “why buying the burden” to refer to the possible challenges of recruiting temporary graduate visa holders who might not have the same level of local knowledge, understanding of local workplace and sustaining connectedness with Australia as those holding PR or citizenship. International graduates in both the survey and in-depth interviews consistently mention the significant structural barrier underpinning the Australian labour market where they are not on equal footing with domestic counterparts or are being discriminated on the basis of not holding PR. One revealed, “Even if I have the privilege to work full time, that doesn’t mean anything. It’s pretty hard for me. The managers don’t even look at my resume because I don’t have PR” (Graduate). Another echoed this sentiment and explained how the entitlement to legal rights to work for a fixed period on the 485 visa does not mean the front door was wide open to employment:

> A lot of large companies, they wouldn’t employ students who have 485 visas. They will require you to have PR [permanent residency] or citizenship. That’s why a lot of students like myself, when we have had the 485 visa, a lot of doors had been closed because we just simply couldn’t apply for those kind of jobs. (Graduate)
Fourth, there is a concern or a myth around the complexities associated with the visa; some employers see employing international graduates on the 485 visa as being complicated because of the paperwork involved, or misconception that they have to sponsor the holders. But in fact, the responsibility for the paperwork is mainly on the international graduates rather than employers, and this cohort does have full legal rights to work in Australia during their entitlement period without any employer sponsorship. One respondent commented: “A majority of employers are unaware of visa entitlements other than PR. Hence, it is assumed that any other visa either needs sponsorship or [holders are] not eligible to work [...] long term.”

This finding is consistent with our previous research on international students which pointed out that in addition to concerns about international students’ English language proficiency and understandings of the local workplace culture, employers may not be willing to recruit international students because of concerns over the complexities of, and lack of clarity about, their student visa conditions (Tran and Soejatminah, 2016). Many employers might be hesitant and cautious because of the fear of being caught with potential troubles for employing international students and graduates, given the intensive media coverage about international students being exploited, being victimised through wage theft and being discriminated against at work, especially in the hospitality sector (Tran, 2013).

Fifth, both international graduates and employers identify the barriers related to the lack of local work experience, local networks and English proficiency for a proportion of international graduates, which echoes previous research (Blackmore, et al., 2014; Tran, 2017; Tran and Soejatminah, 2017; Wall et al, 2017). One international graduate interviewee mentioned: 

Employers are interested in employing the experienced person. International graduates cannot gain local experience or in the field he/she is studying because of limitation of work rights. No employers wants to employ the people with limited work rights which ultimately leaves the student in limbo with work experience and insufficient required skills.

However, others point out a vicious circle: “Companies demand for local experience in the field. Unfortunately many do not get local experience as they just graduated. Without experience [there is] no job, and without job, no experience. It’s a circle” (emphasis added). This finding reinforces the growing emphasis on ‘work readiness’ for graduates that has been suggested in previous research (Blackmore, et al., 2014). The increased importance accorded to local work experience and exposure to the local workplace in the host labour market while studying underscores the role of work-integrated learning (WIL) and the flexible and creative partnerships between universities and local businesses in supporting international graduates to break through the so-called vicious circle, as our interviewee mentioned above. Previous research suggests that employers are more willing to provide work placements for international students due to the growing recognition of the valuable qualities and contributions international students make to the organisation once they are provided with internships (Tran, 2013).

**Visa holders’ perceptions of employers’ attitudes**

Participants’ perceptions of employers’ attitudes and understanding were explored via five measuring elements of agreement on a five-point Likert scale. Overall participants’ perception of Australian employers in relation to the recruitment of post-study work visa holders were not positive. At the mean scores of 4.2 and 3.7 participants scored very high and high on the two statements of Employers tend to favour local
graduates \((n=706)\) and \textit{Employers tend to favour graduates from the same country as them} \((n=677)\) respectively.

Further, with low mean scores of 2.8, participants of this study did not strongly support either of the following statements: \textit{Employers’ attitudes toward international graduates are realistic} \((n=722)\) and \textit{Employers have a good understanding of Post-Study Work visa} \((n=734)\). They indicated least amount of agreement on \textit{Employers are interested to recruit international graduate holders of Post-Study Work Visa} \((n=744)\). Male and female participants indicated similar levels of agreement/disagreements on these statements.

Further cluster analysis of the data revealed that the mean scores calculated for the responses by the participants who secured full-time employment in Australia were not highly different from the responses by those who were unemployed. For example, for the mean of the scores given to the statement \textit{Employers tend to favour local graduates} was 4.2 by the participants who secured full-time employment, and 4.3 by those who were unemployed in Australia.

A visa holder summarises the barriers this segment of the temporary workforce in Australia face in their attempt to access the Australian labour market:

There is a biased view [that] international students/graduates will not be able to integrate to the business culture. Discarding applications based on international names with the view of incompetent English. Employers want a return for the recruitment process and the costs involved, having a two year visa raises a red flag if the candidate will be able to secure long term stay and hence is discarded although they might be the ideal candidate for the job.

Possible but not easy pathway to permanent residency: a chicken or egg situation

The research shows that the temporary graduate visa is not perceived to provide international graduates with a substantial competitive advantage on the Australian labour market. Instead, many graduates see the 485 visa as a pathway to PR which they can then draw on to facilitate their access to the labour market and enhance their employability. However, in order to be qualified for PR, acquiring relevant employment in their field of study is one of the critical factors. Therefore, there seems to be a chicken or egg situation around the nexus between temporary graduate visa, employment and permanent residency. On the one hand, international graduates need PR to facilitate their access to the Australian labour market as most employers prefer those holding PR or citizenship. On the other hand, in order to secure five points that help to increase their likeliness to secure PR, international graduates need to be employed in their field of study for at least one year.

This research found five scenarios framing the nexus between the temporary graduate visa, PR and the labour market:

1. A proportion of international graduates were primarily motivated to use the 485 visa as a conduit to get access to the Australian labour market and gain international work experience to complement their degree in Australia. However they soon realise that employers either are unclear about the nature and intent behind this visa scheme or prefer those with PR or citizenship. Many of those international graduates consequently aim to or switch to use the temporary graduate visa as a vehicle to acquire PR, which is better understood among employers. One participant from this group revealed:

\textit{The visa doesn’t imply any restrictions on working, but it is the employers who wouldn’t}
consider to offer a job role while you are on this visa. I have personally experienced where I had done really well at the job interviews but I couldn’t get through any of the roles because I was not a permanent resident. I personally feel the government needs to come up with programs where they could let the employers know the real purpose of this visa.

Another respondent revealed how they turned to the skilled independent visa (subclass 189), a form of PR, as a vehicle to access the job market relevant to their field of study, which they were unable to do so while on the 485 visa:

485 visa helped as a pathway to the 189 visa and improve social skills while working odd jobs and hospitality. The 189 visa ultimately helped to enter the job market. I was only able to find odd jobs while on the 485 visa (emphasis added).

2. The second group of international graduates were motivated by the dual goals of securing PR and acquiring work experience through the temporary graduate visa. However, this dual intention is often regarded as a significant challenge given the two-year duration of the temporary graduate visa (for Bachelors or Masters by coursework graduates) perceived by the majority of the participants as being relatively short. For example, one participant mentioned:

Most of the times students who hold 485 will be rejected even after full working rights. Sometimes it takes a year to secure a job and if students aren’t able to get PR, they’ve to leave the country with no other option. Students will suffer from huge loan in their home country.

Since the 485 visa is only for two years, it’s extremely difficult for a graduate to secure a job in their field and use that as a pathway to permanent residency. So, if the visa is only for two years, then the eligibility for 489 or another visa must be loosened so that even though your job isn’t in your own field, if it’s at least full time, then you get a chance to apply for another visa (TR or PR). If not, it’s an utter waste of time.

Another mentioned how his dual goals could not be achieved and he had to return to his home country and found employment in his field of study but later on applied for skilled regional visa (subclass 489) as a pathway to PR:

Even though I held 485, it did me no favours in finding a job in my field, which compelled me to move back to my home country, worked there in my field and then applied for 489, which took three years to arrive but that became the pathway to come back to Australia.

3. Both the survey and in-depth interviews show that a proportion of international students are under the illusion that the 485 visa equates PR pathway at the time they applied for the 485 visa, and they might not fully realise the magnitude of the requirements they need to fulfil to ensure their eligibility for PR. There is a gap between international graduates’ intention/desire and reality. Because international students see 485 visa as a pathway to PR, it does not mean that it is an easy pathway. Transiting to PR from 485 is challenging due to the points required to be qualified for PR. This cohort, especially those with this illusion and at the same time struggle to find jobs in Australia, often feels stressed and disappointed about their experience with the 485 visa.

For example, a graduate expressed his stress:

The visa 485 is currently a useless pathway to permanent residence due to the high points required to obtain PR. Many international students have spent thousands of dollars and time to undertake Professional Year program
and sat for English and NAATI exams. However, their hopes of obtaining PR were dashed as the points to acquire PR keeps increasing.

Another graduate who had the expectation that the temporary graduate visa means PR stressed the need to “advice students that it [485 visa] is for the main purpose of gaining professional experience” rather than as a pathway to PR.

This illusion is also shared by education and migration agents interviewed for the research:

I have come into contact with some students and their expectation before coming here is theoretically that. Theoretically, after they finish their study, they will have 2 years here to gain work experience which enables them to apply for PR. However, the most important thing they were not aware of is that when applying for PR, the most popular visa is 189, the immigration department will select from the highest point application, hence they did not expect this fierce competition.

Because when calculating the points, there are different components including age, qualification, the duration they have studied in Australia, English proficiency, employment experience, community language skill between one language and English... It seems that they have to get the maximum points for every single skill to have a chance to be invited.

Onshore agents tend to blame offshore agents for providing misleading information and creating the illusion about the pathway between international education, temporary graduate visa and migration as many offshore agents might not be updated with the regulations and migrations laws, while being motivated to get the commission.

An interviewee mentioned:

Study accounting or study chef or study motor mechanic, in theory you still can get PR, but in reality it is almost impossible. Especially if you stay in big city like Melbourne or Sydney where the policy is very tough and the condition is very high. And almost, I think majority of the overseas education agents, they wouldn’t have an accurate understanding and advice in terms of what kind of study leading to PR. First of all, they’re not in Australia. Second, they are not migration agents. They only know more about the education side, but they don’t know much about the migration for the student.

Another agent revealed:

I mean this, oversea agents, they are, I wouldn’t say this is, you know, entirely the market, but [for] the majority I would say probably... a lot of the agency in the business of education, once the student go to Australia to study, they’re done, they, they get the money, and that’s it. Like what, how, where that student get PR? It’s not really their business [any more]. So as I said, they [students] come to Australia to study, that’s when agents get the commission and that case is closed and it’s done for them.

4. For those international students who wanted to remain and live and work in Australia for a few years after graduation but did not necessarily want to apply for PR, they see 485 as a chance to gain some professional experience and get some income in return to their investment in overseas study or/and to pay back their loan, they often feel positive about the visa and their experience on their 485 visa. However, they also face similar challenges of employers’ lack of understanding of the 485 visa and preference for those holding PR and citizenship. For example, an interviewee shared:

For me, yes, I, I spent a lot of my savings to come here, so I definitely wanted to work for at least a year or two and, and get that money back and then go back to my country if that
was plan or stay here. And it [the 485 visa] gives you that flexibility.

5. A group of temporary graduates see the temporary graduate visa as a chance to extend their stay in Australia for different purposes, ranging from to travel and experience aspects of Australia that they have not had a chance to do so during their study, to escape from an oppressive family or local culture or to stay longer with their partner.

Switching back to study or undertaking Professional Year

Around 24 per cent of 485 holders had commenced (18 per cent) or were intending to (7 per cent) undertake a new program of study. Of the participants who started a new study program while they were on a post-study work visa in Australia, 49 per cent were in full-time employment and 30 per cent in part time/casual employment. The main reasons reported for undertaking or going to start a new program of study were analysed and grouped according to the following themes:

1) mandatory requirement in their professional field and to be recognised as a professional in their respective field (accounting, engineering, computing)

2) gaining five extra points for PR

3) gaining local work experience through internships and enhancing career prospects

4) 485 visa expiration/to extend their stay in Australia

5) unable to find employment and not wanting to be seen as being unemployed

6) change of career path or moving on to a regional university to increase PR prospects

7) personal preference.

Some graduates reported multiple and interrelated purposes underpinning the decision to undertake a new program of study.

The following quotes from respondents illuminate the key motivations underpinning their decision or intention to undertake a new program of study:

I wanted to stay in Australia a little longer.

To earn migration points and to get working experience through course’s internship.

To have a chance to go to an internship.

To keep a visa to stay in Australia and find a way to PR.

To learn more about Australian workplace culture and also to land myself into an IT industry. I was assigned for a 3 month internship after completing my program.

Unable to find a job in my field of study.

While the 485 visa offers international graduates the opportunity to extend their stay in Australia after their studies and accumulate various forms of human and social capital, it is quite evident from the above quotes that the decision to engage in further study is laced with factors related to employment and migration outcomes. This would mostly likely result in their transition back onto an international student visa which is not an uncommon route among temporary migrants. This practice is an example of ‘staggered’ migration trajectories (Robertson, 2019) where education-led mobility as Roberts (2019, p.6) found, could involve “a range of visa statuses... a range of migration tactics over their lives”. This suggests that as much as international student visas and temporary graduate visa are ascribed non-permanent status, it is evident that the intentions of many international graduates on temporary visas are “often tied to the desire for
long-term settlement and residency rather than sojourn” (Roberts, 2019, p.4).

Income

We analysed the income levels of onshore participants who worked full-time in Australia. Based on 87 per cent of the onshore participants working full-time who reported their annual incomes, an overall median of $60,000 income per annum was calculated for the current and past holders of the visa. Of those, the median of income per annum for 205 current holders of post study work visa was $55,000, considerably less than a median of $67,000 for the past holders of the visa.

The figures reported by 134 current visa holders working full-time in their field of study and 71 current visa holders who work full-time but not in their field of study has medians at $59,000 and $46,142 respectively.

The median of income per annum was $60,000 for those with a Masters by coursework degree and $54,000 for the participants with a Bachelor degree. These figures are considerably lower than the median of Australian graduates’ fulltime salaries of $83,300 for postgraduate coursework and $61,000 for undergraduates in 2018 (Australian Government, 2019g).

The median of income per annum was around $62,000 for male participants’ (n=203), and $52,000 for the female participants (n=162) who reported their annual income in Australia. Among the two fields of Accounting and IT with higher number of respondents, full-time employees in Computing, Information Technology with a median of $63,000 reported higher figures than those in Accounting, Business, Administration/Economics with a median of $55,000 for their annual income on average.

With an average pay rate of $32.3 per hour, casual/part-time employees in education and training reported the highest. Further answers to the open questions revealed that the majority of the respondents who were casual/part-time employees in education and training sector worked in higher education institutions.

Temporary graduates working in Restaurants/Cafes and Fast food with an average pay rate of $20.5 per hour reported the lowest hourly wages among the others.

Participants on a casual/part-time basis (n=227) reported that on average they had worked 23 hours the week prior to completing the survey. This figure is notably higher than the national average income of 17 hours per week for the Australian workers on a casual/part-time basis in 2017 (Cassidy and Parsons, 2017).

Employment and English Language Proficiency

Their level of English proficiency was ranked as the factor that greatly impacted their employment, when the respondents were asked to consider their own experience and indicate the extent to which each one of the listed factors had impacted their employment status. Those who secured employment in Australia believed that their employment status was positively (68 per cent) impacted by their proficiency in English language.
Fields of employment

Comparing the overall distributions reported for full-time employment in their field of study, with figures for the country of residence in 2019 for the visa holders, indicates a positive relationship between full-time employment in the field of study and further/permanent stay in Australia. In particular in the fields of Computing and IT, as shown in the two figures (Figures 16 and 17), highest proportion of full-time jobs in the field of study (47 per cent) for onshore participants and highest proportion of residing in Australia (94.6 per cent) in 2019 for whole samples of the three selected fields have been reported by visa holders in this field.

38 per cent of IT graduates, 36 per cent of accounting and business graduates and 30 per cent of engineering graduates reported that they secured their first job in their field of study in Australia in than less one-year post-graduation.

Interviews with employers and graduates in the field of IT indicate six main reasons why IT international graduates are more likely to secure a full-time job in their field of study than those from other fields. First, IT skills are in demand and availability of contract and temporary jobs in IT are among the key factors that contribute to a higher proportion of international graduates who can find jobs while being on the 485 visa. Second, the short-term nature of many IT projects is a significant factor leading to the more widely open door for IT graduates who remain in Australia for a limited time. Third, the flexibility in the nature of IT jobs means that many IT graduates can
commence the tasks without the need for further training/retraining in the new workplace, as compared to other fields.

Fourth, IT industry is not localized and it is quite common in IT to outsource and/or sponsor employees from other countries, which makes it a more welcoming field for international graduates. One employer revealed:

*Because even if the PR holder is employed, they cannot do the job, still. So I think those who are skilful in programming, after two years, they can get a PR. So because IT industry is in need of labour force. For example, some of my colleagues were recruited from Russia via job ads, and after 1-2 years of working, they will be sponsored by the employer and get PR right away without any waiting time.*

Fifth, the culture of IT field is more open for international graduates because many IT managers are originally from international backgrounds. Therefore, international graduates are less likely to be discriminated by IT employers on the ground of not holding PR or citizenships as compared to those in other fields.

Sixth, the selection process in IT is more automatic that aims to shortlist those who have the skills and capacities that fit the requirement of the jobs rather than those who have PR or local work experience, which in turn disadvantages international graduates:

*One thing I would like to share is the shortlisting process in IT is highly automatic. For example, those who want to [be] an accountant or manager, it’s hard to assess the applicants’ skills. In IT, those who can come up with solutions for a given problem will be deemed to be skilful and successful through the shortlisting process. That means the shortlisting process is easier.*

Recruitment in IT is done through job ads which admit all job applications. Applicants will then be sent an online test for shortlisting. Those can do the test well will be invited for a subsequent interview. They will then do a paper test or do the test on side, which facilitate the process of further shortlisting. Therefore, they [employers] are not concerned about work experience. For example, there are 1,000 applicants, each of them all will receive the test, and [if] they do well, they will be shortlisted. The recruitment process is scalable where mass shortlist can be done regardless of the number of applicants. Even those with no experience but if they do the test well, they will be shortlisted.

Employers explicitly stressed that in the IT field, work experience is not required as much as in other fields but what distinguishes one candidate from others is the capability to do the job:

*There are people who have been working for years, but still they cannot perform the job well. Thus, I think if the employers can find an employee that meets the job requirements, and can do the job well, they will employ regardless of 2-year visa*

*Even new graduates can perform better than those with experience because they are updated with new knowledge and are capable to quickly adapt in working environment whereas those who have been working for long [in the] industry may not have such new knowledge.*

In the survey, participants were asked to consider their own experience and indicate the extent to which each one of factors listed in a matrix impacted their employment status.
As shown by Figure 18, their level of English proficiency followed by work experience in Australia and job seeking skills were considered as the factors with highest positive impact on their employment status. Visa status was ranked as the factor with most negative impact of participants’ employment.

Legal loopholes and unethical practices
There are loopholes with regard to the assistance around post-study work pathways and temporary graduate visas. The study shows that a critical area, with which international graduates staying in Australia need assistance is advice related to temporary graduate visa application, post-study pathways and visa options. University staff, migration agents and education agents interviewed in this study echo that this is an area where international graduates may be subject to exploitation by some unreliable agents. Under the Migration Act, universities are not permitted to provide advice on temporary graduate visa application and pathways, or any migration issues for that matter. However, at the same time, universities want their international students to make informed decisions not only about their study but also post-study pathways and employment goals. Many international graduates first turn to their universities for help. However, as post-study work rights, temporary graduate work visas and migration are inter-linked, most universities are of the view that it is too risky to provide any advice related to these matters for international graduates who then in turn are likely to turn to their peers, and social networks and agents for information and advice.

The temporary graduate visa, its associated PSWR and migration options are not areas where free advice is often available because only a registered migration agent can provide such advice, with the exception outlined below. Both migration agents and many international graduates confirmed that temporary graduate visa application is relatively simple and straightforward, and it is possible for international graduates to do it by themselves with some basic instructions. However, interviews with migration agents present a scenario where international students and graduates are unable to verify the information provided to them by migration agents. It would appear that as under the Migration Act only migration agents are legally allowed to provide advice on migration questions regarding temporary graduate visa, post-study employment and how they link to other visa options and PR. However, there are other people who can also give immigration assistance without breaking the law provided that they do not charge a fee for their advice. These
people include parliamentarians and their staff, members of diplomatic missions, consular posts or international organisations. However, in reality, most international students and graduates do not have access to these groups. International students and graduates are thus somewhat in a bind as they might take what they are told as the truth and/or may not have the resources or know how to verify the validity and accuracy of the advice they receive from migration agents. A situation then unfolds where many international students who want to stay on and apply for the 485 visa are vulnerable to being exploited by a growing number of ‘dodgy’ agents who – despite the fact that applying for the 485 visa is an easy and straightforward process – proceed to charge high fees to assist them with their applications. The interviews also revealed how some education and migration agents provided advice on undertaking further courses to gain points for PR. This leads to a number of questionable motives as some migration agents have been known to earn commissions from education providers based on the enrolment of their clients. Moreover, it was also claimed that the recommended courses by migration agents did not necessarily match or suit the professional needs of international students and graduates. Due the complexity of the migration law in Australia and its constantly changing nature, international students and graduates often resort to migration agent services to get immigration advice and assistance. Short consultations with migration agents, in some cases, create more confusion and precarity than clarity in order to encourage their clients to use their services. Many of these agents can be aggressive in their recruitment of international students. They not only hover around institutions but hunt for their international student/graduates-clients on multiple social medial channels. They advertise themselves on social media, especially Facebook pages of associations of international students from specific countries. Various Facebook groups have been established by international students and graduates or agents themselves to discuss the application of temporary graduate visa, for example “Assistance with 485 visa application” or “Seeking PR in Australia” Facebook groups. Some agents search through these groups for posts or queries related to the 485 visa and lure these international students or graduates to use their services. Some even advertised as having “real employers to sponsor you”. The agents we interviewed expressed concerns that illegitimate agents, who exploit this cohort of international graduates or international students interested in post-study work opportunities in Australia, are damaging the reputation of the agent sector.

**From the student perspective:**

It would be valuable to have some sort of support around visas... and allow students to understand what their options are. Because when I was student I never paid a legal consultant or anyone who would advise me on, you know, visa related matters. And I didn’t realise how bad things, how difficult things would be for me. No one I could speak to for free. It’ll cost you a fair bit of money to speak to a legal consultant. Maybe some advice or legal advice from just visa related issues from the university side would be beneficial.

The university international student advisors interviewed expressed their concern about the situation of graduates being exploited:

So [we’re] extreme risk adverse. We’re not gonna take any element of risk of potentially getting any advice that may be deemed migration advice.

For example, post study, we wouldn’t be able... [there’s] a very fine line between the advice. You can virtually give no advice whatsoever. So it’s just interesting in terms of, you know, as I said, it’s a very fine line. So we’re currently looking at what advice we can give a student
on renewing their student visa and the migration advisor is even saying we can’t even tell them the very basic information of where they would go and what they would need to do to submit their application. That’s without going into any detail about what they would need to submit in that application.

Agents expressed their concern:

The government body who manages migration agents has regulations with regard to transparency in the fees charged to their customers. But from our own observations, most of uhm…I do not know is there even 1% of the agents who follow these guidelines…But usually only after they meet a customer when they give the quote. So, customer…customers who have used the service…after meeting the advisor for half an hour or an hour, have to pay any amount asked by the agent as they have already used the services, so have no choice.

Another agent echoed:

A lot of agents, they just take advantage of students. Simply they want to, to get the revenues. They want to charge students or charge whatever. And after you’ve signed for those people because they’ve got to work hard to earn something like, you know, some, some money and then they spend money on the agents. And I think that’s wrong, morally wrong I believe. So, in my case I said to my, always with 485, I have never done 485. I’ll always give advice. I say, you meet the requirements, making sure that you provide these minimum requirements, but you should be good enough to do that. And I have never done 485. But I always spend time to advise students.

An agent shared a story about an international graduate who wanted to use his service for the 485 visa application but he refused and advised the student that it is very simple, and he could do it by himself. The student then tuned to another agent for help but then came to the interviewed agent because he realised that the latter agent is not reliable:

This is exactly what my client said to me. When, he saw the agent, the agent said, no, you can’t do this [can’t prepare the application for 485 visa by yourself]. So he became very, very worried. And then the agent tried to convince him that whoever gave him that advice [he can prepare 485 visa application by himself], if he’s a friend; then drop that person as a friend; If a migration agent, that person should not be a migration agent. He was too scared to the point where he came back to me… He said the agent wanted him to do a more complex visa application, such as 457 instead of 485 because this has more money in it.

I’m not comfortable because I know that 485 is very simple. Easy, if you know the law. If you know the rules, it’s very simple. You either meet the requirements or you don’t meet the requirements. If you meet the requirements, then just fill in the forms. And then, and then submitting all the documents and you’ll get the visa. Simple, easy.

The pity that people are too greedy. And I don’t know, I don’t want to make too much comments about those people because to me, they are in the wrong profession, using the profession to take advantage of people’s fears. So that’s really wrong.

Universities described the situation where agents tried to approach international students/graduates:

They [agents] hover around institutions, they hover around in the city and give out brochures. And the other connection is a lot of the time they’ll be saying, oh, you know, we’ll give you migration advice, But then you come
to get migration advice from them and they say you’re going to have to change your course because you’re not going to get as many points so you need to change to another course. So then they actually start recruiting to send students through other providers...

The restriction on who can give advice leads to international students/graduates’ vulnerability to exploitation:

Students would have to seek that advice elsewhere. Um, so therefore it’s another area where people would see an opportunity to potentially exploit the students because they know that the institution is not going to give the advice, but they know that the students need the advice and migration agents do, do tend to charge a lot of money.

By restricting who can give advice, what advice they can give, and therefore knowing that you have to be a migration advisor, knowing that there’s all these students who want someone to do their application, I’m going to charge you a fortune for it.

Migration agents themselves expressed their concern about the adverse effects of the rigid restriction of the Migration Act with regard to temporary graduate visa, post-study work and pathway options:

This is actually a reality. Many [of] our clients [international graduates] complained, they said it in a way that “when I come to international student advisors they said they do not know or are not allowed to disclose this information”... so... about the Migration Act... indeed it is too strict with regard to who can provide advice or recommendations about migration or visa. It gets to a point where no one are allowed to do so except migration agents.

Because the requirement that only registered migration agents are allowed to provide advice that aims only those with sufficient intellect and knowledge in the field can give advice. However, this accidentally it leads to non-verifying information between students and migration agents. So, when students meet migration agents, ...they come to a company and that’s all they know and there is no other sources for them to verify or to see if that pathway is the best for them.

On the one hand, because of the separation between education and migration and the core principle that universities can only recruit students who are genuine and not driven by migration purposes, institutions are not allowed to provide advice or discuss with students the migration sides of their international education. On the other hand, consistent evidence shows that migration outcome has become an important component in international students’ decision making process. Therefore, in a way, to avoid factoring migration sides in University’s advice is not providing international students the full picture that assists them with making an informed decision and helping them with managing expectations:

It comes back to the very beginning. If we’re advising students at the very beginning on all these, their experiences and what they can expect, and we’re told you’re not going to get, not talk about migration outcomes. Yet, we’re not giving them the full picture of what they’re looking for in terms of the advice to make an informed decision. And then they might get here and find out that the course or what we’ve given them, the advice, it’s not right for them, but then we’ve locked them into six months of their principal course because they will, the institutions can’t, they can’t go anywhere because they need a release from their institution... And it’s getting harder and harder because institutions don’t want to
release their students. ... And then yet they've being given advice but have not been given all the proper advice up front.

Gaps between demand for assistance and university resources

The research pointed out a gap between temporary graduates’ demand for continuing access to career services and extended support for employability and post-study work visa and institutions’ limited resources. Some agents and university staff agree that universities should provide advice on post-study work pathways and visa since it is an area related to the transition from work to study, deemed to be University’s responsibility. For example, an agent mentioned:

So, if possible, there should be a regulation that allows education providers and international student advisors to provide advice on post-study visa eg. visa 485 or bridging visa after 485 which help students with knowledge of these visas. They do not need to provide advice on visas that lead to PR which is more complicated and beyond their capacity.

The partnership with legitimate migration agents to provide free information sessions for international students and graduates has been introduced at some universities. However this arrangement alone is not adequate to cater for the growing significant demands for advice and guidance in post-study work rights and pathways:

I could get a migration advisor to come along but their resources are limited as well. Um, they wouldn’t come as regularly as what we would like, but it doesn’t take away from them the fact that we are all giving this advice to students on a daily basis and every time we give that advice to students, we can’t have a migration advisor sitting with us as well.

An option is to have university staff being trained and qualified to provide advice on post-study work rights and migrations issues. However, the demands for such advice well exceed the availability of such staff:

In terms of whether that be sending some of their staff off to do the migration agent calls and having them qualified to do that. There are some staff that I know who have done that course in the before, but they don’t promote that within their institution because they know they’re going to be inundated with requests or, you know, like with any outsourcing to third parties, how an institution might do that through a transparent process so that at least they know that the services that students might access might be legitimate and not too extreme in the cost.

University staff raised concerns about the imbalance between institutions’ available resources and funding and their ethical commitment to ensure continuing support for temporary graduates and thus delivery on promise:

You know, the funding. Now, now are careers areas adequately resourced to deal? That’s probably what the issue is, you know, because it’s like with all of the services provided to students, you know, they continue to be cut, cut, cut. And it may be that the pressure’s placed on a career service are just so huge that they can’t do that.

...there’s that mentality that we just cut things off when the student finishes their studies because they’re no longer a student. Why can’t we continue to engage with them and support them? Because we did, we did attract them here on the initial promise of a post study work visa.

Both the interviews and survey results show an urgent need for universities to ensure more
investment in extended career support and international student/alumni advice services to cater for international students beyond graduation and in transition from study to work.

**Strategies to navigate the Australian labour market**

Interviews with temporary graduate visa holders show that most of them actively and persistently activated their agency, rather than being onlookers, through employing various strategies to navigate the Australian labour market. The common strategies used by international graduates remaining in Australia include:

- explicitly and proactively explaining their work rights to prospective employers
- being persistent and demonstrating to employers their willingness to work and interest in the job
- targeting small businesses and their own universities
- using diversified and alternative job search channels such as Gumtree, Indeed or Glassdoor instead of sticking to seek.com.au or career.com.au
- vigorously applying for jobs and willing to accept entry level jobs/lower pay
- reskilling
- building professional identity and evidencing their professional skills
- being resilient through taking smaller steps and constantly striving
- self-sourcing internships or seeking internships through undertaking Professional Year
- networking and strategically utilise various networks
- creating jobs for themselves and their international peers.

Informing employers of the 485 visa work entitlements would be beneficial and graduates who actively exercise their agency in explicitly communicating to prospective employers of their entitlements to full legal rights to work in Australia in line with the visa conditions stand the benefit.

> My employment was not affected by my nationality. They [employers] understood my visa status when I explained the process. Good English would have been a major factor...

> I went home and I came back and I was able to, you know, I created my own case and explained all my legalities to the internal HR and the recruiter agency...

While many job applicants may be turned down not necessarily because of their incompetency but the visa status, to cope with the time constraint of the visa, the most common strategy employed by graduates was embarking on the job search prior to graduation, having a career plan and being resilient. In some cases, the employer was willing to even keep the position on hold for the candidate until their 485 visa was granted.

> I spent six month[s] before I [graduate[d] doing research and every day applied four or five applications for different companies in Seek or Indeed or Glassdoor. Every day I [was] searching and applying [for] jobs that I am qualified.

> I got the interview because at the beginning they told me I need to get a work visa to get the opportunity to be interviewed... This job opportunity is very good. I don’t want to lose it. So I told them if I apply for the work visa, it may take about one month to get approved...If they found they’re happy with my performance, then I can go to apply for work...
visa... So I got interviewed and they said it was okay. So then I applied for the work visa...it took about like half a month to get approved.

A graduate in Computer Science, mentioned how he changed his job seeking strategies and searched for entry level jobs on Gumtree, that could help him get a foot on the door and lead to a sponsored working visa later on.

First I tried to search for a job through websites like seek.com.au or career.com.au, but then I figured out that the jobs over there have pretty high expectations and it’s not suitable for me, so I change my strategy and looking for jobs in gumtree which is a lower level, and of course it has a lower salary, but it’s okay for me back to that time... I had been on 485 for 18 months... My current visa is a 457, a sponsored working visa.

Others strategically attempted to build professional identity through a public profile and evidence their professional skills through developing some webs that they can show to prospective employers:

And I start building my several side projects. You know, web projects. I just developed some webs, and at that time of year I remember it was very hard for me to get the first job... They did not count Vietnamese working experience, so it was very hard and you need to show off your skill.

Another popular strategy employed by the interviewed graduates was doing internships and placement programs or taking professional year where they took on roles related to their field of study.

I worked there for three months as an intern... IWL stands for Industrial Waste and Learning, so yeah, it’s like I’m one of four candidates in that program, so they got a couple of companies and I’m happy [that I could] secure a place.

So I was very fortunate. I ended my course so there was a placement subject, 100 working hours during my course, and I did that in my last semester... Upon my placement completion I applied for a credit position, but I didn’t get it, but I was offered this position.

Others exercise their agency through networking and learning from their networks to land a job:

We [I] got friends where I was working so we shared information together, so it was easy for me to get a job.

Yeah I met people at the flying school and they were looking for someone with the flying experience I had and I fell into it that way. I would have been nowhere [if I hadn’t had those networks].

Others see the need for themselves to activate their agency and take the responsibility to establish local connections and increase local social and cultural understandings to enhance employability:

Employers find international graduates to be less favourable due to social and cultural differences. I believe the onus is on international graduates to mix well with the local population so they are able to impress more employers and do better interviews.

Connections with professionals in the field may arguably bring about employment opportunities as well as valuable mentoring at different stages of one’s employment endeavours. As the interview excerpt below illustrates, mentors could play a significant role in easing the challenges of navigating an alien labour market, especially if the mentors are active professionals in the field:

For me it’s pretty much networking and also having a mentor. And also, you know, both of
my previous managers were pretty much ... you know, just keeping in touch with them as well as letting them know where you are and what you’re doing and they will see how they can help you with... The mentor I’ve got helps me in terms of understanding what my strengths are, what my weaknesses are and how to use my weaknesses as a strength... And also, because he does brand strategy and advertising so yeah, it kind of relates to the course I’m doing.

For some participants who were not able to quickly secure a relevant job, the key strategies were taking smaller steps and constantly striving. They did not mind doing jobs outside their field of study, understanding that those may not be their dream jobs but could be the initial local experiences that benefit them in one way or another:

During the time I’m on 485, actually I don’t have any full-time job or any one day of employment related to my finance and banking, but I can still work in any kind of shop like a retail shop, like a grocery shop and things... They can still give me some experience dealing with customers and some experience dealing with your colleagues, your manager and you can earn some money and you can manage your life here.

Engaging in start-up is another strategy. For example, this participant started up his own cleaning business to afford and nurture the long-term aspiration of working in his professional field:

First, it is a waste of time to keep seeking and waiting for interviews. So why not creating the job for myself instead so I can work according to my preferable time schedule? My thought was as simple as that... This job is just short-term, 3 years or 5 years. In the long run, I will certainly focus on what I have learned. Currently, I am still improving my English.

The interview excerpts indicate that given the limited duration of the 485 visa being a significant pressure and barrier for seeking employment, the graduates in the study proactively considered the available options and made creative decisions about how to utilise the visa timeframe to their advantage.

University support and services for employment

Participants were asked about the extent to which different services and job entry support assisted them with their employment in Australia. On average, with an agreement rate of 64 per cent, participants (n=681) recognised Participating in an internship program as the most effective support for transition to the job market provided to international students/graduates. It was followed by other university services that was rated 56 per cent equally for Career training at their university (n=716) and Counselling sessions at their university (n=688), 54 per cent for Mentoring programs by local industries (n=657) and 52 per cent for Alumni events at their university (n=692).

Among the types of services related to employment provided by universities, Participating in an internship program was scored highest by all of the different groups of participants with various employment status, including full-time, part-time or casual in their field of study or in another field, or those who were still looking for a job. High agreement on the usefulness of Participating in an internship program for finding a job in Australia did not vary upon participants’ gender or their national backgrounds.

In terms of external available resources and approaches for finding jobs, using seek.com.au had higher acceptance rate of 70 per cent, which was higher than rate of 56 per cent for the jobsearch.gov.au website among the participants.
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction

In terms of participants’ satisfaction of the post-study work rights arrangement, an overall satisfaction rate of 66 per cent was given by participants. As shown on Figure 19, around 48 per cent of the current and past visa holders were moderately to extremely satisfied with their employment experience while on the post-study work arrangements. 25 per cent of the visa holders were either dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied.

Satisfaction rate for female participants was 70 per cent, which was slightly higher than the satisfaction rate of 62 per cent for male participants. In relation to participants’ field of study, with a rate of 82 per cent, visa holders in Computing and Information Technology discipline reported the highest rate of satisfaction.

Figure 19: Overall satisfaction on the employment experience on the post study work arrangements (n=737)

The key reasons for satisfaction reported by the respondents are linked with the broader and multiple benefits attached to buying more time in the destination country afforded through their temporary graduate visa. The study shows that even though international graduates do not see the 485 visa as directly and immediately helping them secure a job, it gives them the benefits associated with ‘more time’ and opportunity to stay in Australia to enhance their English language and professional, social, networking, and residency capitals and in particular to acquire some return on investment in overseas study and paying back loans in many cases or simply to explore different parts of Australia. In other words, the challenges international graduates face in their attempts to get access to the Australian labour market while on the post-study work visa help them to realise the importance of English language proficiency, work experience, internships and social and professional networks in enabling them to secure employment. Therefore many of them strategically use the ‘more time’ in the host country afforded through the temporary graduate visa to invest their resources in enhancing their English language proficiency, gaining work experience and expanding their networks, which in turn helps improve their employability and employment outcomes in Australia.

The reported dissatisfaction focused on five main reasons: (1) most participants were on two-year post-study work visa, and consider this too short to give employers’ confidence in hiring this cohort, to assist graduates to gain membership with a professional body, to build up work experience and secure employment; (2) employers’ preference for PR applicants and lack of understanding of the 485 visa; (3) lack of
flexibility for extending or renewing the visa; (4) lack of support from related stakeholders including continuing access to institutional career support services and lack of advice around temporary graduate visa and post-graduation pathways; and (5) having the illusion that the temporary graduate visa is an easy pathway to PR but in reality it is not. Lower rates of satisfaction (2.6 on average) were reported by those who participated in the survey from either their home or another country.

Likelihood of recommending 485 visa to other students

Overall a mean score of 7.4 out of 10 was calculated for the responses on how likely participants were to recommend this visa to other students. This score for the responses of female participants was 7.7, which was slightly higher than the mean for male responses (7.1). The mean score for the responses of onshore participants was 7.5, which was higher than the mean (6.1) for the responses of the participants who were in their home country. With a given mean of 8.4 out of 10, those who were employed full-time in their field of study in Australia were more likely to recommend applying for a post-study work visa to other students. With a mean of 6, unemployed participants in Australia were less likely to recommend this visa to other students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the survey and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, we propose the following recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the PSWR policy, enhance the experiences of temporary graduates, and address the existing loopholes. The efforts to take up our recommendations should, where relevant, undergo relevant consultation processes with key stakeholders in order to achieve the best possible outcomes, such as extending the scope of providing advice beyond registered migration agents. A combination of the proposed recommendations listed below is likely to go a long way to address the negative experiences faced by temporary graduates in the 485 visa application process and throughout their participation in the Australian labour market. A more uniform approach can at least provide a level-playing field for all international student graduates across the country.

Policy Recommendations

- The Federal Government should introduce a regulation that permits the renewal or extension of the temporary graduate visa based on criteria related to: (1) job status, and (2) level of income
- The Federal Government should have a regulation that allows international students enrolled in approved courses for at least two academic years to obtain an automatic 485 visa extension after they graduate.
- The Federal Government should consider having a regulation around advice provision for temporary graduates, i.e. extend the scope of advice universities can provide about issues related to post-study work and temporary graduate visa application process (but not about migration) so that the transition to work services can be complete.
- The Federal Government should consider to organise consultation processes with key stakeholders through a Reference Group and set up an Independent Committee in charge of continuing monitoring and review of the implementation of the PSWR policy.
- The Federal Government should manage off/onshore agents more closely, with respect to ethical practices and advice being provided on eligible courses for the 485 visa and entitlements and on the 485 visa not being a guaranteed pathway to PR or/and employment.
Recommendations for Universities

- Universities should provide international graduates with continuing and extended access to career guidance resources and career support; more investment is needed to ensure career and employability support services are adequately resourced to cater for international students beyond graduation.

- Universities should be more proactive and explore avenues of having staff who is trained and qualified to provide information on the 485 visas. Demands will likely be significant, so it will depend on how much universities are able to invest into this.

- Building a sustained support community for international alumni in addition to organizing employment-related events such as career fairs or networking events.

- Working with professional organizations and local businesses and building programs with connections with:
  - professional networks (including alumni working in the professional fields)
  - relevant industry bodies
  - professional bodies in relevant fields

- Integrating of career education, including development of employability skills, work experience projects, WIL and professional portfolio early in the programs.

- Coherent and systemic approach to assist international graduates in developing employability.

- Building sustained and agentic capacity for employability: Conditions, support and education for students to exercise ‘employability’ agency early in the course.

- Manage expectations of international graduates/students in terms of (1) educating them about the need to develop employability earlier on in their program of study; (2) keeping them informed of the reality of the labour market and the need to target small enterprises and businesses instead of aiming at large or top-tier companies; and (3) making clear the intent and nature of the temporary graduate visa and that it is not an automatic pathway to migration.

- Establishing specialist support groups to create a sustained community of support for temporary graduates such as International Graduate Talent or International Graduate Achieve.

Recommendation for addressing the loopholes:

- There is an urgent need to have guidance for international students and graduates about finding and using legitimate agents.

- Establishing a dedicated website providing information about post-study work rights, temporary graduate visa and post-485 visa pathways. It is important that this website is created in consultation with key stakeholders and hosted by a recognised organisation or regulatory body. The website can have specific categories, targeting employers, international students/graduates, education providers and the community. The section for employers should provide description about the purpose and intent of the 485 visa, its entitlements and post 485 visa options. A practical guide for employing 485 visa holders [see page 48 for details] can be included in the section for employers. It should provide very clear FAQs on the temporary graduate visa for international students. Universities and education agents, while they cannot provide legal advice, could refer students who have any post-study work- and migration-related questions to this website. The application process and the cost for the 485 visa should be explained clearly on the website.
State governments through their respective initiatives (such as Study Sydney or Study Adelaide) should strengthen support for international graduates staying on in their state through study/post-study centres and run services that provide information sessions, advice and consultations on:

- post study work rights and pathways
- temporary graduate visa application
- developing professional connections and enhancing employability

It is critical that best practices need to be shared across the states and better promotion of these services is needed.

The involvement of the state government in this regard will ensure a more cohesive approach to supporting international graduates and at the same time relieve part of the pressure on institutions to sustain multiple services for international students.

Partnerships between universities and legitimate agents around the provision of guidance and advice for post study work rights

Agreement with legitimate migration agents who can provide free information sessions on campus about the temporary graduate visa and the checklist for visa application

Partnership between University’s Student Association/Student Union and community Legal Centre (for example Eastern Community Legal Centre) to provide international students and graduates with guidance and advice on temporary graduate visa and post-study work rights.

These multi-levels of support are needed to alleviate the demands on a single staff member at the university and give students support throughout the year, rather than the one-off information session held at the University.

Recommendations for working with employers:

- It is crucial to educate employers and raise their awareness about the intent and nature of the temporary graduate visa and the potential contributions of international graduates on this visa and on visa options post 485.

- There should be specific campaigns and flexible and practical approaches to aligning employers’ needs and strengths of international graduates/students.

- ‘Benefit’ or ‘burden’: Reciprocal benefits need to be communicated in an explicit and meaningful way to employers.

- Creative and flexible approaches and partnerships with employers at a systemic level.

- Good practices in partnerships with businesses to support international students’ and graduates’ internships and work experience should be shared across institutions, states and nationally.

- Building and reinforcing the partnerships with small businesses and branches of international companies in supporting international graduates to acquire work experience in Australia, as these two sectors are more open to this cohort.

- At the same time, government departments, city councils and local government associations (LGAs) should be more welcoming and play a more active role in providing internships/work opportunities for international students and graduates since the public sector (except for universities and TAFEs) is currently less open to international graduates than the private and NGO sectors.
• A practical guide that assists employers to hire international graduates should be introduced with practical steps that organizations can take to employ international graduates.

• It is urgent to have a coordinated approach involving different key stakeholders: Government sector, professional organizations, university, communities, employers, and student associations; for example, Austrade, state government initiatives (i.e. Study Melbourne, Study Sydney), IEAA, Victorian Working Group on International Student Employability (VicWISE), ISANA, AMES Australia, City and local Councils and Council of International Students (CISA) and Asia Society Australia.

Recommendations for international students/graduates:

A key success factor among students/temporary graduates is to activate ‘employability’ agency earlier on in their course (Tran, 2018):

• How effectively international students have managed their time in relation to developing employability in Australia

• How strategically they have focused on enhancing employability, including work experience, networking, CV/track record building and understanding of professional communities from earlier on in the course.

In terms of policy, the findings of this research underscore a critical need for an option to extend or renew the temporary graduate visa for an additional one or two years for those who have been employed full or part-time in their field of study for at least six months, or start up their own businesses in or outside their field of study with a certain level of income. Importantly, this option needs to be communicated clearly to employers to reassure them that international graduates can stay on longer than two years and can make longer-term contributions to the company. This proposed policy would address the concerns and hesitations from the employers about the short-term nature of the temporary graduate visa. The renewed or extended visa should come with the condition that the visa holders must continue to work for the same employer while being on the renewed visa.

It seems that many Australian employers have yet to recognise the potential value of international graduates or see the benefits of hiring international graduates on the temporary graduate visa, and prefer PR holders. Many are still unclear about what the post-study work visa is and what is involved in hiring an international graduate. Raising local businesses’ awareness of the temporary graduate visa, its purpose and scope is imperative. It is crucial for the international education sector, universities and related stakeholders to have specific campaigns, as well as flexible and practical approaches to align employers’ needs and international graduates’ strengths. The reciprocal benefits of recruiting international graduates need to be communicated in an explicit and meaningful way that is specifically tied to the context and missions of organizations. At the moment, the general benefits of international education and international students are often well known, but mainly to people already familiar with them, rather than to the broader community in Australia.

These are crucial steps forward if Australian international education is to remain competitive on the education export market and to ensure that Australia can tap into and maximize the potential of a highly skilled international graduate workforce and the substantial growth and rapidity of temporary graduatification.
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