

**Service and Creative Skills Australia's
Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee
Inquiry into the Value of Skilled Migration to
Australia**

2026



INTRODUCTION

Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA) is an industry-owned, industry-led Jobs & Skills Council (JSC), funded by the Department of Employment & Workplace Relations (DEWR). We offer workforce planning, guidance and advocacy for the following industries:

- Arts
- Personal Services
- Retail
- Tourism
- Hospitality

Working within a tripartite approach, SaCSA is the critical link between industry stakeholders, government and unions. We aim to provide a stronger, more strategic voice in ensuring Australia's Vocational Education and Training sector delivers stronger outcomes for employers, workers, learners, trainers and educators.

SaCSA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee's Inquiry into the Value of Skilled Migration to Australia. SaCSA, in consultation with its stakeholders, has considered the value of skilled migration for its five industry sectors, with a particular focus on workforce planning. Furthermore, SaCSA has contributed data and insights to Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) on the composition of the Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL) within our occupational remit.

These insights provide a well-informed basis to contribute to the Committee's Inquiry, with a particular focus on the following points of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

- c) The scope to more effectively target skills gaps and shortages in critical sectors to improve services that benefit Australian communities; and*
- d) The scope for skilled migration settings to more effectively support Australian businesses, boost productivity and encourage innovation.*

SKILLED MIGRATION AS A TOOL TO ADDRESS SKILLS GAPS

As part of SaCSA's [2025 Workforce Plan Updates](#), skilled migration was identified consistently as a vital pathway to addressing skills shortages, particularly where domestic employment pipelines have fallen short of workforce demands.

This reliance is reflected in workforce composition, with a number of occupations recording a substantially higher share of workers who arrived in Australia within the past 10 years than the national average (10.9%). These include Chefs (35.8%), Cooks (28.7%), Hotel Service Managers (25%), male Hairdressers (many of whom are employed as Barbers) (20.5%), and Beauty Therapists (22.2%).¹

Similarly, these roles also exhibit high proportions of workers on temporary skilled visas, including Chefs (4.2%), Cooks (1.4%), Café or Restaurant Managers (1.2%) and Hairdressers (0.6%), exceeding the national workforce average of 0.5%.²

Furthermore, according to figures corresponding to the Tourism, Travel and Hospitality Workforce, migrants (both recent arrivals and long-term migrants) held approximately 797,300 (39%) of the around 2.05 million jobs in the Accommodation and Food Services Industry.^{3,4}

¹ ABS, 'Occupation by Year of Arrival', in 2021 Census of Population and Housing (2022), accessed March 2025.

² ABS, 'Occupation by visa subclass' in 2021 Australian Census and Temporary Entrants (2023), accessed January 2026 and ABS, 'Occupation', in 2021 Census of Population and Housing (2022), accessed March 2025. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions in 2021 these proportions were likely at an artificial low.

³ Note: The Accommodation and Food Services Industry (1-Digit ANZSIC) is used as a proxy for the Hospitality sector.

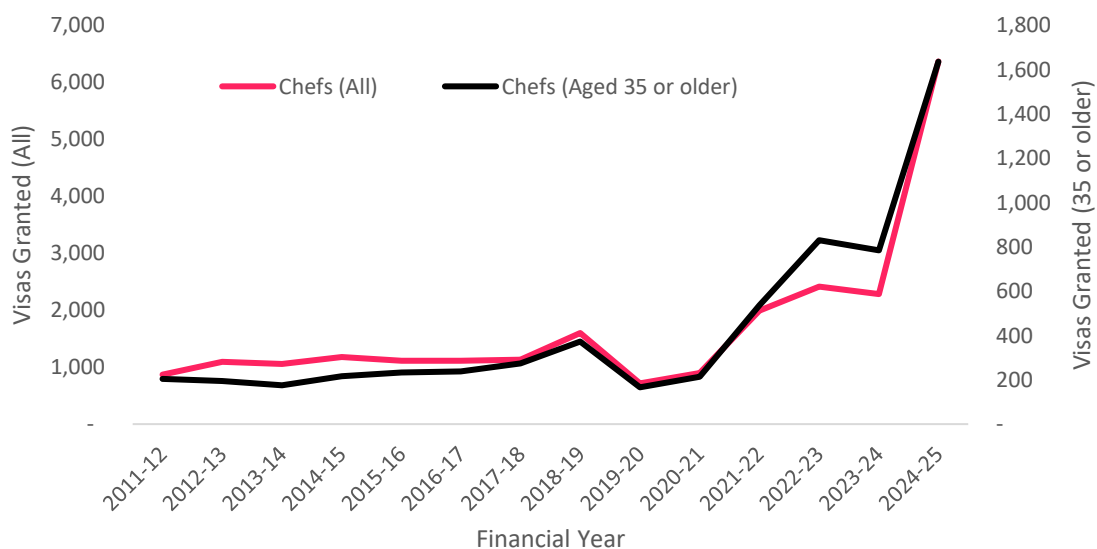
⁴ ABS, Jobs in Australia, Migrant Jobs by Industry (2022-23). Note: 'Number of jobs' is not to be conflated with the numbers of workers as estimated by the ABS Labour Force Survey, as a single individual or worker can hold multiple jobs but not vice versa.

While many of these roles are filled by international student visa holders or Working Holiday Maker visa holders, there are many skilled roles that are filled through migration pathways as well.

For example, in the Hospitality sector, the occupations of Chef, Café or Restaurant Manager and Cook were within the Top 15 nominated occupations for primary visa holders as at 30 June 2025, with Chef being the top occupation overall, with 10,140 primary visa holders as at 30 June 2025, 2.3 times as many visa holders as the second place occupation, Motor Mechanic (General) (4,350 primary visa holders).⁵

In addition, the reliance on migration for Chefs has increased significantly, with temporary skilled visa grants going from 1,594 in 2018-19 before COVID to 6,362 in 2024-25, almost a fourfold (299%) increase (see Figure 1).⁶ This increase is even greater (338%) for Chefs aged 35 or older, showing that employers are increasingly using this visa for Chefs with greater experience.

Figure 1: Skilled visas granted for Chefs, 2005-06 to 2024-25



Source: Department of Home Affairs, Temporary Work (skilled) visa program, June 2025. Some entries for the older than 35 series were suppressed and given as “<5”. In these cases, this was assumed to be 3 as an average.

Similarly, the number of Temporary Skilled Work visas granted to male Hairdressers has increased significantly in recent years, going from 104 in 2018-19 to 270 in 2024-25, an increase of 160%. As a proportion of total visas for Hairdressers, they represent almost half of all visas granted (see Figure 2).⁷ The ABS Labour Force Survey data show that only around 25% of Hairdressers are male, yet they account for almost half of all visas granted.⁸

As Barbering is captured as a specialisation under the Hairdresser ANZSCO classification, visa data for male Hairdressers is likely to include a substantial number of Barbers. While not all male Hairdressers work as Barbers, training data points to a clear gender segmentation within the occupation. Training data shows that 93% of Certificate III in Hairdressing enrolments were female, whereas 73% of Certificate III in Barbering enrolments were male.⁹ Taken together, this indicates a strong reliance on skilled migration to meet demand for Barbers rather than for Hairdressers more broadly.

⁵ Department of Home Affairs, Temporary resident (skilled) report 30 June 2025.

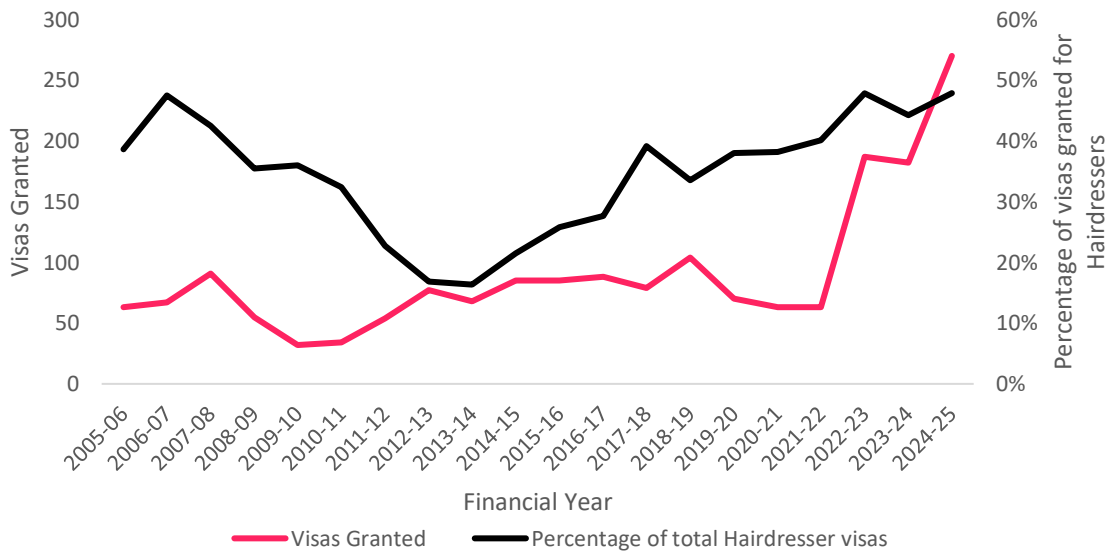
⁶ Department of Home Affairs, Temporary Work (skilled) visas granted report, 30 September 2025. Data available on data.gov.au.

⁷ Department of Home Affairs, data.gov.au, Temporary Work (skilled) visa program, June 2025: <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/visa-temporary-work-skilled>.

⁸ ABS, Labour Force Survey Detailed, May 2025, Table EQ08: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/latest-release>.

⁹ National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), ‘Program Enrolments and Completions 2024’, in VOCSTATS Total VET Students and Courses (2024)

Figure 2: Visas granted for male Hairdressers, 2005-06 to 2024-25



Source: Department of Home Affairs, Temporary Work (skilled) visa program, June 2025.

In addition, the [Creative Workforce Scoping Study](#) (CWSS), published by SaCSA in partnership with Creative Australia, showed that many occupations in the Arts sector are in acute shortage and reliant on migration through the Temporary Activity visa (subclass 408) and the Temporary Skill Shortage visa (subclass 482) to fill gaps in their workforces, including Digital Game Developer, Animator or Visual Effects Artist, Film and Video Editor, Production Manager (Screen or Live Performance), Screen Producer and Production Coordinator (Audio, Screen or Live Performance).

Core Skills Occupation List

The CSOL also highlights the necessity of skilled migration as part of the broader workforce development pipeline, with 39 of the 179 occupations (21.8%) within SaCSA’s occupational scope on this list. Given that occupations on the CSOL are determined by both shortage ratings from JSA’s Occupation Shortage List (OSL) as well as the extensive data and stakeholder analysis and feedback, the decision of JSA to include these occupations highlights the importance of skilled migration pathways as one avenue to address skills gaps.

While all stakeholders acknowledge that the skills gaps within the Australian economy cannot always be filled by a local workforce, particularly in emerging skill sectors, the current limitations of the migration system hampered efforts to utilise migration pathways. This was highlighted in the CWSS as stakeholders across a range of creative subsectors mentioned that they have explored migration pathways as a solution but given the lack of specific occupations within creative subsectors, these pathways have been difficult to access.

To this end, the transition to the new Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA) appears to address some of these concerns and in SaCSA’s feedback to the 2025 CSOL Consultation, SaCSA has advocated on behalf of our industry sectors for these specialist roles to be included in the next iteration of the CSOL.

SKILLED MIGRATION AS A SUPPORT FOR AUSTRALIAN BUSINESSES

As highlighted, skilled migration for SaCSA's industry sectors plays a key role in addressing skills gaps where there are external factors limiting domestic employment pipelines, such as training gaps and external industry perception. However, skilled migration can only support Australian businesses if the program is accessible for businesses with respect to current operating conditions.

The following sections outline two of the key factors limiting uptake of skilled migration pathways across SaCSA's five industry sectors:

Core Skills Income Threshold

One of the limiting factors identified by SaCSA's stakeholders is the current level of the Core Skills Income Threshold (CSIT), which determines a minimum income level of skilled migration through the Subclass 482 - Skills in Demand (SID), the Subclass 186 - Employer Nomination Scheme, and Subclass 494 - Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional visa pathways.

While it is recognised by industry that the CSIT serves an important role of ensuring migrant workers are paid at a commensurate level compared to the Australian Average Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings (AWOTE), it does not consider the operating conditions within the broad range of industries that utilise these visa pathways.

As noted in the submission to this inquiry from the Australian Hotel Association and Accommodation Australia, when compared with the Hospitality Award - the Award most commonly used for employing chefs and cooks - the CSIT is currently equivalent to the salaried (Award plus 25 per cent) wage of a Chef de Partie (Cook Grade 5 (tradesperson)), as set out in Schedule A - Classification Structure and Definitions of the Hospitality Award 2020 and the Restaurant Award 2020. This classification represents the highest level of Chef under the Awards, below managerial roles.

As a result, this restricts the ability of employers, particularly in regional areas, to utilise skilled migration pathways across roles at all lower skill levels within a commercial kitchen, including commercial cooks, as well as commis and demi chefs.

This disparity between actual pay conditions and the CSIT extends to other occupations with high rates of temporary skilled migration, including Cafe and Restaurant Managers and Hairdressers, with these occupations' median annual earnings being less than the current rate of the CSIT.¹⁰ In particular, this may exclude small and medium enterprises from pursuing skilled migration pathways for their workforce issues as they may not be able to exceed these rates of pay to meet the requirements of the CSIT.

While changes specific to occupations may introduce further complexity into the skilled migration system, stakeholder engagement has clearly indicated that further consideration must be given to the impact of the CSIT on occupations with median wages lower than the current CSIT rate, as well as for hiring conditions outside of the major capital cities, where wages are lower still.

Limitations with current CSOL methodology

Another limiting factor with the current skilled migration system is the limitations with the current methodology used to determine which occupations are listed on the CSOL. Much of this stems from limitations with the OSL, which is highlighted as a key factor in JSA's consideration of the CSOL.¹¹

Such limitations include:

- The binary classification of Shortage or No Shortage (noting the possible regional variations). This can lead to possible misinterpretations when data is scarce or does not provide a clear picture, as occupations may be classified as No Shortage by default, and thus decrease the likelihood of being placed on the CSOL.

¹⁰ Jobs and Skills Australia, Occupation Summaries – Hairdresser and Cafe and Restaurant Manager, Accessed January 2026

¹¹ Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025 Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL) Consultations, [2025 Core Skills Occupations List \(CSOL\) Consultations | Jobs and Skills Australia](#)

- The current lack of information about newly created OSCA occupations. Since the OSCA classification replaced ANZSCO in December 2024, few labour market statistics have been published using OSCA, making newly created occupations difficult to evaluate. While use of the mapping provided by ABS of ANZSCO to OSCA is a useful tool, it cannot (for example) distinguish differences in characteristics in a newly created OSCA occupation from the ANZSCO occupation it previously belonged to.
- The use of the vacancy fill rate as the main indicator of shortage. While this is broadly sound, there are some businesses where the work needs to be completed and cannot tolerate a shortage of personnel, which incentivises employers to hire workers they would not normally consider suitable. Stakeholders across the Arts and Hospitality industries have advised SaCSA that this is a known practice across several roles in their sectors.
- The source of vacancy data used to determine fill rates and other data in the Survey of Employers who have Recently Advertised (SERA), primarily online job boards for fixed periods. Stakeholders across SaCSA's industries, chiefly the Arts and Hospitality, have noted that this is incongruent with common recruitment methods in industry. For example, employers often leave a job advertisement up indefinitely as they constantly need new workers to come in (artificially inflating numbers), or they recruit through networks, word of mouth or social media (artificially depressing the appearance of vacancies).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

SaCSA welcomes the Committee's Inquiry into the Value of Skilled Migration to Australia particularly given the importance of skilled migration to the industries represented by our Jobs and Skills Council.

This submission highlights the role skilled migration plays in supporting service and creative industries where skills shortages persist and local training pipelines alone cannot meet demand, while emphasising the importance of migration settings that are practical, responsive and aligned with industry operating conditions to support Australian businesses and adapt to changing labour market conditions.

SaCSA looks forward to seeing the outcomes of the Committee's Inquiry and would welcome the opportunity to discuss further any of the points raised in our submission.