September 18, 2026

Opening statement: Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Public Hearing for the Committee's Inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia

Opening statement from Dr Matthew Brown, Deputy Chief Executive, The Group of Eight

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee.

Australia's future prosperity depends on our ability to attract, educate and retain talented people from around the world.

The migration debate is too often reduced to numbers. The real question is whether Australia is attracting the skills and expertise our economy needs to become more productive.

Not all migration is the same.

Highly skilled graduates, researchers and PhD candidates are not simply adding to our population. They strengthen our workforce, boost productivity, expand research capability and turn new ideas into new industries, businesses and jobs.

The link between skilled migration, research, innovation and productivity is direct.

This matters because Australia has a productivity problem. Business investment in research and development remains too low, while employers in advanced industries need more highly skilled people.

For the Group of Eight universities, this is not an abstract policy debate. It goes directly to Australia's economic competitiveness.

Most international students at Group of Eight universities complete their qualifications and return home. But Australia does need some of the best to stay, particularly those with critical research and technical skills.

When an international PhD graduate stays in Australia, we are retaining years of advanced training, specialised expertise and research capability developed within our own universities and research system. These are the people who help businesses adopt new technologies, commercialise Australian research, create new industries and strengthen our international competitiveness.

Research is also central to Australia's sovereign capability and economic security. Our ambitions in advanced technology and international research partnerships depend on having the right people and remaining connected to the world.

In saying this, we would acknowledge the announcement that the Government has made yesterday that with changes to migration regulations international PhD students will still be permitted to bring family members with them to Australia. They are vital to Australia's research effort.

The Group of Eight supports a migration and international education system based on quality, integrity and genuine student outcomes. It cannot be a free-for-all. But neither should we allow a blunt, one-size-fits-all approach to undermine one of Australia's strongest sources of skills, research capability and future economic growth

As South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas recently observed, there is a risk of a race to the bottom in the debate over international students. At a time when other countries are competing aggressively for talent, Australia should not be engaged in a contest about who can shut the door fastest. The economic consequences of getting this wrong will be felt through weaker productivity growth, lower rates of innovation, reduced research capability and a smaller pool of highly skilled workers available to Australian employers

The question is not how many international students Australia can keep out.

The question is how many of the world's best minds Australia can attract, educate and retain to help build a more productive and prosperous Australia.

That is not simply a migration policy.

It is an economic growth strategy.

**Check against delivery