

Dear sir/madam,

I respectfully submit that there is no need for Australia to introduce any form of citizenship testing upon new citizens, and that assessments of English competency (beyond that which is currently performed), any "commitment to Australia's way of life", or knowledge of "Australian values", are entirely unnecessary. I write as an Australian citizen and university student from a migrant family, with many friends and relatives who have migrated (or are trying to migrate) into Australia.

The key factor that the Discussion Paper ignores is the fact that Australia is competing with other countries for migrants. Making our migration and citizenship processes more complex will be damaging to Australia's future -- not because there is a lack of migrants, but because the migrants that Australia needs most (for instance, educated professionals, or workers with skills in high demand) will be discouraged from choosing Australia if any further complexity is added to the existing process. Past migrants generally hold Australia's current system of migration in disdain, with most of them believing that the process is slow, confusingly complex, and overly bureaucratic. Any kind of testing will worsen this perception, to the point that it will cause tangible damage to the attractiveness of Australia as a migrant destination. If educated and/or skilled foreigners wanting to live elsewhere learn that the process for becoming an Australian is more difficult than they are willing to tolerate, they will almost certainly choose other countries instead.

Separate to this, knowledge of Australian history or of "Australian values" is no more relevant to migrants than it is to citizens born in Australia -- most of whom did not know, for example, that 2001 was the Centenary of Federation before seeing the Government's advertising campaign. Additionally, it must be observed that there is no consensus in Australian society, or among Australian scholars, authors, or entertainers, of exactly what "Australian values" are, and it is therefore unreasonable to use this as a basis for testing new citizens. The claim that knowledge of this kind will help migrants to "build social links" (paragraph 35) is grossly out of touch with the reality that very few Australians, at a person-to-person level, place any emphasis on formal knowledge of this country's history, laws, or cultural background.

Similarly, additional English-language testing will do little more than impose an extra burden on migrants who already complain loudly about the difficulty of securing residence in Australia. Migrants are completely incapable of functioning in Australia without some grasp of English -- for instance, compared to other nations in our region, there are extremely few multi-lingual signs in Australian cities. New migrants lacking English skills can frequently be heard commenting on how difficult it is to perform day-to-day tasks until they learn more English. This alone is sufficient guarantee that prospective citizens will learn English, and makes it entirely unnecessary to impose a formal test.

Neither general citizenship testing nor English-language testing will keep out individuals who are determined to enter Australia, but they will stand as an additional hurdle in what is already a complex and convoluted process. This will do no more than discourage migrants in the categories that are most desired by Australian employers and governments. Therefore, there is no need whatsoever to implement either kind of test in Australia.

Hourann Bosci
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