

GMS Flash Alert

Immigration

2026-267 | 26 October 2026

Australia – Immigration Update Q3 2026

Australia introduced new processing priorities for certain temporary and permanent skilled visa applications and announced or proposed additional immigration measures affecting employer-sponsored, student, working holiday, training, and visitor visa pathways. Separately, legislation enabling a public register of approved business sponsors took effect on 8 October 2026, and the Department of Home Affairs (the “Department”) removed the credit card surcharge for visa application payments.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The revised processing priorities may affect recruitment and employee-mobilization timelines, particularly when applicants do not fall within a priority sector or cohort. Employers may also face increased public scrutiny of sponsorship activity when the sponsor register is introduced and reduced flexibility when using certain temporary visa pathways. Early assessment of suitable visa options, realistic lead times, and sponsorship-compliance arrangements may help employers plan assignments and recruitment more effectively. The removal of the credit card surcharge may reduce the total cost of visa application payments.

Key Updates

Departmental Processing Times

Updated published processing times (from the date of lodgement) are as follows¹:

- Skills in Demand (Subclass 482) visa – Specialist Skills Stream: Up to 78 days (increase from 57 days).
- Skills in Demand (Subclass 482) visa – Core Skills Stream: Up to nine months (decrease from 10 months).
- Temporary Work (Short Stay Specialist) (Subclass 400) visa: Up to six weeks (increase from four weeks).
- Temporary Activity (Research stream) (Subclass 408) visa: Up to 17 months (increase from three months).
- Permanent residence (PR) under the Employer Nomination Scheme (Subclass 186 visa): Up to 25 months (increase from 14 months).

- Bridging Visa B (required for overseas travel for Bridging Visa A holders): Up to four weeks (however, this may increase in the lead up to the holidays).

Please note that processing times are approximate only and can vary particularly as Ministerial Directions 121 and 122 are implemented. At the recent Migration Institute of Australia (MIA) National Conference attended by KPMG, the Department announced that it plans to use its overseas posts to help process Skills in Demand visas to help reduce processing times.

KPMG in Australia continues to recommend submitting decision-ready applications (especially for temporary visa applications) to help avoid preventable processing delays.

Beyond the new processing priorities, the government has also unveiled a wider suite of proposed reforms designed to reduce Net Overseas Migration, better align skilled migration with Australia's workforce needs, and strengthen compliance and program integrity.

New Processing Priorities

As previously reported by KPMG, the government has introduced Ministerial Directions 121 and 122, which establish the processing priorities for 482 visa applications and certain permanent skilled visa applications².

Under Direction 121, Subclass 482 visa applications will generally be processed in the following order:

- Primary applicants in the listed priority sectors.
- Applicants in the Specialist Skills stream of the Skills in Demand visa.
- Other primary applicants who are in Australia at the time of application.
- Other primary applicants who are outside Australia at the time of application and do not have accompanying family members included in their application.
- Remaining applications.

Key changes

- Priority group 1 processing for Subclass 482 visas has been broadened beyond healthcare, teaching, construction, law enforcement, and defence to include agriculture, aquaculture, fishing, resources, mining, and oil and gas.
- 482 Specialist Skills stream applications are now a priority processing cohort (priority group 2).
- Applicants who are offshore at the time of lodgement (and do not fall within a higher priority group) may experience comparatively longer processing times as onshore applicants are prioritised.
- The Department may consider expedited processing requests in compelling circumstances; however, a strong case would be needed, and the outcome would remain at the Department's discretion.
- Corresponding priority arrangements have also been introduced for certain permanent skilled visa pathways.

Employers in priority sectors are expected to benefit from improved access to overseas talent and potentially faster processing outcomes. However, the practical impact on processing times across the other groups remains to be seen as the new directions are implemented. KPMG in Australia continues to actively monitor processing trends and will share insights as they become available. We can also assist employers with

occupation mapping and immigration strategies to help leverage the expanded priority cohorts and reduce potential workforce gaps.

Employers may wish to proactively assess where roles fall within the new processing framework when planning recruitment and mobilisation timelines.

Sponsor Register Update

When the government released its Migration Strategy in December 2023, one of the proposed measures included the introduction of a public sponsor register.

- The register would list all approved business sponsors and include sponsor information such as the number of nominated workers and nominated occupations.
- The intention of the register is to increase transparency, enhance employee mobility and maintain program integrity.
- The legislation that allows the Department to implement this register took effect on 8 October 2026. However, no further details on the register have been released at this stage.

When the register is introduced, which may be later this year, previously private sponsorship data would become publicly available. Active users of the register are expected to include visa applicants or visa holders seeking sponsorship opportunities, other employers seeking onshore talent and unions.

Employers may wish to review their compliance and retention practices and establish operational processes to address the anticipated queries.

Wider Immigration Reforms

The government has announced a set of further measures aimed at managing migration levels, including:

Visa Type	Proposed Change
Working Holiday Makers Subclasses 417 and 462	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction of a ballot system and annual caps for second- and third-year Working Holiday Maker visas, with priority given to applicants who undertake regional work.• Citizens of the United Kingdom are excluded from the ballot system and annual cap; however, a slowdown in visa processing times for this cohort is expected as a result.• New Subclass 462 visa applications are already temporarily paused for the majority of capped partner countries.
Student Visas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restricting the ability for certain visa holders to lodge further Student visa applications onshore (this has already been implemented).• Restrictions on family members accompanying Student and Temporary Graduate visa applicants, with limited exemptions available.• Additional measures targeting "student visa hopping" to maintain the integrity of the program.

<p>Training Visa</p> <p>Subclass 407 visa</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As previously advised by KPMG, the Department has been applying increased scrutiny to Subclass 407 nominations and visa applications. • Refusal rates for this visa have increased significantly during the second half of 2026 due to stricter assessments by the Department.
<p>Visitor Visas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater use of 'No Further Stay' conditions on Visitor visas to prevent further visa applications being lodged onshore (e.g., Partner visas). • Currently only the Subclass 600 visa can be issued with a 'No Further Stay' condition. However, at the recent MIA National Conference, the Department confirmed its intention to change the legislation to allow this condition to be applied to both eVisitor visas and Electronic Travel Authorities. This change is expected to take effect later this year.

Employers may wish to plan early and incorporate greater flexibility into their workforce and immigration planning. Reduced access to international students and working holiday makers may require alternative talent approaches, while increased Subclass 407 refusal rates and greater use of 'No Further Stay' conditions reinforce the need to assess viable visa pathways upfront rather than relying on temporary or transitional options.

Removal of Credit Card Surcharge

The Department removed the credit card surcharge previously applied to visa application payments. This change reduces overall application costs for visa applicants and sponsoring employers. Visa application charges themselves remain unchanged.

The change is a welcome cost-saving measure, particularly for higher-value visa applications and high-volume visa programs.

KPMG INSIGHTS

Australia's immigration landscape continues to evolve as the government focuses on reducing Net Overseas Migration and strengthening programme integrity. Employers could expect further policy and operational changes in the coming months. KPMG in Australia will continue to monitor developments and keep you informed of key changes and their implications for your workforce and mobility programmes.

If readers have any questions or concerns about this update and potential impacts, they should consult with a member of the KPMG Australian immigration team (see the Contacts section).

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Department of Home Affairs, "[Visa processing times](#)."
- 2 Immi Australia, "[Direction 121](#)," published on 18 September 2026.

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Contacts

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