

# **Complement, substitute or remedy? Immigration policy as a distinct source of skills in Australia**

## **Abstract**

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Skilled immigration and training policies are generally assumed to be ‘functionally equivalent’ sources of skills. This is reflected in previous studies framing skilled immigration as either ‘complementing’ or ‘substituting’ training and other domestic labour market institutions. This presentation questions this prevalent assumption by analysing the role of skilled immigration policy as a distinct – rather than functionally equivalent – source of skills supply that can serve to remedy market or institutional failures. It draws upon interviews with employer association and trade union representatives in the Australian construction and hospitality industries to identify how key labour market actors make sense of the function of skilled immigration policy. The argument presented is that while skilled immigration policy can indeed complement or substitute other labour market institutions, it can also serve to remedy the systemic failures of these institutions to supply skills. The findings suggest the need to reconceptualise the function of skilled immigration policy in terms of its distinct rather than equivalent functions to training and other domestic labour market institutions.

## **Author’s Bio**

**Chris F. Wright** is an Associate Professor in the Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies at the University of Sydney Business School where he is Co-Director of the Sydney Employment Relations Research Group. Chris’ research focuses on the intersection of employment, globalisation and public policy, with a particular interest in labour immigration and comparative employment relations. His research on labour immigration has focused on the drivers of policy change, employers’ motivations for recruiting migrant workers, and migrant workers’ rights and representation. Chris received his PhD from the University of Cambridge.