

# Government backflips on 35-year age cap for graduate visa: 'Policy was misguided'

A plan to impose a blanket age cap on a popular postgraduate visa from 50 to 35 has been backtracked, though some proposed changes will still be enforced from July 1.

## KEY POINTS

- The Department of Home Affairs maintains the 50-year age cap for PhD graduates applying for the TGV.
- Australia's Migration Strategy aims to reduce the number of migrants in permanent temporary status.
- Students are 'disappointed' that 35-year-old age cap remains for master's by coursework graduates.

The Department of Home Affairs has backtracked on a plan to [impose a blanket reduction of the age cap for the Temporary Graduate Visa Class 485 \(TGV\), from 50 to 35](#)

As revealed on the department's [website](#)

, the eligibility age will remain at 50 for certain streams of the visa - for 'international PhD' and 'masters by research' applicants - from 1 July.

However, the 'select degree' two-year extension will cease as planned, meaning the maximum stay period for doctoral graduates will be halved from six to three years.

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Further, international students pursuing coursework master's and bachelor's degrees are still subject to the 35-year age limit.

Despite the new rules, Hong Kong and British National Overseas passport holders will still be eligible through the visa stream if they are under 50.

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A Home Affairs spokesperson told SBS Chinese that: "Masters (research) and doctoral degree (PhD) graduates will now continue to be eligible for a TGV if they are under 50 years of age."

"This will ensure Australia's migration system is better targeted to build Australia's economic prosperity and security.

"Key objectives of the Migration Strategy are to build stronger communities and reduce migrant worker exploitation by reducing the number of migrants who are permanently temporary."

### **Protest efforts 'bear fruit'**

PhD student Maryam Taheri, from Iran, said that she felt her efforts to place focus on the personal toll associated with lowering the age eligibility did "bear fruit" when she saw the backflip.

"The government has recognised that this policy was misguided and would have harmed research students, as well as Australian universities and the economy," she said.

"I now feel a lot better. At least now I know I have time after graduation to think and [make decisions about] my future before being forced to leave Australia."

aheri was among a cohort of 20 PhD students from Sydney who were calling on the department to consider tailored adjustments to the new TGV rules.

The assistant and media coordinator of these calls, PhD student Apei Song from the University of New South Wales, said the group felt a sense of "hope and heart" upon hearing that the eligibility age limit for some streams would remain at 50.

"We won," he said, adding, "If Australia hadn't changed this policy, it would have been difficult to attract more PhD students. At 35, many scholars are just

getting started, and 50 could still be a crucial age for academic achievements".

### **'Rectifying mistakes'**

Jake Zheng, the director of TOPSELECT and a registered migration agent in Australia, said he viewed the reversal of the government's decision as a way of "rectifying mistakes".

"The ensuing backlash and feedback from students underscored significant adverse effects. Whether it's academics or applicants hoping to work after graduation, the authority did not anticipate such a strong reaction from the public," Zheng said.

"Take PhD graduates, for instance. Their contributions to society go beyond just getting work visas and paying taxes right away. It might take years for their impact to be fully realised. It wouldn't be fair if the government only thinks about short-term gains."

However, Zheng said the adjustment to age restrictions did not imply a loosening of migrant intake policies.

"There hasn't been a change in the government's plans for immigration policy in the upcoming financial year, and it continues to focus on tightening skilled migration."

### **Age limit for master's graduates 'disappointing'**

Under the updated TGV rules, the 35-year age cap still applies to other applicants, including those pursuing bachelor's and coursework master's degrees.

Students who wish to apply for a TGV before changes come into effect must provide evidence from their education provider that all academic course requirements were met, and that they have completed their eligible qualification, prior to 1 July.

Penny Pan, a 36-year-old master's student at the University of South Australia, said she was "disappointed" that coursework master's degrees were still subject to the latest age limit.

"I will be 37 years old when graduate," she said, "... it feels like age discrimination."

"I might have considered the UK or the US. Even if I still chose to come to Australia, given my work experience, I might have opted for a university with a higher ranking, a shorter master's program, or a major city like Sydney or Melbourne."

Zheng said that at this stage, international students over 35 had very limited options beyond communicating with their universities to obtain a completion letter before the changes took effect.

"The age limit is a requirement for application submission rather than visa issuance. This means international students over 35 can still submit their applications before July 1 and, if they meet the eligibility criteria, can obtain the TGV