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The Impact of English Language Proficiency and Workplace Readiness on the Employment Outcomes of Tertiary International Students (Executive Summary)

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Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The impact of English language proficiency
and workplace readiness on the employment
outcomes of tertiary international students



Acknowledgements

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations commissioned the University of Melbourne's Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) to undertake this study in May 2008.

The project team brought together research staff from the CSHE and the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences (MDHS) of the University of Melbourne. The team comprised:

- Sophie Arkoudis (CSHE)
- Leslyanne Hawthorne (MDHS, Faculty International Unit)
- Chi Baik (CSHE)
- Graeme Hawthorne (MDHS, Department of Psychiatry)
- Kieran O'Loughlin (Melbourne Graduate School of Education)
- Dan Leach (CSHE)
- Emmaline Bexley (CSHE).

The wide range of expertise this team brought to the research was critical to the outcomes.

The study's recommendations are based on conclusions drawn from both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Leslyanne Hawthorne and Graeme Hawthorne conducted the quantitative analyses on Census, Australian Education International (AEI) and *Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia* (LSIA) data. Chi Baik, Leslyanne Hawthorne, Sophie Arkoudis and Dan Leach conducted and analysed interviews with a wide range of stakeholders. Emmaline Bexley was the project officer in the early stages of the study and coordinated the preparation of the literature review. Kieran O'Loughlin provided expert advice on the study design and critical feedback on drafts of the report. All members of the project team contributed to the final report and its recommendations and share responsibility for these.

The project team wishes to thank the interviewees who participated in the qualitative data collection and the staff of Australian Government departments who served on the project steering group.

Sophie Arkoudis, Project Director
Centre for the Study of Higher Education
The University of Melbourne

April, 2009

The impact of English language proficiency and workplace readiness on the employment outcomes of tertiary international students

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (extract from full report)

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A study commissioned by the
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Centre for the Study of Higher Education
The University of Melbourne

August 2009

Abstract

This project examines the influence of English language proficiency (ELP) on workplace readiness and employment outcomes for international students and graduates who seek to work in Australia. The study adopts a mixed method approach involving a detailed review of relevant literature, semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups, and quantitative analyses of three statistical data sets — Australian 2006 Census data, Australian Education International (AEI) data from January 2002 to June 2008, and the former Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) *Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia* (October 2005 and October 2006).

The qualitative data from the interviews enabled the authors to analyse the topic of investigation from several different perspectives including those of: international students and graduates; local (permanent resident or citizen) students and graduates; representatives of tertiary institutions and VET providers; recent offshore graduate job seekers with overseas qualifications; and Australian employers and regulatory bodies in five professional and three trade fields.

The findings show that international students employment outcomes are not as good as their Australian domestic counterparts and that they face greater challenges in finding full-time employment after graduation. While ELP is a key factor influencing their employment outcomes — particularly if graduates have low levels of ELP — the findings from this study show that ELP is not the only or principal issue.

Employers' first priority is to engage graduates with strong profession-specific skills and then to consider their 'well-roundedness'. The 'well-roundedness' includes graduates' personal characteristics and attributes, the diversity of their experiences and skills, as well as their 'cultural fit' into the workplace.

There is potential to respond to this expectation through policies and practices that support integrated approaches for enhancing ELP and workplace readiness within educational institutions, as well as increasing international students' awareness of the value of the experiences and skills they can develop outside of their studies.

Executive summary

This project examines the influence of English language proficiency (ELP) on workplace readiness and employment outcomes for international students who seek to work in Australia following skilled migration. The objective was to develop a body of knowledge to be made available to the international education industry to enable them to enhance ELP and the workplace readiness of international students.

This study was undertaken in the period June to October 2008 prior to the recent Global Financial Crisis (GFC) and the December 2008 and March 2009 changes to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) skilled migration program. However as skilled migrants are still required for critical shortage areas such as the health and medical, engineering and IT professions, the findings and recommendations from the study can inform policy and practice regarding ELP and workplace readiness of international students who seek employment in Australia after graduation.

While ELP is a key factor influencing access to skilled employment — particularly if graduates have low levels of ELP — the findings from this study show that ELP is not the only or principal issue. Employers' first priority is graduates with strong profession-specific skills. Following this, perceptions of the 'well-roundedness' of graduates are considered to be equally as important as ELP. The 'well-roundedness' sought by employers includes graduates' personal characteristics and attributes, the diversity of their experiences and skills, as well as their 'cultural fit' into the workplace. There is potential to address this expectation through policies and practices that support integrated approaches for enhancing ELP and workplace readiness within educational institutions, as well as increasing international students' awareness of the value of the experiences and skills they can develop outside of their studies, for example, in the course of casual employment in Australia.

The present study was conducted in three phases. The first phase involved a literature review that explored key issues that influence the relationship between ELP, workplace readiness and employment outcomes. The factors identified were used to shape the questions asked of employers, university and VET staff, students and graduates during the third phase of the project. The key issues identified for investigation were:

- the different employment-related perceptions and experiences of international and local students as well as graduates, as defined by whether English is their first or second language;
- the different stakeholder understandings of the level and type of ELP required for the workplace, including any differences between the level of proficiency required for work in the professions and selected trades; and
- the importance of ELP in relation to other factors that may influence workplace readiness and employment outcomes, including how levels of ELP interact positively or negatively with these.

The second phase of the study was based on analysis of three statistical data sets. The first analysis was of Australia's 2006 Census data, to define the typical employment outcomes achieved by recent degree or diploma-qualified migrants to Australia in their first 1-5 years of settlement (across all migration categories). Employment outcomes were assessed by level and field of qualification, date of arrival and birthplace. Eight occupations were examined, given their relevance to recent skilled migration flows: five professions (accounting, information technology,

engineering, medicine and nursing) and three trades (building, hospitality and hairdressing)¹.

The second statistical analysis undertaken was of Australian Education International (AEI) student enrolment data from January 2002 to June 2008. This demonstrated the level of recent growth in international student demand for Australian university and vocational education and training (VET) sector courses by region/ country of origin, field and sector of study. The aim of this analysis was to define the characteristics of students with a potential to transition as Principal Applicants into the skilled migration category.

The third analysis was of the *Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia* (LSIA). This allowed direct comparison of the labour market integration rates achieved by onshore Independent (international graduates²) compared to offshore Independent Principal Applicants at 6 months and 18 months post-migration. This analysis permitted assessment of work outcomes by field of qualification, ELP and birthplace, based on a representative sample of all skilled category migrants. It also allowed the study to examine how well international students performed after graduation compared to similarly qualified recent arrivals (all immigration categories and domestic graduates) and offshore skilled migrants, through LSIA comparison with the 2006 Australian Census data.

The third phase of the study comprised interviews with local and international students and recent graduates; VET providers and universities; and employer groups and regulatory bodies. In addition, interviews were conducted with recent offshore graduates to Australia holding overseas tertiary qualifications and seeking employment, to seek contrasting perspectives. The interviews allowed for an in-depth analysis of interrelating factors influencing ELP, workplace readiness and employment outcomes of international students from the perspectives of key stakeholders.

In total, interviews were conducted with 147 interviewees. These comprised:

- 40 international students and graduates for whom English is a second language and who are completing/completed qualifications in Australia;
- 18 local students and graduates for whom English is a first language;
- 28 university and VET staff (representing 10 institutions);
- 18 recent offshore graduates with overseas qualifications for whom English is a second language;
- 36 employers and regulatory bodies (in the fields of accounting, information technology, engineering, medicine, nursing, building, hospitality and hairdressing); and
- 7 policymakers based in the Federal government departments directly concerned with skill migration, international students, and employment outcomes (DEEWR and DIAC).

¹ The 2006 Census data provides employment outcomes for migrants selected within all immigration categories: skilled, family and humanitarian (the latter two typically associated with poorer employment outcomes since they were not points-tested as a condition of selection).

² The term 'international graduates' is used in this report to refer to international students who have completed their tertiary studies in Australia.

Overview of the main findings from the statistical analysis

Analysis of the 2006 Census data showed:

- Historically low levels of unemployment were prevalent in Australia when the data were collected. Just 7.5% of degree-qualified 2001-06 arrivals were unemployed by 2006, compared to 1.5% of all domestic graduates. Doctorally qualified migrants were particularly advantaged (all professional fields) compared to migrants holding lower level qualifications.
- Despite this positive finding, employment outcomes for recently arrived degree and diploma qualified migrants³ varied widely in Australia in the first 1-5 years after arrival (all immigration categories). For example, 52% of English speaking background (ESB) degree-qualified migrants secured work in their own or another professional field and strong outcomes were also achieved by Commonwealth-Asian migrants⁴ trained in British-based systems (e.g. 51% from Malaysia).
- Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) migrants experienced far more variable employment rates (e.g., just 27% from China secured some form of professional work in the first 10 years in Australia, in their own or another professional field, compared to 34% of migrants from India).
- Significant differences were evident for many skilled migrants in terms of professional field. Labour market integration rates were generally strong in high demand fields such as medicine and nursing, despite a severe risk of de-skilling (i.e. employment in a low level occupation) for select NESB groups (e.g. doctors from China). Outcomes were relatively poor in fields such as engineering, where there was even greater risk of de-skilling.
- In terms of the trades examined, recently arrived migrants qualified in hairdressing were very likely to work in their field (employment rates from 70-100% being the norm) compared to low rates for migrants qualified in food/hospitality. Few recent migrants qualified in building had found any work in their trade (particularly those of NESB origin), despite good overall employment outcomes.

Analysis of the Australian Education International data (January 2002 – June 2008) showed:

- The recent period has coincided with increased international student enrolment in select trade courses (reflecting Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) policy changes⁵). This has particularly applied to food/

³ Census data do not define where qualifications were gained. This can only be imputed by date of arrival. The majority would have been gained overseas but the data would also include a substantial number of migrants with Australian qualifications (eg those who had arrived young).

⁴ Defined in the Census as migrants from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh

⁵ Please note that in 2004-05 just 9% of skilled category applicants had occupations on the Migration Occupation in Demand List. A year later the proportion had risen to 43%, given 5 extra points were now required for skilled migration. Trade sector student enrolments grew rapidly from this time, in a context where a substantial number of trades were being added to the MODL. This opportunity was sharply contracted in early 2009, with DIAC policy changes ensuring occupations on the Critical Skills List (CSL rather than the MODL) receive priority processing, and very few trades are listed on the CSL.

hospitality courses, followed by hairdressing, with minimal enrolments evident to date for the building trades.

- Student demand has remained far higher however for Australian professional degrees, with enrolments in business/ commerce dominating, followed by accounting, information technology and engineering. Competition for work post-migration in these fields was thus likely to be intense.
- Rapid changes have also occurred in terms of source countries - most notably growth in international student enrolments from China (93,387 enrolled by June 2008) followed by India (65,377). These countries have also become major Australian sources for offshore skilled migrants - allowing scope to compare work outcomes achieved by both groups.

In the context of these 2006 Census and AEI enrolment data findings, analysis of the *Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia* (LSIA) permitted assessment between the work outcomes of onshore and offshore independent applicants. The LSIA also allowed assessment of the extent to which possession of an Australian qualification conferred 'protection' on otherwise disadvantaged migrant groups in the job-seeking process (as established by the 2006 Census analysis).

In brief the LSIA data showed:

- Both onshore and offshore Independent migrants had secured excellent overall employment rates six months post-migration to Australia (noting here that few trade-qualified migrants had migrated by 2006, with few therefore included in this analysis).
- Work outcomes were best for ESB offshore migrants (93% employed at 6 months in some form of job), with far lower employment rates achieved by select offshore Independents from NESB groups, such as those qualified in China (55%).
- Higher rates of employment at 6 months however prevailed for international students qualified in Australia. Indeed 85% of NESB onshore Independent migrants were employed at 6 months overall, compared to 79% recruited offshore. Possession of an Australian qualification was thus advantageous. Most notably, Australian qualifications significantly improved outcomes for Principal Applicants from relatively disadvantaged NESB source countries (such as China).
- Despite this, level and type of employment significantly differed. Offshore Independent migrants were more likely to have secured work in their field of qualification in Australia than onshore Independent migrants. They were at lower risk of unemployment and 'not in the labour-force' status.
- These findings for onshore Independent migrants remained at 18 months post-arrival, despite some improvement in their status. Most notably 30% of international graduates were employed in their profession at this time, compared to 36% of comparable offshore migrants.
- Important variations were evident by field of qualification – reported here for the professions, given so few skilled migrants at the time of LSIA data collection were trade-qualified. Offshore migrants were significantly more likely than onshore migrants to be employed in their field at 18 months in education (60% compared to 31%), IT (56% compared to 35%), and accounting (48% compared to 35%). Onshore migrants performed better when they had been obliged to complete a lengthy period of education in Australia (e.g. to qualify in fields such as engineering or medicine, where their

employment rates were comparable or superior to those of offshore migrants).

- Large numbers of onshore and offshore skilled migrants remained at risk of de-skilled work in Australia at 18 months after migration. In all 41% of onshore migrants were employed in only low skilled work, compared with 28% of Independent migrants recruited offshore. This represents a very significant finding. The risk was greatest in the over-subscribed fields of business/commerce, accounting, and education (the first two associated with rapid recent student enrolment growth in the period to June 2008).
- As demonstrated by the multivariate analysis undertaken, self-reported level of spoken English was a key predictor of Australian employment at both 6 and 18 months, for onshore as well as offshore Independent migrants. At 18 months, onshore skilled migrants who spoke English very well or for whom it was the first language were 3.7 times more likely to be employed compared to those with poor English (Business/Other category). Offshore Independent applicants were 2.1 times more likely to be employed, so this was a very positive overall finding for onshore migrants.
- A range of intervening variables beyond English ability by definition contributed to this outcome. For example ESB migrants have qualified in British-based education systems, in developed economies directly comparable to Australia's, and with similar technological standards. 'English' thus becomes a proxy for a package of additional attributes well understood by employers, such as recognised prior qualifications.
- Age also matters. Independent migrants aged 25-44 years had achieved higher labour market integration rates, as did those aged 45-64 years compared to younger new graduates. Australian employers clearly seek and value a degree of experience in migrant professionals, particularly where new graduates are deemed to lack significant Australia-based training and a high degree of workplace readiness.
- Despite the less positive employment outcomes achieved by onshore migrants qualified in Australia, compared to skilled applicants recruited offshore, it is important to note that they fared far better than recently arrived degree qualified migrants from comparable birthplace groups arriving in all immigration categories. Within this context the employment outcomes achieved by onshore and offshore Principal Applicants emerge as very positive indeed. For example, as demonstrated by the LSIA, 75% of onshore migrants from China had secured some form of work in Australia within the first 6 months of migration. 87% were employed at 18 months, compared to 77% of offshore Principal Applicants. The comparable rates for Indian Independent migrants at 18 months were 96% and 94%.

Overview of findings from the qualitative analysis

The qualitative data support the general conclusions from the quantitative analysis. The personal accounts collected during the interview phase not only highlight some of the problems faced by international students and graduates as they seek employment in their field of study, but also identify ways in which policies and practices might respond to these issues.

Low levels of ELP and employment outcomes

- Development of ELP during international students' period of study is important as there are clear employer expectations of minimum ELP levels

required for professional and trade sector employment in Australia. If graduates do not achieve these levels, they are unlikely to be employable in their field of study.

- Graduates with poor oral ELP appear to be particularly disadvantaged in the recruitment process, with accent considered an issue by many of the interviewees. A range of measures are adopted by employers to test ELP levels of those applying for employment, such as the use of telephone pre-interviews and requests to rewrite applications on-site in order to test written skills.
- Generally, lower levels of ELP were required in trades than in the professions, in particular for entry-level employment. However, miniscule numbers of international students had qualified and sought work in Australian trade sectors at the time that the study was conducted. In certain fields, such as hospitality and carpentry for example, graduates with poor ELP might also find employment within their ethnic communities, and in that case, lower ELP might not have an effect on their immediate work outcomes.

Adequate levels of ELP and employment outcomes

- Overall international students with perceived adequate levels of ELP appeared to face greater obstacles than local graduates in finding employment in their fields.
- In gaining employment interviews and being offered work, many factors in addition to ELP were considered important for both international and domestic graduates. These include the perceived level of technical skills, the level of employment demand by field, relevant work experience, prior completion of part-time or casual work not related to the field of study (which may facilitate transition to the workplace), as well as personality and individual characteristics. Local graduates and employers referred to these factors as indicating that a graduate is 'well-rounded'.
- Beyond initial labour market barriers, excellent levels of ELP were considered critical for international students/graduates to progress further in their careers once they had gained employment. While some of the large employing firms indicated that they were able to support international students in developing their ELP during their first year of employment, access to concurrent ELP support was typically ad hoc, brief in terms of time and seen as delivering minimal outcomes. Such support was not provided long-term.

Other factors influencing workplace readiness and employment outcomes

- International students/graduates may lack understanding of the skills and attributes sought by employers in their field. Their focus is primarily on obtaining their degrees during their period of study and they believe the main obstacle to finding work in their chosen field is lack of opportunities for relevant work experience.
- In contrast to the perceptions of international students/graduates mentioned in the previous point, local students and graduates believe that a broad range of work experiences (not necessarily related to the field of study) are essential for workplace readiness and finding work. The importance of this was reinforced by interviews held with employer and regulatory body stakeholders.
- Offshore skilled graduates with an international qualification also consider work experience to be more important than ELP in achieving successful employment outcomes. They indicate however that a current lack of

opportunities to gain Australian experience results in deskilling or underemployment, with many obliged to find first employment outside their field of study. The acceptance of such employment is perceived to carry risks. According to a number of offshore and onshore interviewees, it becomes very difficult to find subsequent work in their own field of study, even if they undertake postgraduate studies.

Assessing ELP for workplace readiness

The findings of the study indicate that there appears to be some uncertainty about the usefulness of IELTS in respect to workplace readiness. Interviewees in general varied in their perceptions of what the scores represent as indicators of graduates' workplace readiness, with personality and what might be termed 'workplace fit' seen as far more important indicators of future performance.

The various interviewees considered 'workplace ready' ELP to include both general and specific occupation language skills. These include high-level workplace communication skills with an emphasis on social and oral English, with literacy and cross-cultural skills also considered to be important within the professions. ELP appeared to be construed as the ability to use English for a variety of tasks particular to specific different professional and vocational fields.

Some university and VET providers are beginning to develop subjects where ELP for the workplace is taught and assessed. This would seem to be a positive step forward in addressing employer concerns regarding the communications skills of graduates.

Examples of best practice in educational institutions and post study

Most universities and VET providers have programs that aim to assist all students with job applications, resumes, and developing job interview skills. Within these programs, a few of the stand-alone workshops may be targeted at ELP, but only in terms of raising awareness. Given that ELP is a long-term developmental process, little can be achieved in a few workshops of short duration. More innovative programs are emerging that involve semester-long subjects offered within courses, focusing on developing international students' communication skills within the workplace, particularly at the beginning of a course. These programs are of potential relevance to a wide range of Australian institutions.

On the basis of this study, the emerging good practice programs appear to:

- involve ELP, inter-cultural awareness and job search skills;
- make connections with the relevant field of study to facilitate field-specific language training;
- address specific ELP needs of international students, such as pronunciation;
- link ELP development to clinical practice or work placement;
- involve both careers services and Academic Language and Learning Units in developing the program; and
- incorporate semester long programs that may be offered as for-credit course components.

Further, 'professional year' courses have been developed for international students who have recently graduated in the fields of accounting and engineering. These courses are designed to address Australian employer requirements through enhanced ELP and professional training, supported by extended Australian work experience placements. Regulatory bodies as well as the tertiary sector are involved in these courses. For example Engineers Australia is the Australian designer and

provider of the professional engineering program of study, which includes a substantial industrial internship.

Conclusions

ELP and finding work in the field of study

The majority of interviewees agreed that ELP was very important for finding work in their chosen field. Specifically, they felt that communication skills in the job interview were essential, as were the skills to interact with co-workers and clients. Issues of fluency and accent were raised as a potential obstacle to recruitment, as were levels of reading and writing.

The level of disadvantage experienced by recently arrived NESB professionals was affirmed by analysis of the 2006 Census data. This showed migrants from the major ESB countries achieve higher levels of employment outcomes, followed by migrants from Commonwealth-Asian countries. Employment rates were markedly worse for NESB migrants in the first 5 years, in particular for migrants from non-Commonwealth-Asian countries such as China.

The analysis of the LSIA data demonstrated that oral English language skills are a key predictor of successful employment outcomes in Australia. Skilled category Principal Applicants — including those from ESB countries — who self-reported that they spoke English ‘very well’ were far more likely to be employed at 6 and 18 months post-migration compared to those who self-reported ‘poor’ spoken English levels. (By definition it should be noted here that the ‘ESB’ category subsumes a range of additional factors, in particular education in British-based systems in countries with comparable levels of economic development to Australia.) Further, skilled migrants selected offshore appeared more likely to find work in their own profession than those selected onshore. This may in part be due to offshore applicants having experience in the workplace.

ELP and job performance

While a few respondents (mainly local students/graduates) did not feel that ELP was crucial for “getting a job” in their chosen field, all interviewees agreed that ELP was essential for performing well once in the workplace, particularly for promotion to more senior positions. Interviewees affirmed that the level of ELP required to perform well in the workplace depended largely on the field of study and the type of work involved. For example, many entry level IT positions in Australia no longer exist, yet a high level of ELP may be required for IT work in the more senior, managerial level positions. Overall, technical ability was deemed to be the most important issue, along with a capacity to fit in. ELP appears to be the next most important attribute sought. The extent to which Australian employers are willing to accept perceived lower levels of ELP appears to be mediated by the level of labour market demand. Within a slowing economy, it is likely to be more difficult for international students with weaker ELP skills to achieve successful employment outcomes.

For a number of recent offshore graduates, ELP (often referred to as ‘communication skills’) was considered to be the most important factor in performing well in the workplace, with some believing their chances of promotion or career advancement to be limited because of their level of ELP. This finding is consistent with the LSIA data analysis. It was further supported by findings from the interviews with the employers and regulatory bodies who indicated that poor ELP reduced the chance of being recruited, and increased the risk of graduates’ career stagnation and perhaps ultimate dismissal, if work performance was found not to improve. The whole person

was relevant, with personality and the ability to communicate socially with colleagues also considered fundamental to effective performance.

The experience of international students in finding work

Generally, all the onshore and offshore graduates interviewed— regardless of field of study — expressed difficulty in finding work in their chosen field. A large proportion reported that they had failed, on numerous occasions, to be short-listed for an interview. Some of these graduates found part-time work in their chosen field and supplemented their income by working in restaurants or shops. Others had found full-time work in areas unrelated to their studies, mainly in the restaurant or retail industries. This is in line with findings from the 2006 Census and the LSIA data that suggest that degree-qualified migrants (particularly those from NESB origins) are at serious risk of de-skilling. The experience of international students, graduates and NESB offshore migrants is in stark contrast to the experience of local graduates and recent ESB migrants, all of whom (except one pursuing an academic career) had found full-time work in positions directly related to their field of study.

While it may be easy to conclude that ELP was the main factor influencing the different employment outcomes of these international and local graduates, a closer examination of the findings reveal that the issue is complex and that factors other than ELP influence employment outcomes. This is evidenced by the fact that the majority of international graduates who participated in this study had failed to reach the interview (or pre-interview screening) stage in the application process. This suggests that they were filtered out on the basis of their written CV, which most students prepared with intensive support from professional career advisers. In this situation, ELP had little, if any, influence on employment outcomes before the interview stage. This raises the important question: What are the types of experiences/activities, skills and attributes that are valued by prospective employers and that can be demonstrated in a CV? In other words, what can international students and graduates do to enhance their chances of being short-listed for interview?

As the employer interviews made clear, selection for interview is likely to be influenced by a range of perceived attributes, including the quality of graduates' prior training, their length of residence in Australia, their level of cultural enclosure, and relevant work experience. Overall, it seemed clear that international students and graduates could benefit from focusing on developing a diverse range of skills through a variety of extra-curricula activities, which may positively influence their employment outcomes.

The interviews also made clear however, that most of the international students/graduates did not consider part-time jobs in areas unrelated to their field of study as being important for finding working in their chosen field. On the other hand, the local students/graduates interviewed considered part-time work and diversity of experiences as being highly valued and sought after by employers. The Australian employers interviewed also sought 'well rounded employees' who not only have sufficient ELP but also cross-cultural ability and the potential to adapt to the Australian workplace.

The LSIA data affirm the importance of spoken English language skills as well as the attraction to employers of workplace experience. The analysis revealed that age group was a key predictor of employment outcomes with Independent migrants aged 25-44 years having consistently better employment outcomes than younger new graduates aged between 18-24, followed by those aged 45-64 years.

In summary, the research findings reveal that ELP represents a key issue for both graduate job access, and for subsequent mobility within work. The research confirms

the risk of de-skilling and underemployment among recent migrants (particularly onshore Independent migrants), while raising important issues for consideration by government, educational institutions, employer groups, and onshore applicants themselves.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That universities and VET sector providers develop a range of targeted programs and resources (guided by the DEEWR project titled *Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities*, developed by the Australian Universities Quality Agency) to support and enhance the development of international students' ELP during their course of study.

Recommendation 2

That education providers develop closer links with industry and employer groups in order to assist in work placements and internships specific to the students' field of study in Australia, as well as offering advice regarding employability skills that can be embedded within for-credit curriculum teaching and assessment.

Recommendation 3

That universities and VET providers consider developing English language support programs, which prepare students specifically for their internship/workplace placements, including programs in developing oral and written communication skills relevant to their workplace.

Recommendation 4

That universities, colleges, international student recruitment agencies and other key stakeholders be encouraged to provide information concerning the range of concurrent (see section 4.5 of report) and post study (see section 6 of the report) strategies international students can adopt to enhance their ELP, cross-cultural ability and future Australian employability, should this be a factor in terms of their decision to study in Australia. Such advice should explicitly include the potential value of concurrent work experience while enrolled in Australia.

Recommendation 5

That employer groups be encouraged to develop access and equity guidelines for recruiting overseas-born workers (both onshore and offshore graduates), taking into consideration fair and equitable strategies/methods for evaluating applicants' ELP.

Recommendation 6

That DEEWR consider supporting further research on (a) the validity of using IELTS and/or other standardised global ELP tests as a measure of workplace readiness; and (b) the assessment of ELP requirements for trade sector employment, given the lack of data available to date.