

research
REPORT



securing **futures**

making the most
of migrants' skills

About **AMES**

AMES is the largest provider of services for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Australia.

Services provided by AMES in Victoria include a comprehensive range of settlement, English language and employment programs. More than 38,000 people accessed AMES programs in 2012. Employment is an essential cornerstone in the process of successful settlement for most new migrants. AMES supports a range of innovative programs to assist people arriving in Australia to find good quality work. This research reviews the AMES Skilled Professional Migrants Program (SPMP), a four week intensive employment orientation program for professionally qualified migrants.

For more information about the Skilled Professional Migrants Program (SPMP) please visit our website at www.ames.net.au

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- Staff who conducted the interviews for this report

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- South East Water
- Heinz
- Pitcher Partners

Our **VISION**

“ Full participation for all
in a **cohesive** and **diverse** society ”

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1 Executive summary

This report reviews the effectiveness of the AMES Skilled Professional Migrants Program (SPMP).

Designed to equip professionally qualified migrants to find work in their field in Australia, the SPMP aims to provide a bridge across the cultural divide facing some migrants relaunching their careers in Australia.

The purpose of this research was twofold. Firstly, as a measure of program effectiveness, we wanted to document the employment outcomes of the professionally qualified migrants who completed the program between 2010 and 2012. The second objective was to investigate and better understand the pathways these migrants take towards achieving their career goals in the early years of settlement.

Most of the 239 SPMP participants interviewed for this project were selected for migration to Australia on the basis of their qualifications and professional experience through the Skilled Migration Program. All participants had professional backgrounds and a strong desire to continue their careers in Australia. This research indicates that participating in employment orientation such as the SPMP can be particularly effective in fast tracking people into work that utilises their skills.

In the words of one participant:

“The SPMP was very useful - the cover letter, resume and information about interviews. It was good to meet people who were in a similar situation to me. It is hard for migrants, when they first arrive ... I still use the resume that I created in the course. When I apply for jobs I have about a 90% strike rate of being invited for an interview.”

Computer Science Engineer from Nepal, male

Participants came from a diverse range of professional backgrounds. The largest proportion had engineering, IT specialist or accounting and finance backgrounds. Before enrolling in the program, less than 35% of the participants had worked in Australia. Those who had worked were mostly in low skilled or non-professional work. After the SPMP, employment situations had significantly improved; 89% had found work, and of this group 64% were in a professional position.

More than half of those who found work after the SPMP did so within three months. At the time of interview, 72% of participants said that their employment after the SPMP was a good or partial match with their overseas background and more than 80% of people rated the usefulness of the SPMP as very high. This indicates the springboard effect of the SPMP. Information and advice provided at the right time can enable people to shift into work that more closely matches their qualifications and overseas experience:

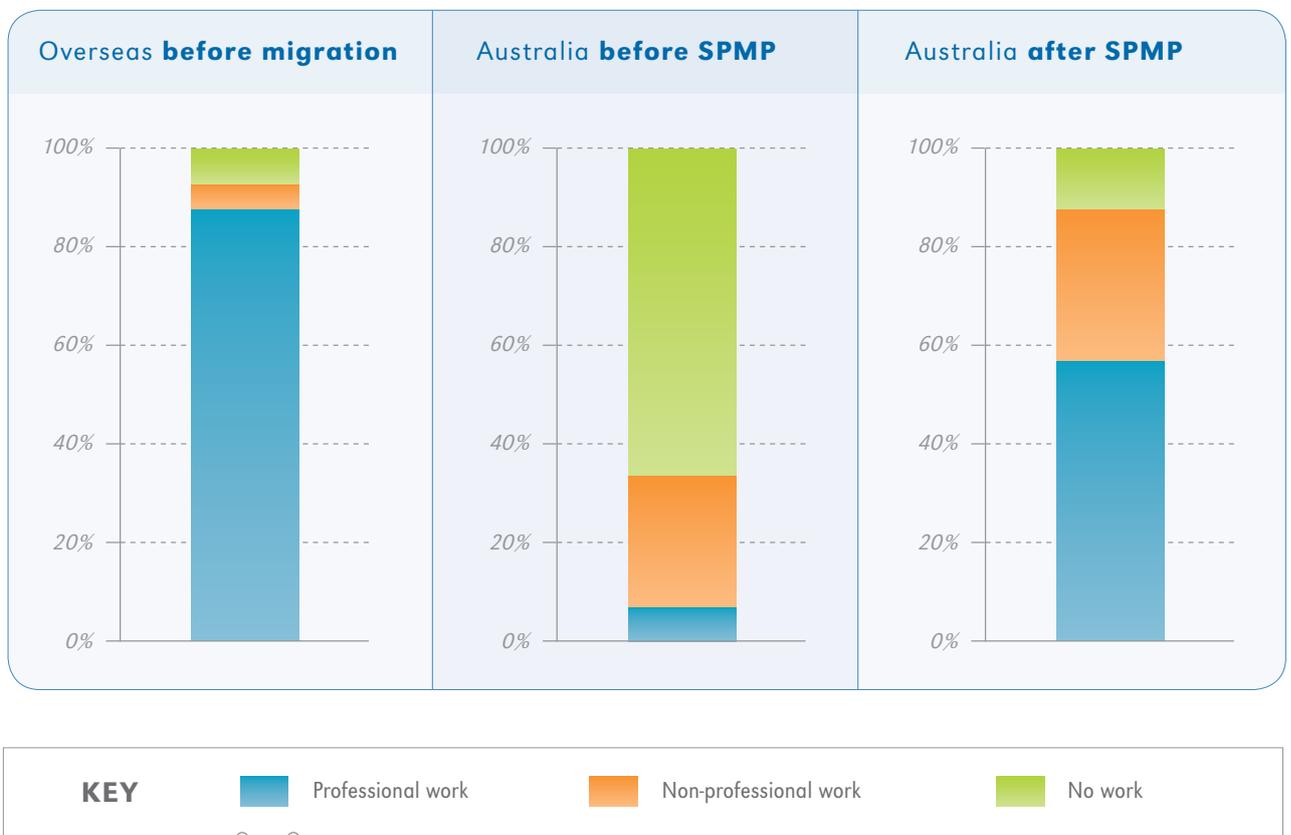
“It was the first door I found open. Without the SPMP I’m pretty sure finding my first job would have been much harder.”

Graphic Designer from Venezuela, female

There was significant variation in people’s career trajectories. Some people who were unemployed in Australia moved directly into professional work at their level after the SPMP, others had found work in their field at a lower level with potential to progress. A small number of participants were still looking for work in their field when we spoke with them. However it was clear that for the majority, the SPMP was a catalyst for finding employment more closely aligned to their professional background.

Australia’s immigration program attracts a high proportion of highly skilled professionally qualified migrants. This research suggests that there is a role for employment orientation such as the SPMP for some migrants, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds. The SPMP is an intervention that can maximise the use of the skills brought by migrants and contribute to Australia’s productivity.

Work Situations



Case **STUDY**

Mehdi came to Australia from Iran through the Skilled Migration Program in 2011.

He has a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering and significant experience as an engineer, working in production, design and process engineering for over 12 years.

Like many other Skilled Professional Migrants Program (SPMP) participants, Mehdi heard about the SPMP from some friends and enrolled in January 2012.

Looking back he says the program was very useful:

“You know actually the first thing was understanding the working culture. The teachers explained what happens in the job market and the workplace. I found out about writing a resume in Australia. The interview skills, this was very important. Also all the guys who attended had the same situation. We helped each other, this was teamwork. The teachers helped us so much, they were very kind.”

After the SPMP Mehdi did some casual work in a company that manufactures diaries while he looked for engineering roles. While he was working there he was called for an interview with an engineering firm specialising in making test equipment for the electronics, medical, mining and telecommunication industries. He was successful and started work in May 2012 as a mechanical design engineer on a full time, permanent basis.

Mehdi describes his job as being a fantastic match with his experience and says he is “100% satisfied”.

“It is my first professional job in Australia. It is varied and project based. I’m gaining more experience; it’s not a routine job.”

Mechanical Engineer from Iran, male

Names in all case studies have been changed.

2 Introduction

This report reviews the AMES Skilled Professional Migrants Program (SPMP).

The SPMP is a four-week intensive program that assists migrants with professional qualifications to develop job search skills in Australia. These include the preparation of resumes and job applications, interview skills and networking. The program also aims to develop participants' understanding of the Australian job market and workplace culture. During the course, participants receive feedback from corporate volunteers and, after completing the course, may be mentored by industry professionals who provide ongoing support and advice during their job search. Past participants can also join an AMES SPMP alumni group that facilitates networking and information exchange.

This review is based on interviews conducted with 239 people who participated in the SPMP from 2010 to 2012.

Migration and employment

Employment is essential for successful settlement for most migrants. It creates the conditions underpinning social integration and supports financial independence, security and wellbeing. The quality of work is also important as those who do not use their skills and experiences at work may experience lower income, loss of employment skills and loss of social status, all of which can have a negative impact on settlement. This can also affect the settlement of other family members.

The SPMP was developed in response to seeing migrants with professional qualifications and experience struggling to find work in their field in Australia. For migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds there is a downward trend in occupational status in Australia, leaving many people, including those who have come through the Skilled Migration Program, working in jobs that do not adequately use their skills and capabilities (Green, Kler & Leeves 2007; Hawthorne 1997; Reid 2012).

Australia's Skilled Migration Program

The Skilled Migration Program is Australia's largest migration stream and is very successful in terms of employment outcomes. With a strong focus on the applicant's English language and professional skills, most skilled migrants find work and can make an immediate contribution to Australia's workforce and economy.

Overall the employment rate for skilled migrants is comparable with the Australian average (ABS 2010; DIAC 2010). However, there are important differences in employment outcomes for different groups within the Skilled Migration Program. Skilled migrants who are sponsored directly by employers go straight into a job on arrival and are unlikely to experience unemployment. Those from English speaking regions who generally have strong language and cultural ties to Australia are more likely to find work in a skilled job relatively quickly. In contrast, skilled migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds can find that the culture and language gap, which also influences employer perceptions, can make finding professional work more challenging.

Immigration to Australia by visa stream



Source: Department of Immigration and Border Protection

The majority of participants in the SPMP come through the Skilled Migration Program. It is important to note that many of the non-English speaking migrants coming through the Family and Humanitarian streams also bring valuable skills and qualifications to Australia and can experience similar difficulties finding professional work in their field in the early stages of settlement.

The AMES Skilled Professional Migrants Program (SPMP)

The SPMP provides intensive job search and cultural advice to migrants, many of whom join the program soon after arriving in Australia. It is partly funded through Victorian Government subsidies and partly by the participants. A selection process for entry into the course means that it targets those who are job-ready and have high levels of English.

The overall aim of the SPMP is to assist professionally qualified migrants to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to secure appropriate jobs in their field. This is not only beneficial for migrants who have chosen to permanently settle in Australia but makes a valuable contribution to the Australian workforce.

One of the barriers that non-English speaking migrants face when looking for work soon after arrival is unfamiliarity with Australian recruitment practices including resume presentation, application processes and interviews. There can also be difficulties with language and accent, having overseas qualifications recognised by employers, and developing the new professional networks that are essential for finding work. Additionally, it can be very challenging to find employment without local experience and local referees.

Conducted eight times per year, the SPMP addresses these issues by assisting participants to:

- develop resumes and cover letters appropriate to the Australian context
- understand job advertisements and recruitment processes
- understand the Australian job market and workplace culture
- develop interview skills
- receive information and advice from local professionals.

The SPMP participants meet one-on-one with a qualified career counsellor to discuss their employment aspirations and can apply for a mentor on completion of the course. The role of mentors is to provide industry information, assist with networking and generally support the participants in their search for professional employment.

There are several features that differentiate the SPMP from other programs for skilled migrants. It is a short, intensive and practical course. It has strong links with corporate partners who regularly join the program as guest speakers, practice interviewers and mentors. Participants receive intensive support from teachers as well as advice tailored to the specific barriers faced by them. There is also an opportunity to participate in *Working the Australian Way*, a two-day workshop resourced by corporate partners.¹

All these activities equip participants with the tools and confidence to apply for and secure professional jobs in Australia.

¹ AMES has recently published a short review of this workshop. This is available online at www.ames.net.au/research-and-policy/research.html

Case **STUDY**

Carolina came to Australia from Venezuela through the Skilled Migration Program in February 2012.

She has a Bachelor of Systems Engineering and worked as a database administrator in Venezuela for five years.

Carolina heard about the SPMP through a friend and enrolled immediately after arriving in Australia. During the program she applied for a job with an IT consulting firm and was successful. At the time of interview she was working full time as a database administrator in a role she said matched her skills completely.

Carolina said she found the SPMP very useful:

“Because it helped me to learn how to behave in an interview. The networking is great – I am still using some connections I built in the SPMP. The SPMP showed me the right way through to job hunting and I was successful in a very short time.”

Systems Engineer from Venezuela, female

Since being interviewed Carolina has found a new full time role as a database administrator with one of Australia’s largest telecommunications and information services companies. She is very happy in this role and expects to develop her career in the business intelligence field.

3 Research design

We were interested in documenting the outcomes of the Skilled Professional Migrants Program (SPMP) and understanding more about the context of professional migrants' lives as they arrive in Australia and look for work. Our approach to this project was to interview as many SPMP participants from 2010 – 2012 as possible. As well as collecting demographic information, the interview was designed to cover the following key areas:

- education and work history overseas and in Australia
- work history since the SPMP
- employment conditions in current or most recent role
- satisfaction with employment
- value of the SPMP for finding professional work.

Six interviewers were trained to conduct these interviews by telephone. All had worked at AMES previously in a range of roles independent of the SPMP and were familiar with the issues related to settling in Australia. The interviews were conducted in English in keeping with the high level of English required to participate in the SPMP.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the research. They were asked to give consent on the basis that the interview was voluntary and confidential. Interviews were arranged at the convenience of the participants with most interviews taking place outside usual business hours.

The interviewers were trained to refer any issues raised by participants, as these related to their situation post the SPMP, to appropriate staff at AMES for follow up. A number of people were referred for advice in relation to finding work, further study and related issues.

Number of people interviewed

Between 2010 and 2012, a total of 408 people participated in the SPMP. We were able to make contact with 65% of participants. We no longer had up to date contact information for the others.

Participants contacted

	N	%
Contacted	266	65%
No contact	142	35%
Total ²	408	100%

Of those we could contact, 90% agreed to be interviewed for this research.

Contacted participants interviewed

	N	%
Interviewed	239	90%
Declined	27	10%
Total	266	100%

We were able to contact and interview a slightly higher proportion of participants from 2012 than from 2010 or 2011. Overall we interviewed 59% of the original SPMP participants for this study.

Participants interviewed by year of SPMP

Year of SPMP	Total participants	Interviewed	% Interviewed
2012	154	110	71%
2011	99	49	49%
2010	155	80	52%
Total	408	239	59%

² All percentages in the tables are rounded to the nearest whole percent. Due to this rounding, components may not always appear to sum to 100%.

Limitations of the study

A number of issues must be considered when interpreting the data collected for this research:

- We were unable to contact 35% of the total group who participated in the SPMP between 2010 and 2012. They may have had different experiences not captured in this report.
- We were able to contact fewer of the participants from 2010 and 2011 who have been in Australia for a longer period of time than the 2012 participants. This group is therefore under-represented in this report.
- The time between the SPMP and being interviewed was up to two years; recall of the program and its impact may have been difficult for some people.
- This research was conducted internally by AMES. Participant responses may have been influenced by their past or present interactions with AMES services.
- Our interviewers reported a small number of cases where English language pronunciation in combination with a poor mobile phone connection may have influenced data quality.

Ethics

AMES is committed to high ethical standards in all our work with clients. This research conforms to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)* and was approved under the *AMES Social Research and Ethics Policy 2011*.

All data about participants was kept securely within the AMES Research and Policy Unit.

In keeping with AMES research practice, all participants will receive a copy of this report.

4 Research participant profile

The people interviewed were relatively young, recently arrived and highly motivated to find professional employment in Australia. Most participants completed the Skilled Professional Migrants Program (SPMP) within the first two years of arrival in Australia and at the time of interview had been here less than five years.

They came from more than 40 countries and had a diverse range of skills and experiences. The composition of the SPMP each year is influenced by priority skills and industries that are nominated in the Skilled Migration Program. Circumstances in various countries of origin can also make it more or less difficult for skilled professionals to migrate.

Background of research participants

		N	%
Region of birth ³	East Asia & Pacific	70	29%
	South Asia	58	24%
	Latin America	43	18%
	Middle East	42	18%
	Europe & Russia	21	9%
	Africa	5	2%
Total		239	100%

Gender	Male	162	68%
	Female	77	32%
Total		239	100%

Age	25 - 44 years	215	90%
	45 - 60 years	23	10%
	No response	1	<1%
Total		239	100%

Visa	Skilled or Business	171	72%
	Student ⁴	34	14%
	Family or Spouse	16	7%
	Humanitarian	5	2%
	Other	5	2%
	No response	8	3%
Total		239	100%

Time in Australia (at interview)	Less than 1 year	37	15%
	1 year up to 2 years	59	25%
	2 years up to 5 years	109	46%
	More than 5 years	31	13%
	No Response	3	1%
Total		239	100%

³ See Appendix 1 for countries of birth in each region.

⁴ Those who arrived on a student visa had tertiary level qualifications and work experience prior to arrival (with one exception). They had come to Australia to complete post graduate studies and had subsequently made the decision to migrate permanently.

Overseas professional background

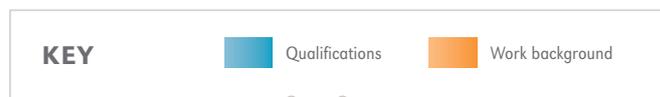
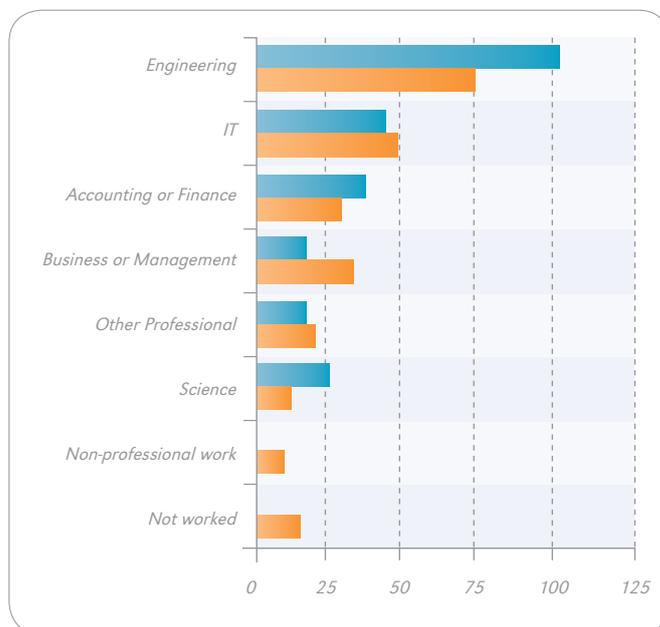
The SPMP participants came from a range of professional backgrounds. There were many types of engineers from mining and mechanical to civil and chemical. There was a broad range of IT specialists, finance professionals and managers. Other professionals included lawyers, lecturers, architects and graphic designers.

Sector of work prior to arriving in Australia

Sector	N	%
Engineering	82	34%
IT	52	22%
Accounting or Finance	38	16%
Business or Management	36	15%
Other Professionals	19	8%
Science	12	5%
Total	239	100%

There is not always an exact match between sector of work and qualifications as people did not always, or exclusively, work in the same area as their qualification. For example, some of those with engineering qualifications pursued related careers in IT, science, business or management and have been categorised in those sectors. A small number of participants had yet to start working, or working in their professional area, before migration to Australia, and in that case were categorised according to their area of qualification.

Overseas work and qualification



Most of the participants also had considerable experience working in a professional environment before coming to Australia.

Duration of professional work prior to arriving in Australia

	N	%
More than 10 years	65	27%
5 - 10 years	79	33%
1 - 5 years	75	31%
Less than 1 year	6	3%
No professional work	14	6%
Total	239	100%

Case **STUDY**

Jacky came to Australia from China through the Skilled Migration Program in October 2010.

He has a Masters in Computer Science and had worked in Shanghai as a database administrator for two large companies over eight years. His hope was to find similar work in Australia.

On arrival Jacky applied for many jobs in his field but was not successful. He attributes this to having “poor job hunting knowledge” and no local work experience.

He enrolled in the SPMP in January 2011, having learned about it online. The program was effective from Jacky’s point of view:

“I understood the employment market better after the course. I improved my employment skills and my language skills.”

Database Administrator from China, male

Three months after completing the SPMP, Jacky applied online for a job with a government department in New South Wales. He was successful and now works full time in a permanent role as an IT Engineer Officer for the NSW Government.

Jacky is very happy in this role:

“What I am doing is what I like and what I am good at. The position is pretty stable and I can improve.”

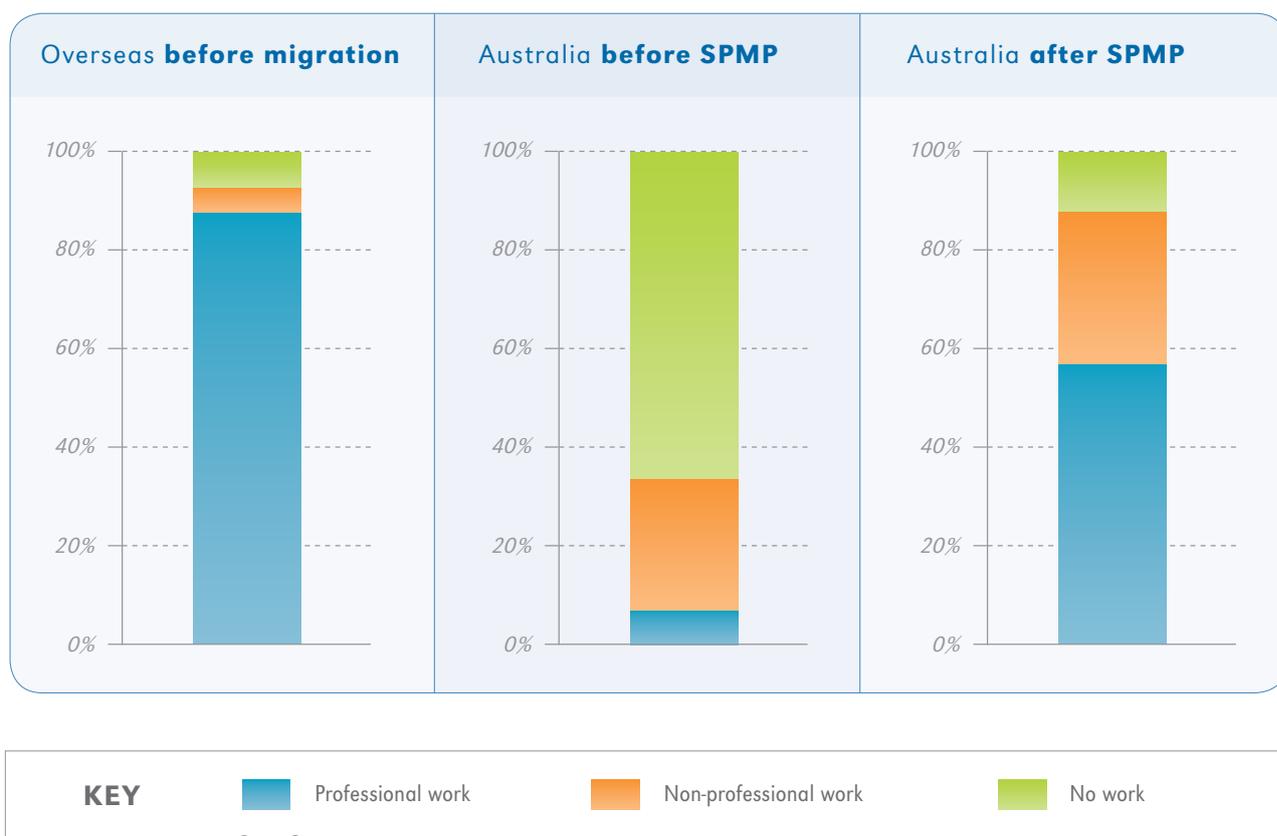
At the time of writing this report, he hoped to be working in this job indefinitely.

5 Employment before and after the Skilled Professional Migrants Program

Participants' jobs, as described in their interviews, were classified using a simple schema, both before and after arrival in professional and non-professional categories. This assisted us to understand the extent to which people found work following the SPMP but also, importantly, the nature and quality of this work. People with jobs that were considered professional included engineers, accountants,

IT specialists, business and management consultants, scientists and a range of others such as architects and journalists. Non-professional jobs ranged from administration and sales jobs to retail, hospitality and work in factories. See Appendix 2 for more detailed information about this coding schema.

Change in work situation before and after migration



	Overseas before migration	Australia before SPMP	Australia after SPMP
Professional work	215	18	136
Non-professional work	10	65	76
No work	14	156	27
Total	239	239	239

The profile of the participants interviewed revealed that all participants in this program had a professional qualification and more than 90% had also worked in a professional context overseas.

Employment in Australia before the SPMP

Most participants enrolled in the SPMP soon after arrival, usually within the first two years of settlement. Prior to this only a third of participants had started working in Australia, most in non-professional jobs or in jobs below their professional level. Many had tried to find work related to their overseas professional experience and had found this to be much more difficult than expected. One participant described the experience prior to the SPMP:

"We were expecting that we would get jobs ...I had enough skills but you need to transfer the skills to the Australian culture... I did process working to provide money. I was not used to such work. It was a very difficult time for me and my family."

Chartered Accountant from Sri Lanka, male

The types of work people had in Australia before the SPMP ranged from casual and contract work as engineers or IT professionals to precarious work in hospitality, cleaning and factories. Participants enrolled in the SPMP, generally through hearing about it from friends and family, as an active response to the challenges faced trying to enter a new labour market. Some had lost their short term contract jobs, others felt trapped in low skilled work that did not make use of their skills and the majority had yet to begin working in Australia. A participant who was working in a casual position only slightly related to her original field prior to the SPMP said:

"I just arrived in Australia and had a weak idea on the job market and how to find a job."

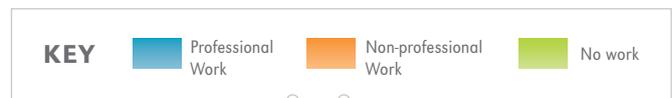
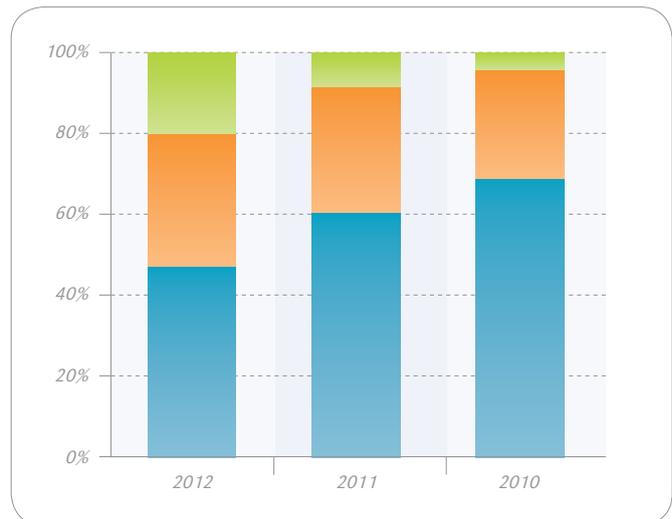
Structural Engineer from Russia, female

Employment in Australia after the SPMP

Interviews for this research took place between six months and two years after participants completed the SPMP. At the time of interview 89% of participants had started working in Australia. Of this group two thirds were in a professional job. This almost complete reversal of people's situations before the SPMP is partly linked to the increasing length of time they had been in Australia, but it is clear that the SPMP also had an immediate impact on work prospects for most of the participants in this study.

A higher proportion of participants who completed the SPMP in 2010 were both working, and working in a professional job, at the time of interview. However even among those who had completed the SPMP in 2012, 80% had worked and more than half this group were in a professional position. This is an indication that people were finding work soon after the SPMP and continuing to progress into professional jobs over time.

Work situation after SPMP by year

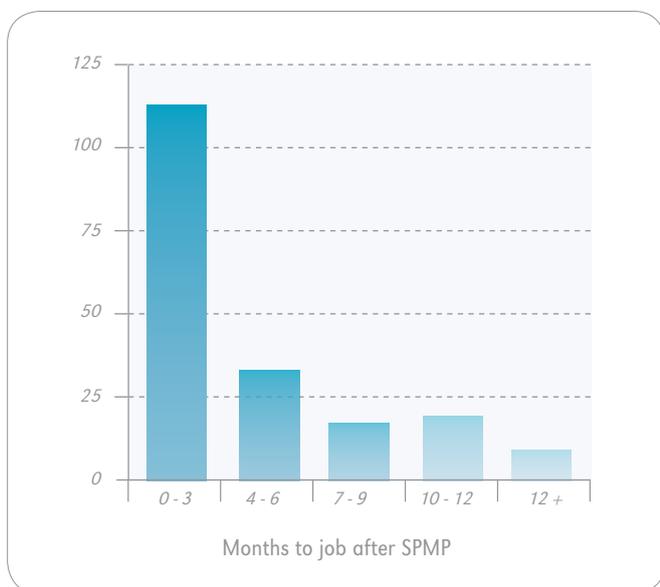


	2012	2011	2010
Professional work	52	29	55
Non-professional work	37	17	22
No work	21	3	3
Total	110	49	80

The springboard effect of the SPMP

The length of time taken to find new work following the SPMP was relatively short. For the 212 participants who were working following the SPMP, more than half found a new job in less than three months.

Length of time to find work following the SPMP



Months	N	%
0-3	113	53%
4-6	31	15%
7-9	17	8%
10-12	19	9%
12 +	10	5%
Not stated	22	10%
Total	212	100%

The springboard effect of the SPMP is evident in people's reflections about the impact of the program.

For example, a participant who went from unemployment into a job that he felt completely matched his overseas experiences says:

"I arrived in Australia at the end of June 2012. I tried to find some job opportunities before I attended this program. After this program, I knew what the problem was. I knew what the labour market was and what companies were looking for. After the program I was very comfortable in the knowledge I gained to get a job. How to prepare a resume, how to read the job ads to see if they match my skills, this was very useful for me."

Electrical Engineer and Business Administrator from China, male

Similarly, another person who arrived with more than five years' professional work experience described her relief at finally gaining a foothold at a lower level within her professional field:

"It was the first door I found open. Without the SPMP I'm pretty sure finding my first job would have been much harder."

Graphic Designer from Venezuela, female

We also asked participants to rate the match between their work since the SPMP and their professional skills and experience. Overall, the results suggested that participants were quite positive about their employment in Australia.

Match between work after SPMP and professional background

	N	%
Well matched	109	51%
Partial match	45	21%
Not matched	58	27%
Total	212	100%

Notably even among the group who said they were partially satisfied, there were a number who were still on the path towards finding work that matched their skills in Australia. Some were working in related jobs but at a lower level with much less responsibility:

“It’s not the work I’m qualified for. I’m overqualified. The employer has given me a role which partly fits my qualifications. I am in charge of payments which is related to accounting. It’s not my dream role. In the short term it’s quite okay.”

Accountant from the Philippines, male

Conditions of employment after the SPMP

Overall a high proportion of working participants were in full time, permanent employment that paid more than \$30 per hour.

Employment conditions after the SPMP

Hours of work	N	%
Full time (38 hours or more)	151	71%
Part time	61	29%
Total	212	100%

Status	N	%
Permanent	112	53%
Casual	49	23%
Fixed term contract	39	18%
Self employed	7	3%
Other	5	2%
Total	212	100%

Pay per hour	N	%
\$30 or more	92	43%
\$20-\$30	68	32%
Less than \$20	32	15%
No response	20	10%
Total	212	100%

Fewer of the women interviewed for this research were in the same situation. This is similar to other research about migration and employment, where a significant gap between men and women’s labour market participation, income and employment status is consistently noted. Further research about the employment experiences of professionally qualified women migrating to Australia is warranted.

Job satisfaction and finding a good job

When we asked participants how satisfied they were with their current job and what their aspirations were for the future, it was clear that finding work in their field was a high priority. A participant who is an experienced engineer but has been working as a tennis coach says:

“I really desire that I will eventually find a job related to my experience. That is why I came to Australia, to work in my field of the oil and gas industry.”

Mechanical Engineer from Iran, male

Our findings in this report indicate that there is a link between successful settlement and appropriate employment. Those who were satisfied with their work drew strong links to the fact that they were working in the general field in which they had trained. Other important factors for work satisfaction were having a sense of security in employment, feeling supported in the workplace and having good employment conditions.

Satisfaction with job since the SPMP

	N	%
Satisfied	103	49%
Partially satisfied	70	33%
Not satisfied	39	18%
Total	212	100%

Conversely, under-utilisation of skills and experiences was the most common reason for low job satisfaction since the SPMP. A participant who had started work in Australia in hotels and as a car park attendant said:

“The current job is really low-skilled which does not need any particular professional skills. In terms of income, it can support my living here.”

Lawyer and Business Executive from Sri Lanka, male

While many had found work that more closely matched their skills following the SPMP, others were still looking for more stability and consistency. Some people were entering the labour market in Australia for the first time at a lower professional level or at the bottom of the career ladder. Wherever they were on this spectrum, people generally expressed a keen desire to take up more responsible positions in the future. For example a participant who was working in a related but lower skilled area compared to his work overseas said:

“I think I am capable of doing more than what I’m doing now. I need more challenge.”

Electronic Engineer from Mexico, male

Participants also expressed hope that they would develop professionally and that they would be valued by their employer:

“I’d like to progress in my job and to grow in my position, learning more skills. I’d like to be more beneficial for my company... It depends on a few things like the Australian job market.”

Electrical Engineer from Iran, male

The SPMP is not only beneficial for those who have yet to start working in Australia, it can also provide resources and tools to help lift professionally qualified people out of low skilled and unrelated work. For some participants, the SPMP was exactly the intervention they needed to move into a better job and was a catalyst for them to find work much closer to their overseas experience and aspirations.

6 Trajectories towards professional employment

Data about overall employment outcomes can obscure some of the complexities faced by new migrants as they settle and rebuild careers in a new language and cultural context. In reality, there is no line that cleanly delineates professional and non-professional work. Individual preferences for flexibility and security vary over time as does the general state of the employment market for different professionals. For example following the global financial crisis in 2011, some areas like IT contracted significantly, making it much more difficult for people to find work:

“The IT job market is very competitive and it is hard to find a full time position even with others’ help.”

Software Developer from Japan, male

In this section we will look at the pathways to work both for those who had and had not started working in Australia prior to the SPMP. The overall positive impact of the SPMP within this complex picture is illustrated through examples of some of the common employment trajectories we found in this research.

Participants who had not worked in Australia before the SPMP

Some people who were unemployed before the SPMP moved directly into professional work at their level after the program. This is the most desirable outcome for participants; however this was not the experience of everyone who had found their way to professional work. Some participants found themselves in non-professional roles after the SPMP but with new confidence to begin the process of working their way back up the career ladder. Others had decided to apply their skills in new ways and sometimes to develop new careers in Australia altogether. Many were somewhere along this journey at the time of interview.

Trajectory 1: Finding professional work after the SPMP

A participant who arrived through the Skilled Migration Program had found out about the SPMP through information on the Australian Government’s immigration website and

enrolled soon after he arrived. He says of his experience before and after the SPMP:

“I had an interview with an employer before the program but with practice in the SPMP, I realised where I had gone wrong. ... Now I am applying my technical skills. The workplace is ideal. Conditions of work are flexible. My work is only 30 minutes away from my home. The job is well paid.”

Mechanical Engineer from Ethiopia, male

Trajectory 2: Taking a number of jobs after the SPMP before finding professional work

An IT specialist with more than five years’ experience enrolled in the SPMP on the recommendation of a friend. Within two months of the program she had found short term work in her field and at the time of interview, about one year later, was working in a full time, permanent role in her field. She says:

“I learnt how to write a resume that suits the Australian requirements and to go through the whole process of job interview; that was very useful. I applied what I had learnt through the SPMP in the interview and successfully got the current job It is totally related to Computer Science and the job title is exactly the same as my previous job in Russia.”

Software Programmer from Russia, female

Many other people interviewed found their first job after the SPMP in a short term position or at a lower level in a related field. Participants reported that through this first job they were often able to create the opportunities that led to more professional and higher paid jobs over time.

Trajectory 3: Moving into related but non-professional work after the SPMP

A participant with more than ten years' experience had found work in Australia that was related but at a lower level than her overseas work. Like some of the other participants in this study she felt hopeful that over time this would assist her to find a better position more closely related to her field:

"It's not my field. I only use my skills to reconcile my data with inputs. I'm just doing it to have local experience. If you have local experience you already have your foot in the door, there is a stepping stone. You have a bigger chance than applicants who have no local experience. I learned that in the *Working the Australia Way* workshop and also the SPMPThe programs taught me how to become more resourceful looking for jobs."

Accountant from the Philippines, female

Participants who had worked in Australia before the SPMP

Trajectory 4: Moving into professional work

A participant who had considerable experience managing agricultural loans in a large bank overseas found himself working in a variety of casual jobs in order to survive in Australia. These included pizza delivery, fast food service and cleaning. Since completing the SPMP he has been working in a permanent part time role as an Accounts Manager for a multinational company and is studying to complete his CPA. Speaking about the SPMP and his current work he said:

The course is very helpful. I learned some techniques and I used them to find the job ... The teachers personally help students and help them to find jobs ...I'm learning a lot of things by doing this job, it's good for the future. The prospects from this job are good."

Accountant from India, male

Trajectory 5: Moving into a job more closely related to original professional field

We interviewed a participant with a psychology degree and who had completed further studies in Australia. Before the SPMP she was still working in her student job as a waitress. When we spoke with her, she had found work more closely related to her field:

"I'm still learning in my job, at the beginning it was basic, general admin but later I got involved in more and more things ... The course gave me back my confidence. I realised I would be able to get a job and I had enough skills to get a job"

Human Resources Graduate from Mexico, female

Trajectory 6: Remaining in non-professional work following the SPMP

Those whose overall work classification did not change after the SPMP often reported that while they were not yet working in a professional role, their confidence and job seeking skills had improved. Most felt that they would be able to find professional work in Australia in the future. One person who had moved from delivering newspapers to working in a warehouse following the SPMP said:

"The SPMP was very useful. I learnt a lot about how to improve my job hunting skills such as writing an application and speaking at the interview. However my job is not related to my experience. I need to earn money for living. People are ok, nice, but the work is heavy lifting, blue collar work. I am not satisfied. I'd like to have full time work as a mechanical engineer"

Mechanical Engineer from Japan, male

Trajectory summary

This research suggests that the SPMP is useful for those who have yet to find work in Australia. It can help fast track people into careers using their expertise. It is also useful for those who have started working in Australia in lower skilled jobs and found themselves stalled in terms of reaching their full potential.

7 Participant feedback

In this section we report on feedback from participants about the SPMP design and content.

We asked all 239 SPMP participants about their employment overseas and in Australia. However, 61 of these participants went on to complete *Working the Australian Way* and provided feedback about this workshop rather than SPMP. In this section we report on the views of the other 178 people who shared their experiences about the SPMP with us.

Participants were asked how useful they found the SPMP in general, and whether they thought it had helped them (or would help them) find work in their professional field. By far the majority of participants said that they found the SPMP very useful.

Usefulness of the SPMP

	N	%
Very Useful	150	84%
Somewhat useful	22	12%
Not useful	6	3%
Total	178	100%

When asked to nominate the aspects of the program participants found most useful, some strong themes emerged. The most frequent elements were:

- developing a resume and writing applications appropriate to the Australian context
- developing interview skills
- gaining insight into Australian workplace culture and Australian culture more generally
- having encouraging, supportive teachers
- gaining job search skills (reading advertisements, approaching employers)
- learning about the Australian job market and recruitment practices
- getting advice from corporate guests
- meeting other professionally qualified migrants
- gaining confidence.

When asked to say how the SPMP was useful, many participants spoke about a combination of factors:

“Knowing the Australian workplace culture and recruitment process. I have learnt how to write an appropriate resume to highlight my strengths. I had a mentor who was also a chemical engineer but working in a more commercial field rather than cosmetics. She was helpful too by giving me some insight about her field.”

Chemical Engineer from Colombia, male

“First of all, before coming here I thought the job process was the same as in Asian countries. When I came here I learnt that resumes and cover letters were done differently. I attended two interviews for two big companies. This helped me a lot. I met some friends, built up my network. I learnt about the workplace culture, the trainers gave a lot of input about that.”

Mechanical Engineer from Malaysia, male

On the more specific question of whether the SPMP had helped them find work in their professional field, the majority of people responded positively.

Helpfulness of the SPMP for finding work in field

	N	%
Helpful	123	69%
Not sure	34	19%
Not helpful	21	12%
Total	178	100%

Thirty-one people said that doing the SPMP had directly helped them find their current job:

“I found my current job as a result of training I received in the SPMP. Now I know how to face interviews more correctly, as Australian employers want.”

Electronic Engineer from Colombia, male

When asked to explain how they thought the SPMP had helped them find professional work, participants named similar themes to those listed previously. Many participants said that their mentor had been a key factor in helping them find work suited to their background and skills:

“I started the mentoring process in February 2012 and met my mentor twice, who was a civil engineer in the water industry. He had given me some insights about the recruitment process of the industry and further reinforced my resume writing. After the second meeting with him, I was called for the job.”

Civil Engineer from the Philippines, male

The participants who were unsure or felt that the SPMP had not helped them find work were generally those who had not yet found professional employment.

In the context of this positive feedback, participants were asked if they had any suggestions for improving the SPMP. Again, some clear themes emerged:

- incorporate a work experience component
- provide more opportunities to practice interviews and networking
- further develop the mentor component
- develop stronger connections with industry
- have closer ties with recruiters
- run programs by industry for additional networking
- broaden the range of professional fields represented.

AMES is already engaged in a range of activities relating to these suggestions. These include strengthening connections between past SPMP participants and corporate partners, developing social networking for past participants and actively recruiting new mentors from a range of professional fields and companies.

Case **STUDY**

Vibha completed a Bachelor of Science in Microbiology in India and worked there as a pharmaceutical microbiologist for four years.

She came to Australia in 2008 as a spouse through the Skilled Migration Program.

Vibha's career goal in Australia was to obtain a position as a microbiologist in either the food or pharmaceutical industry. Her first job, gained after completing a Certificate III in Health Services Assistance, was a casual role as a Patient Services Assistant at a major hospital in Melbourne.

Vibha heard about the Skilled Professional Migrants Program through a friend and decided to enrol in May 2012. She says the program was very useful for her:

"The SPMP training was really useful because it helped me learn different types of recruitment sources, especially how to contact employers directly. I studied microbiology for four years but I could not find a job. But six months after the SPMP I was able to find a job. It gave me a lot of ideas."

Microbiologist from India, female

Following the SPMP Vibha decided to make direct contact with a global leader in pharmaceutical research via LinkedIn. This led to her gaining a full time role as a microbiologist.

Vibha is very happy to be using her professional skills and says her work completely matches the job she was doing in India. On a 6 month, full time contract at the time of interview, Vibha hopes to become a permanent microbiologist in her current workplace.

8 Conclusion

Australia's Skilled Migration Program is very effective in meeting its policy objective of contributing to productivity and increasing the availability of skilled workers in Australia.

Many migrants who arrive with overseas professional qualifications and experience find employment in their field independently and make an immediate contribution to Australia's workforce and economy.

A small proportion of professionally qualified migrants are unable to gain appropriate employment soon after coming to Australia. Despite arriving with valuable skills and experience, there can be cultural differences that make it hard for some migrants to enter their professional field quickly. Whilst they may have excellent professional qualifications and experience, high levels of English and high motivation, some migrants face challenges in relaunching their careers in a new cultural environment.

This research looked at the effectiveness of a program designed to assist this group of migrants. The AMES Skilled Professional Migrants Program (SPMP) offers an intensive introduction to the Australian job market and recruitment practices. It assists participants to develop resumes and interview skills appropriate for the Australian context and provides opportunities for networking with professionals in relevant fields.

Our finding is that these elements have a significant impact in assisting professionally qualified migrants to re-enter their field. In this research, 89% of people found employment after completing the SPMP, with over half using their overseas skills and experience in this work.

Furthermore, we found that more than half of the participants gained new employment within three months of the SPMP. This suggests that an optimum time to offer this program to migrants with professional backgrounds is soon after their arrival in Australia.

Many skilled migrants arriving in Australia are in the early stages of their working lives. Their contribution to Australia's productivity will be a long term one. The employment of professionally skilled migrants increases diversity in Australia's workforce and builds the much needed cultural competence to connect with other countries and markets. Investment in this group is therefore well placed.

An effective strategy to make the most of migrants' skills, would be to establish a national program for professionals who require targeted employment orientation to relaunch their careers in Australia.

89% of people **found employment**
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overseas **qualifications** and **experience.**

9 References

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Appendix 1 Participant country of birth

		N	%
East Asia & Pacific	China	23	10%
	Korea	12	5%
	Philippines	9	4%
	Malaysia	7	3%
	Indonesia	4	2%
	Japan	4	2%
	Thailand	4	2%
	Vietnam	4	2%
	Hong Kong	2	1%
	Kiribati	1	<1%
South Asia	India	25	10%
	Sri Lanka	23	10%
	Bangladesh	6	3%
	Pakistan	3	1%
	Nepal	1	<1%
Middle East	Iran	35	15%
	Iraq	4	2%
	Egypt	3	1%
Latin America	Colombia	14	6%
	Venezuela	14	6%
	Mexico	6	3%
	Brazil	2	1%
	Chile	2	1%
	Uganda	1	<1%
	Peru	1	<1%
	Honduras	1	<1%
	Ecuador	1	<1%
	Argentina	1	<1%
Africa	Ethiopia	1	<1%
	Mauritius	1	<1%
	Somalia	1	<1%
	Uganda	1	<1%
	South Africa	1	<1%
Europe & Russia	Russia	13	5%
	Germany	2	1%
	Netherlands	1	<1%
	Poland	1	<1%
	Spain	1	<1%
	Slovakia	1	<1%
	Romania	1	<1%
	France	1	<1%
Total		239	100%

Appendix 2 Job classification schema

Classification: Professional Work

Industry Area	Example of Job Titles
Engineering	Mechanical Engineer - Mining and steel manufacturing Senior Process Engineer IT Engineer for Telecommunications Civil Engineer Research & Development Design Engineer Highway Design Engineer
IT	Software Developer IT Manager IT Project Manager Computer Programmer Database and Systems Administrators IT Consultant
Accounting & Finance	Accountant Auditor Senior Finance Officer Head of Investment Banking Financial Analyst
Business & Management	Project Management Consultant Marketer, Industrial Products Recruitment Manager Operations Manager Production Manager Business Analyst
Science	Surveyor Quality Control Chemist Research Analyst Medical Pathologist Pharmaceutical Microbiologist
Professional - Other	Architect Graphic Designer University Lecturer Public Relations Consultant Journalist

Classification: Non-professional Work

Industry Area	Example of Job Titles
Administration & Sales	Office Administrator Service Desk Support Customer Service – Call centre Data Entry Technical Sales
Hospitality Retail Care Work	Kitchenhand Supermarket Team Member Waiter Petrol Station Attendant Shop Assistant
Labouring Factory Drivers	Process worker in a factory Cleaner Laundry Worker Bus Driver Warehouse Staff
Vocational Teachers	Tennis Coach Yoga Teacher Casual Spanish Teacher
Trades	Contractor – Solar panel installation Carpenter Contractor – Kitchen installation Machinery maintenance work Apprentice Mechanic



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