

Skilled Professional Migrants Program Employment Outcomes

Introduction

Skilled migrants make up the largest category of the Australian Migration Program. In 2019-20, 95,843 visas were issued within the Skilled stream (approximately 70% of the total program for that year). For skilled migrants arriving without employer sponsorship, finding work related to their occupational skills and qualifications soon after arrival is often strongly desired.

The Skilled Professional Migrant Program (SPMP)

AMES Australia's (AMES) Skilled Professional Migrant Program (SPMP) is designed to support professionally qualified migrants to find work in their field by providing employment readiness training and mentoring. The SPMP offers an intensive introduction to the Australian job market and assists clients to develop a resume and interview skills appropriate for the Australian context, as well as providing opportunities for professional networking. On completion of the program, SPMP clients are matched with a volunteer mentor, who works in a similar industry and occupation, to provide industry information, assist with networking and generally support the client in searching for professional employment.

About the research

Since 2010, AMES has annually surveyed SPMP clients to measure the program's effectiveness and employment outcomes 12–24 months post completion of the SPMP. Over nine years, 697 SPMP clients have participated in this research.

This report focuses on employment outcomes from the 2017 and 2018 SPMP client cohorts collected approximately 12–18 months after completion of the program.

This report also provides an analysis of the data collected from the cohorts over the nine years to compare employment trends and overall learnings within the SPMP for future application.

While clients who completed the SPMP during the COVID-19 period have not yet been surveyed, in-depth focus groups were conducted in 2020. The outcomes provide further insights as to the barriers facing skilled migrants and the pathways that they have taken to achieve their career goals in this more recent period.

Latest survey and focus groups findings

SPMP clients from the 2017 and 2018 course years – 322 in total - were invited to participate in the employment outcomes survey. The survey received 79 responses (25% response rate).

At the time of survey, 91% of the respondents were employed. Of those employed:

- 56%** were male
- 81%** were aged under 45 years.¹
- 51%** had arrived in Australia less than 2 years prior. 44% had been in Australia for 2–5 years.
- 58%** were in professional work².
- 77%** found work within 6 months of completing the SPMP.

¹ Permanent skill-based visas to Australia generally have an age limit of 44.

² Professional work refers to positions that require a relevant undergraduate or an advanced degree qualification alongside some form of specialised experience. Non-professional work refers to front-line or low-level duties.

Most SPMP clients in employment were male and had been in Australia for less than five years. Most of them had found employment within six months after the program and were in professional work. These statistics support the skilled migrant profile where the initial visa application will tend to be based exclusively on the attributes of the primary applicant who is more likely to be a male. Although there were fewer women within the employed group, it still represented strong employment outcomes and therefore constitutes an untapped reserve of skilled talent to draw upon.

While the 79 respondents represent the experiences of a relatively small number of SPMP clients who completed the course between 2017 and 2018 (25%), their experiences securing employment relevant to their skills and qualifications are consistent with those of survey respondents from earlier years.

COVID impact

In June 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown in Melbourne, two focus groups were convened via Zoom with seven participants from the 2017 and 2018 cohorts. The purpose of the focus groups was to gain further insights regarding the pathways SPMP clients have taken to achieve their career goals, especially given the challenges of COVID-19.

The opportunity for focus group participants to share experiences enabled a much broader range of topics than is covered in the survey, including barriers to finding skilled jobs. Barriers identified included a lack of qualifications recognition and lack of understanding Australian workplace culture and recruitment practices, such as behavioural style interviews:

“We are not outspoken even though we are equally talented and well educated. Here people will do very small thing and they will tell very big stories. We will do the big things and we always tell the small stories” (Project manager, India)

Further barriers raised included lack of local work experience and professional networking.

Some focus group participants were trying alternative approaches such as volunteering and making connections that lead to jobs:

“A person should get involved in voluntary work, in the community. It is a way to get in touch with people and to build networks. A lot of the job market is hidden; we need somebody who can support us and give us information”
(Engineer, Peru)

Focus group participants reported that they had found the SPMP very useful for learning about recruitment, behavioural style interviews and workplace culture in Australia, and reported that the SPMP had helped them to prepare to apply for work.

Participants also indicated that an early intervention program is necessary to assist skilled migrants' transition to the Australian labour market.

Cumulative findings

The SPMP outcomes survey has received a total of 697 respondents between 2010 and 2018 program years representing 53% of the total SPMP client cohort over that period. Results indicate that in total 85% of the 697 respondents had found employment, and of this group 59% were in a professional field related to their pre-arrival occupation.

The 91% employment rate for the 79 respondents of the recent survey is higher than the average of 84% for the 618 respondents between 2010–2016 program years, reflecting a difference in time series data between 2 years (with a smaller sample) and 7 years (with a relatively larger sample).

Nearly 70% of the 697 respondents migrated to Australia on the basis of their overseas qualifications and professional experience through the Skilled Migration

Program. All of them had professional backgrounds and a strong desire to pursue their careers in Australia.

Respondents who had found work, even if it was casual or part time, agreed that the SPMP had equipped them with the confidence to apply for and secure professional jobs in Australia and they had a positive outlook on their settlement.

Many respondents reported that their mentor had been a key factor in helping them find work suited to their background and skills.

Conclusion

This research provides strong evidence that early intervention programs, such as the SPMP, increase the likelihood of skilled migrants finding and securing employment relevant to their skills and qualifications. There is clear evidence that any program should include these key components :

1. Australian style recruitment processes and employment applications
2. Orientation to Australian workplace culture
3. Access to work experience and mentoring opportunities
4. Employer engagement and networking opportunities
5. Access for migrants regardless of location (metropolitan and regional/remote areas)

This program has demonstrated over a significant time period that recognition of skills and qualifications, understanding interview skills and workplace culture, and the guidance of mentors can facilitate the process of skilled migrants finding employment commensurate with their skills, experience and qualifications.

An effective strategy to make the most of professional migrants' skills and experience would be to expand programs such as the SPMP. Funding is the core to

any sustainable service development. One of the issues faced by the SPMP is the lack of medium to long term recurrent funding. This could be enabled through national funding of programs for skilled professional migrants who require targeted employment orientation and mentor support to relaunch their careers in Australia.

A further option to consider is a partnership model including federal funding, support from State / Territory governments, philanthropic trusts and corporate organisations who could assist with mentoring and job placements. When large corporations demonstrate leadership and actively recruit skilled migrants and espouse the benefits of a multicultural workforce, other workplaces are more likely to adopt similar practices.

Full report can be found [here](#).

The full report combines historical SPMP client employment data collected since 2010, as well as the most recent data collected in early 2020, approximately 12–24 months after completion of the 2018 course, totalling nine consecutive years of data collection.

The data collection aims to address the following areas

1. the effectiveness of the SPMP designed to assist this group of migrants
2. the barriers for them to finding skilled jobs
3. broaden the scope of the SPMP as a national program for professionals who require targeted employment orientation to relaunch their career in Australia.