

Comment on Productivity Commission Draft Report: **Migrant Intake into Australia**

Submitted to:
Australian Government Productivity Commission
December 2015

AMES Australia would like to congratulate the Productivity Commission for a comprehensive and thoroughly researched Draft Report that addresses the items detailed as part of the Scope of the Inquiry.

The draft report has made a number of requests for additional information. AMES Australia would like to provide further evidence on Information Request 5.2 and on the section relating to migrants in rural/regional areas - see page 161.

1. Information request 5.2

The Commission is interested in information on policies that are likely to be more effective in attracting highly skilled immigrants to live and work in Australia. (p34)

In its initial submission AMES Australia made reference to Interventions to support migrants secure work (see pages 8 to 9). In this submission there was a brief description of the AMES Australia Skilled Professional Migrant Program and how it assists skilled migrants to secure employment in Australia. It also touched on possible models that could be used to pay for programs to support skilled migrants integrate into the labour market.

In June 2015, the Research and Policy Unit at AMES Australia completed a report that was commissioned by the Federal Office for Women's Policy. As part of this report an extensive desk top analysis was undertaken that looked at a range of different models and types of interventions to support skilled migrants' access the labour market.

This review focussed on four states in Australia: Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. It also looked at overseas examples from Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Switzerland and Finland. Websites were primarily used to gain an insight into the range of services available. In some instances personal contact was made (via email or skype) to gain more information that was not available on the website. The target population for most of these services are skilled professional migrants who are job ready, with high proficiency in English and overseas qualifications and experience. All programs cater for individuals who have work rights in their respective country of settlement. Many of the agencies providing programs for skilled migrants offered a similar approach. There were some core features of each program that were common to all or many of the services contained in this review.

These include:

- Individual vocational counselling and planning
- Job market and industry awareness in the context of local conditions
- Learning about local workplace culture - such as local slang and idioms, conditions of employment and what to expect in the workplace of the adopted country
- Preparing new migrants to be "work ready"
- Preparing resumes and cover letters - tailored to meet local labour market conditions
- Interview preparation - particularly for behavioural based interviews

- Networking and communication strategies
- Self-marketing strategies

This evidence review found that there was a great deal of variation among the programs in terms of what they did or did not offer. Some of the programs provided mentoring only, while others offered work experience or a combination of both. A number were generalist programs, while others were occupational specific.

Some programs worked collaboratively with employers and industry partners to match up employment vacancies with skilled migrants. In the US, agencies were closely aligned with a network of employers in which to place skilled migrants who had completed their programs. Ultimately it will be employers who lead cultural change in relation to extolling the benefits of skilled migrants.

Cost was identified as a barrier to accessing these programs. Ideally they should be free and government funded. In Canada programs are either partially or fully funded by the Federal Government. In the US there is a reciprocal arrangement where former clients are expected to give back to program once they have secured employment. In Australia there are different cost structures ranging from full fee paying, partial fee paying and free.

Funding models varied from one country to the next. All Canadian programs have some government funding. US programs are entirely privately funded, some European programs are funded from hypothecated taxes collected from Lotteries. Partnerships with philanthropic agencies, corporate sponsors were also common in terms of funding program. This allowed services to be offered with a nominal fee or no cost. In Australia programs are funded by user pays, full or partial government subsidy.

Evidence generated from the evaluation of these programs indicates that they are very successful in assisting skilled migrants to enter the labour market. When looking at program follow up 12 months after completion, between 70 to 95% of participants (depending on the program) secure professional employment.

Settlement services in Australia specifically cater for humanitarian migrants and refugees. Yet, in the absence of a program like the Canadian “Orientation Abroad Program”: for emigrants bound for Australia, this means that they are essentially landing here without any formal direction on where to get help. Of course family and friends may provide an introduction into the Australian community, but there are still significant numbers of migrants who arrive in Australia without this sort of support. There is a need for some sort of orientation or settlement program for all migrants so that people can learn about laws and customs, how to access services as well as understanding the local labour market and expectations of Australian workplaces. This provides would-be immigrants with the relevant information to make an informed choice about where to migrate.

The evidence from study has demonstrated when skilled migrants are given access to early intervention services to support them to integrate into the labour market there is high outcome based success rates. There is also a need to ensure that those living in metropolitan, rural and remote areas have access to programs either through a Distance Learning type module.

If Australia wants to continue to attract talented migrants, we need to provide the necessary assistance to ensure that skilled migrants can enter the Australian labour market. Changing the current situation where there is either no or limited support for skilled migrants will require investment. If Australia is committed to bringing skilled migrants to Australia more resources need to be made available to support them to enter the labour market quickly. Ultimately, this enhances the settlement process and the whole Australian community benefits.

2. Urban and regional labour supply (p161)

AMES Australia would like to provide further evidence relating to migrants moving into rural areas. Partner migrant women who arrive under the Skilled or Family Streams, may experience difficulty accessing labour markets in rural, regional or remote areas. Findings from a study funded by the Federal Office for Women indicated that these women were less likely to have access to any support services and/or services to help them find a job. They were also in a difficult position because in the regional, rural and remote areas where respondents resided there were very few if any professional roles available to them. This meant that they had to reconsider their employment options in a tightly held labour market where only a few jobs were available in certain industries. For some this meant occupational downgrading by moving into childcare, disability or aged care sectors.

Please note that the report undertaken for the Office for Women's' Policy has not yet been released and is currently with the Office. Further details could be accessed once the report is released.