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

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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

April 2009

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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)
- Lesleyanne 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. Lesleyanne 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, Lesleyanne 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.

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April, 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 migrant job seekers with overseas qualifications; and Australian employers and regulatory bodies in five professional and three trade fields.

The findings show that international student graduates have poorer employment outcomes than their local 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.

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Executive summary

This project examines the influence of English language proficiency (ELP) on workplace readiness and employment outcomes for former 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 represents an important policy issue for Australia, in a context where former international students represent around 40% of Independent skilled category migrants and economic growth has rapidly slowed (Evans 2008).

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 (former international students) 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 former international students performed 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 migrants 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 former 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 migrants 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).

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 migrants² 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 migrants³ 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 changes⁴). This has particularly applied to food/

² 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).

³ Defined in the Census as migrants from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh

⁴ 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 English speaking background 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 former 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 former students. They were at lower risk of unemployment and 'not in the labour-force' status.
- These findings for former students remained at 18 months post-arrival, despite some improvement in their status. Most notably 30% of former international students 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 former students 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 former international students 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 former students.
- 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 former international students 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 former students 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, minuscule numbers of former 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 graduates 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 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 graduates 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 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 migrants 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' English language proficiency 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 communication tasks particular to specific different professional and vocational fields.

Some university and VET providers are beginning to address a number of these concerns by developing subjects for ELP and workplace readiness, in which ELP for the workplace is taught and assessed. These programs offer suggestions for policy and practice that can address the issues of ELP in terms of workplace readiness.

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, résumés, 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 recent international student graduates 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.

There were also marked differences in employment outcomes depending on migrants' field of study, particularly between the professions and trades. Labour market demand facilitated securing Australian work (e.g. in medicine and nursing). In general barriers to employment were also greater for the professions than the trades – for example recent migrants with qualifications in fields such as accounting and engineering being less likely to secure work in their own field than migrants in areas such as hairdressing and food/ hospitality.

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 international graduates 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 graduates with weaker ELP skills to achieve successful employment outcomes.

For a number of new migrants, ELP (often referred to as ‘communication skills’) was considered to be the most important factor in performing well in the workplace, with some international student graduates 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 student graduates in finding work

Generally, all the international graduates and recent migrants 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 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 student 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 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 enculturation, 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 former international students), 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 DEEWR encourage universities, colleges, international student recruitment agencies and other key stakeholders 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 English Language Proficiency 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.

1. Literature review

1.1 Introduction and background

Australia is internationally recognised for the active and effective marketing of its education services to international students. While international student enrolments in higher education have increased slightly in 2008, VET is the fastest growing sector (Australian Education International, 2008a). Within higher education, international students comprise one fifth of enrolments in onshore courses. This is the highest level in the OECD countries (OECD 2007). Despite its comparatively small size, Australia has the third largest share of the higher education/upper vocational international student market (11 per cent) behind only the UK (12 per cent) and the USA (22 per cent) (Verbik & Lasanowski 2007). Education is Australia's largest services export and third largest export overall (IDP 2008).

However, in recent times there has been a new emerging rationale for international student education, which is the competition for skilled labour (de Witt 2008). Industrial societies such as Europe, North America, Japan and Australia, are competing for talented students to fill their skill needs. Within these countries there are specific skilled employment areas that governments are attempting to address through migration policy. The implication of this for education in Australia is that the focus has shifted from international students returning to their home country after receiving their Australian education, to retaining international students who can apply for permanent residency (PR) and fill the skills needs that exist in the country. Along with this shift, English language proficiency (ELP) has been placed under the spotlight as an important factor in influencing workplace readiness and employment outcomes of international students.

This study has been undertaken at a time when there has been an increased focus within the higher education and VET sectors on the English language proficiency of international students. In 2007, the English Language Symposium was held, which highlighted the importance of ELP in terms of entry to courses, in-course support and Australian employment outcomes. In addition, there have been moves by universities and VET providers to focus on the ELP of their students, guided at times by the papers developed in the symposium (available from the AEI website www.aei.dest.gov.au).

DEEWR has also sought to address some of the issues raised in the Symposium by commissioning two projects involving English language proficiency of international students in the higher education and vocational education and training (VET) sectors. These were:

- 1 *Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International students in Australian Universities*, led by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA); and
- 2 *The Impact of English Language Proficiency and Workplace Readiness on Employment Outcomes and Performance of International Students*, led by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE), University of Melbourne.

This research project, which is the second listed above, sought to develop a body of knowledge to be made available to the international student industry to enable it to enhance the ELP and workplace readiness of international students. The purpose of this section of the report is to uncover the key variables in relation to the influence of ELP on workplace readiness and employment of international students, especially those intending to stay in Australia as skilled migrants. In addition, this section also explores the extent to which factors other than ELP influence workplace readiness

and employment outcomes for international students. These variables informed the questions asked of employers, university staff, students and graduates in the qualitative phase of the study.

Key Research Questions

1. To what extent does English language proficiency influence workplace readiness and employment outcomes for international students?
2. What other factors influence workplace readiness and employment outcomes for international students seeking employment in Australia?

This section provides a selective review of the literature surrounding the key issues influencing language proficiency, workplace readiness, including their impact upon employment outcomes. It begins with a short overview of Australia's skilled migration policy, which contextualises the study. A brief analysis of trends in comparable countries is provided. In the final section the overlapping factors that influence English language proficiency and workplace readiness for international students are identified.

1.2 The skilled migration policy framework in Australia

1.2.1 Background

In 1997 the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs commissioned the first major review of Australia's skilled migration program in a decade. The report, published in 1999, had major policy impacts. The government's objective in revising selection procedures was 'to select young, highly skilled migrants who will quickly make a positive contribution to the Australian economy (and)... are able to support themselves on arrival in Australia' (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 1999: 2). Completing international students, previously barred from skilled migration for a period of three years, became immediately eligible to apply on course completion and were awarded bonus points for possession of an Australian qualification (minimum 12 months study, subsequently extended to two years). The potential pool of such migrants was large. Australia's export education industry had developed rapidly in the previous decade, like that in the UK, Canada and New Zealand. Between 1996 and 2000 universities had accelerated their transformation from "academy to global business", in part through the increased recruitment of international fee-paying students (Marginson & Considine 2000). The commissioned research for the 1999 skilled migration review found former international students to be highly acceptable to Australian employers, regardless of ethnic origin and across virtually any field (Census data demonstrating a mere 9 percentage points separating them from Australia-born graduates in terms of professional outcomes). On this basis the authors advised:

It seems inappropriate for the requirement (for three years workplace experience) to remain, when Australia's export education industry is almost wholly commercially based, and there seems little risk of a third world 'brain drain'... Such students are viewed by officers as having exceptional potential for the skilled migration program, yet may lose out in terms of points to others seen as far less employable (Birrell & Hawthorne: 1999).

Starting from 1998, international students' transition to skilled migration was liberalised. Within two years former students could apply to migrate onshore, with those accepted entitled to stay on immediately in Australia. By 2002 150,000 international students were enrolled in Australian onshore courses, the majority derived from Commonwealth-Asian nations (Malaysia, Singapore, India). During this

time students were ideally placed to secure the maximum migration points, so long as they possessed a recognised bachelor degree (60 points), were aged between 18 and 29 years (30 points), had advanced English language ability (20 points, with testing exempted), and an Australian qualification of 12 months or more (5 points). The impact of students' eligibility on program selection outcomes was dramatic:

Under the points test used to select most skilled migrants in 2000-01, about 60% of Skilled Independent visa Principal Applicants were in the age group 18-29, around 88% scored maximum points for English language ability, and nearly 90% scored the maximum points for skill. About 40% of Independent Skilled migrants granted visas in 2000-01 were in occupations in national shortage and about 50% had Australian qualifications (Department of Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002: 19).

In 2005-06 the Australian Government commissioned the most extensive review of Australia's skilled migration program since 1988. Former international students had become strong program participants by this time (52% of the total), with an estimated 66% of all Indian students and 38% of all Chinese (PRC) students migrating. According to senior officials interviewed by the reviewers, students had a "99% chance" of being selected by this time, unless they failed health or character checks. 83% were employed within 6 months of selection (compared to 82% of skilled migrants selected offshore). In theory such migrants had self-funded to meet local employers' English language and credential needs, simultaneously supporting the development of Australia's export education industry. The review panel however identified reduced employment outcomes for former students relative to migrants selected offshore. Most notably that just 46% of former students were immediately using their professional credentials in work, compared with 63% of older offshore applicants. New graduates with Australian degrees were also paid less than offshore migrants (attracting annual salaries of \$A33,000 compared to \$A52,500). Weekly earnings were correspondingly lower (\$A641 compared to \$A1,015), and job satisfaction was less (44% of former students liking their work compared to 57% of recent offshore arrivals) (Birrell, Hawthorne & Richardson 2006).

It should be noted that the data was collected from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA), where the results were specific to the cohort sampled and reflect the points test and the policy parameters which applied at the time of visa application. In addition, the information referred to principal visa applicants, as secondary applicants were not required to meet any points-based criteria.

1.2.2 Current regulations

Since September 2007 steps have been taken to address the issues concerning the Australia's General Skilled Migration (GSM) categories. Exemption from English language testing is no longer allowed for former international students, given the difficulty faced by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship in policing education providers' academic entry and progression standards. International English Language Testing Scheme (IELTS)⁵ Score 6 (rather than IELTS 5) has been declared the threshold 'competence' score across the four language skills⁶, with IELTS 5.0 only applied to Principal Applicants with trade skills. Liberalised access to post-course visas has facilitated former students' stay in Australia, giving them an

⁵ At the time that the study, IELTS was the main English Language Proficiency test used for immigration purposes.

⁶ Speaking, listening, reading and writing; with the threshold score required to be reached on all four skills by independently validated language testing.

additional 18 months (if required) to gain skilled work experience; improve their English language skills; or undertake a professional year related to their field of study. This was seen as a positive move to assist international students in gaining relevant work experience, which would lead to increasing the potential for employment in Australia. Only passport holders from the UK, Ireland, the US, Canada, and New Zealand are exempt from English testing on transition to migration, given the problem of defining which candidates should be waived. Significant bonus points will also reward 'proficient' English speakers (25 points for candidates rated IELTS 7 or above). The practices of educational providers are to be better monitored, in particular those operating in the fast-growing migration-driven vocational training sector. Higher migration points are provided to Australian graduates who have completed postgraduate study: most notably former students possessing doctoral degrees (25 points) or 3 year qualifications (15 points) (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008).

In 2006-07, 97,920 people obtained Permanent Residency (PR) through Australia's GSM program, representing 66% of the Migration Program overall (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008a). Around half were former international students, who had recently completed a tertiary degree or other acceptable qualification at an Australian institution. Under the GSM, such visa applicants can apply for PR in the 885 subclass if their qualifications meet the Australian standard for an occupation on the Skilled Occupation List (SOL) and are worth 50 or 60 points under the SOL (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008d). Between 2001-02 and 2005-06, principal (onshore) applicants for PR under the overseas student visa subclass of the GSM program increased from 5,480 to 15,383 (Birrell, Hawthorne & Richardson 2006; Birrell 2006).

While Australia's skilled migration quota for 2008-09 was reduced by 14% in March 2009, in consequence of the global economic downturn and an official forecast of 7% unemployment by mid 2010⁷, no changes to the points test have yet been signalled. The following section therefore focuses on current and recent selection requirements.

All GSM visas require applicants to pass a points test, with points awarded depending on occupational background, age, English ability (demonstrated by meeting designated levels of the General Training format of the IELTS test), recent employment history including Australian employment, having an Australian qualification, having an 'in demand' occupation, being a speaker of a preferred/designated language, having lived/studied in regional Australia, partner's skills, and nomination by a state or territory government or by a relative residing in a designated area of regional Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008c). Depending on the sub-class of GSM visa applied for, applicants must meet varying points hurdles.

Before 2004, ex-international students applying for PR were not required to take the IELTS as other applicants did, as they were deemed to have reached the equivalent of IELTS score 6 via their onshore study experience. Since 2004, however, these applicants have had to demonstrate language proficiency by sitting the IELTS as part of the PR application. Further testing is necessary for entry to some professions, with high mandatory levels required as a condition of practice. Proficiency at the IELTS Score 7 level is necessary before an immigrant can practice in any of Australia's health professions (including medicine and nursing). IELTS 6 is required for select engineering functions, and has been advocated by regulatory bodies as essential for effective performance in a range of additional fields (see Hawthorne 2007). While accrediting bodies, for example those covering IT and accounting, do not specify a

⁷ This was announced by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship on 16 March 2009.

minimum proficiency level, Australian employers are increasingly demanding that ex-international students sit an IELTS test before employment is offered, sometimes requiring scores as high as 8 (Deloitte Australia, for example, is accepting applications for its graduate program in 2008 from accounting students who do not yet hold Australian PR, requiring an IELTS score of 8 in Speaking and Listening (Deloitte 2008).

The 885 visa (and the comparable visa for offshore applicants) requires the highest points under the points test, at 120. Points awarded for training at an Australian institution are very valuable: since the September 2007 policy modifications which followed the skilled migration review a doctorate of 2+ years is worth 25 points; a bachelor of 3 academic years with at least second-class honours, or Masters or Honours degree is worth 15 points, and 2+ years of study in Australia at the degree, diploma or trade level is worth 5 points (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2008c). As GSM migrants take up such a large proportion of the migrant pool, and because of the emphasis on education and training in the GSM points test, migrants to Australia have a far higher average level of education than do Australian born citizens. In 2001, for example, 13.7% of Australians were degree-qualified, compared to 26.1% of all migrants who had migrated the previous 5 years, and 18.9% of migrants overall (Hawthorne 2008).

The award of 20 bonus points for applicants qualified in Migration Occupations in Demand (MODL) appears to have impacted on international students' selection of field of study as well as educational sector. For example, by 2005 a wide range of VET sector fields were included on the MODL list – reflecting the strength of the Australian economy, and growing demand for vocational skills including trades (recent enrolment data from AEI (2008c) indicate that the four main fields of study within the VET sector are management and commerce; food, hospitality and personal services; society and culture; and engineering and related technologies). After the addition of the wide range of VET fields to the MODL, migration-motivated students channelled rapidly into the VET sector: a mere 978 Indian students enrolled in VET sector courses in 2004-05, compared to 6,743 in 2006-07, at a time when demand for VET sector courses was growing by 51% per year compared to just 8% for higher education courses (Hawthorne 2008). The very focused growth in MODL-oriented VET courses indicates that there is a strong relationship between the MODL and fields of study chosen by prospective migrants. To date, statistical data concerning the employment outcomes and performance of international graduates from the VET sector is unavailable.

The main changes to the policy sought to address two key issues that were considered obstacles for international students seeking work in Australia. The first was English language proficiency, and the second was related work experience to their field of study. The above discussion has highlighted the growing trend in the use of language assessment for migration, employment and tertiary entry. This is especially true in Australia, where IELTS has been the main English language assessment used for many purposes.

1.2.3 Overseas comparisons

In discussing Australian policy decisions, it is important to be aware of the significance placed by other English speaking countries on host country language ability for migrants, including former students. In the following discussion, only issues of ELP will be discussed, though it is acknowledged that there are other requirements that need to be met for entry into tertiary study. The opportunity to work in a host country after graduation is becoming a common marketing tool for countries competing in the international higher education market (Verbik & Lasanowski 2007; Hawthorne 2008). Overseas comparisons are therefore useful in determining how

Australia's competitors have been attracting international students in this increasingly tight market.

1.2.3.1 Britain

Since early 2008, the British government has been phasing in a new points-based migration system, which is described in its publicity as 'Australian-style' (for example, Directgov 2007). The new system replaced the previous eight routes of entry to migration, with five tiers encompassing general high skill level individuals; those with a job offer; workers to fill temporary skills shortages; youth; and students (Salt 2007).

Migration under all tiers apart from Tier 1 must be sponsored by employers, and the new system is designed to be complemented by an overhaul of sponsorship and compliance arrangements. For example, intending international students must be issued with a certificate of sponsorship by their institution. Institutions (both public and private) will in turn be subject to mandatory accreditation as sponsoring bodies, and must demonstrate, among other things, that they have appropriately qualified staff and quality teaching and learning resources (UK Border Agency 2008). Such demonstration will include inspections. Further investigation of this aspect of the new British system once it has been fully implemented could be useful for the Australian system, especially in view of recent scandals involving 'shop front' institutions in Australia.

As with the Australian GSM program, applicants in Tier 1 of the new British migration system will be allocated points based on attributes seen as predictive of labour market success. The rationale of the points system was "to produce a structured and defensible decision-making process [in which] prospective migrants will, prior to making their application, be able to assess themselves against these criteria, reducing the number of speculative and erroneous applications" (Home Office 2006). Former international students may be selected under this tier, which also includes general skilled workers, entrepreneurs and investors. Tier 2 migrants, by contrast, must be sponsored into pre-arranged UK jobs by local employers and this second tier is not points based. Neither of these categories in the first instance offers permanent residence to ex-students – transition to PR status is made in later (separate) applications, with outcomes determined by continuing satisfactory employment, and good earnings levels. Tier 1 however "aims to retain the most able international graduates who have studied in the UK. It will also enhance the UK's overall offer to international students" (Border and Immigration Agency 2008).

Possession of a degree and reaching a designated English language level are the key Tier 1 selection criteria for skilled applicants. IELTS Score 6.5 in each component of the test will in future be required for Tier 1 applicants rather than the previous Score 6 (Tier 1 migrants being permitted to enter the UK without pre-existing employment). The stated aim is to "help migrants to integrate more readily into society". However, applicants qualified by UK degrees will be exempt from language testing, as will investors. Tier 2 employer-sponsored applicants will in future require IELTS Score 5.5, rather than the previous Score 5 – a lower level requirement given these migrants have already secured UK work (Salt 2007). Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the new visa arrangements in Britain lies in the lack of formal language skill requirements for former international students, with those applying under the Post Study Work category deemed to have met the language requirements by virtue of having obtained a bachelor's degree or postgraduate diploma at a recognised education institution—the same situation which has drawn such criticism in Australia (1999-2006).

While the new British system has many superficial similarities to the Australian points-based system, there are important differences, primarily centred on Britain's place in the EU. Thus while the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, announced that the

"introduction of our Australian-style points system will ensure that only those with skills the country needs can come" (Directgov 2008), the new system will only cover an estimated 40% of migrant workers entering the UK, since those from EU member nations may already work where they will (The Economist 2008). In 2006/7, 24.4% of postgraduates and 5.7% of undergraduates studying at UK higher education institutions were from non-EU countries.

As has been the case in Australia, there have recently been a number of news articles questioning the English language proficiency of overseas students studying in the UK. Criticisms included that the language requirements for entrance were set too low (generally IELTS 6.5 or 7); that the reliance on international students for fee revenue has resulted in 'dumbing-down'; that pass marks for international students were routinely lowered and that plagiarism is rife; that short, taught Masters courses were particularly lax in requiring good written English in assessments; and that students graduated without adequate English communication skills (Coughlan 2008; Newman 2008).

1.2.3.2 *The United States of America*

United States skilled migration policy has relied for decades on international students – in particular those completing US doctoral degrees, following undergraduate qualifications gained in source countries. The most recent available data (National Science Foundation 2008) has suggested that 85-95% of Indian and Chinese graduates remained, typically transiting to 5-year temporary resident visas, and then other residence options. The H1B category recruits degree-qualified employer-sponsored workers, with an estimated one million residents in the US in any one year (Hawthorne 2009). Uncapped categories and exemptions have facilitated some students' capacity to remain, prioritising visas for scientists, health practitioners, IT specialists, and other R&D workers. The presence of foreign post-doctoral students is regarded as fundamental to US global competitiveness. As in Australia and England, US-based training rather than additional English language testing is thought to ensure former students' work readiness. Major employer groups have lobbied Congress for automatic provision of Green Cards (permanent resident status) to all former students who have completed US doctoral degrees. The pool is large – the US is currently training an estimated 28% of global PhD scholars, out of a total of 650,000 international students (Marginson & van der Wende 2007). Referring to the data available from the National Science Board, Marginson and van der Wende further suggested that about half the foreign doctoral graduates stay in the United States after graduation, many in faculty positions.

1.2.3.3 *Canada*

Canada, like Australia, has placed extraordinary emphasis on the recruitment of migrants with skills in the past decade (around 60% of total intake, the great majority holding degrees). By 2001 this strategy was transforming select professional fields, with migrants constituting half of all degree-qualified workers in engineering, IT, and architecture/ building. In contrast to Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, however, Canada has attracted minuscule numbers of degree-qualified English speaking background migrants, with India, China, Pakistan and the Philippines the major recent source countries. Just 7% of such migrants in 1991-1996 and 5% in 1996-2001 were of English Speaking Background (ESB) origin (all categories), compared to 25% a decade or more earlier. Between 1996 and 2001, for example, just 6% of doctors, 4% of nurses, 2% of engineers and 2% of IT professionals migrating to Canada were from English speaking background source countries. This compared to 30%, 43%, 22% and 18% respectively migrating in these fields to Australia (Hawthorne 2008). These trends may begin to reverse, however, as Canada in September 2008 introduced the Canadian Experience Class to its skilled

migration program, offering a streamlined application process for prospective permanent residents with managerial, professional or technical skills, who have two or more years of skilled work experience in Canada, or who have one year's experience and are international graduates of a Canadian postsecondary institution (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2008). Former international students are anticipated to be the major program participants.

Skilled migrants in Canada have encountered major barriers related to credential recognition, the relevance of past work experience, and in particular the possession of adequate host country language ability to work in the knowledge economy (Thompson & Worswick 2004; Ferrer, Green & Riddell 2004; Chiswick & Miller 2000). According to recent studies, skilled migrants had worse employment outcomes than family category immigrants who were not points-tested – the 'new face of the chronically poor' in Canada, in a context where it can take 20-28 years to achieve wage parity with comparably qualified Canadians (Picot, Hou & Coulombe 2007). Poor English skills are regarded as the most significant contributor to this with a body of evidence accumulating in relation to select professions (Hiebert 2006; Canadian Council of Professional Engineers 2004; Canadian Language Benchmarks 2002).

While the province of Quebec has controlled its own immigration program (prioritising selection of French language skills), this is not the case for the rest of Canada. Prospective skilled migrants continue to self-report their English ability, with no external verification required. Recent proposed legislative change, which would have required applicants to secure "third-party language tests", has not succeeded (Smith 2008). The new Canadian Experience Class skilled sub-category however will target international students who have qualified in Canada, and impose stringent English language requirements.

1.2.3.4 New Zealand

New Zealand's economic selection system has prioritised the migration of English speaking background migrants, including former students. In 2004-05 the migration/refugee quota was 48,815 people, the majority (29,826) selected through skilled categories. By 2006 selection criteria were directly comparable to Australia's, including pre-migration English language screening (initially a minimum of IELTS Score 5.0 or equivalent, since raised to 6.5 for Principal Applicants and hence more rigorous than the level required for Australia). There have also been bonus points for former international students with New Zealand qualifications (based, like Australia, on 2 years minimum study).

Within the first year of operation, such onshore applicants typically achieved 150 points compared to 120 for offshore applicants, with 31% of all selected migrants in consequence 20-29 years old. The introduction of the Skilled Migrant Category coincided with a major shift in terms of country of origin. In essence New Zealand reverted to its historical norm in 2004-05, with the UK (49%), South Africa (12%), China (6%), India (5%) and the US (4%) the primary migration source countries. This outcome reflected "extensive marketing by Immigration New Zealand in the UK, Europe and the USA for skilled migrants", and reduced the scale of recently cultivated flows from India and China. The proportion of UK skilled migrants, for example, surged from 15% of the total in 2000-03 to 49% of the NZ total in 2004-05, while representation from China, India and "other countries" dropped markedly: India from 22% to 5%, China from 11% to 6%, and "other countries" from 39% to 25% (Bedford 2006). The latest available data (June 2008) have confirmed employment outcomes to be excellent – around 88% of skilled Principal Applicants employed within 6 months of arrival (Masgoret 2008).

1.2.4 Summary

The above international comparisons have indicated common global concerns about the influence of English language proficiency on workplace readiness and employment outcomes for international students. However, given that skilled migration is a relatively new rationale (since 1999) driving international education in Australia, there has been to date very little available published evidence of factors influencing international students' employment outcomes, and a lack of research in terms of the support that they may require to develop their English language for the workplace. A gap exists in the published research on workplace readiness and employment outcomes of international students who selected their fields of study with the view of seeking PR and finding employment in the country they have studied in. What seems evident is that Australia is ahead in terms of considering these issues and attempting to develop a body of knowledge and strategies to inform practice within Australia.

1.3 Key factors influencing the development of ELP

1.3.1 Introduction

Research has indicated that there are many variables that influence second language learning and these can be broadly categorised into social and individual factors (Ellis 1997; Cummins and Man Yee-Fun 2007; Duff 2008). Social factors include the opportunities a learner has to communicate in social interaction in academic learning contexts and social settings, the support available to develop their academic language skills while studying, as well as their living with people with whom they can speak in English. Individual factors can include age, personality, aptitude, motivation for learning English and previous educational level. Given the complexity of developing English language proficiency, there is no magic formula to assist international students in developing their proficiency, however the research does point to certain issues that may need to be considered in providing opportunities for international students to develop their English language proficiency.

1.3.2 English language proficiency and entry to courses

ELP is one measure by which international students are selected into university and VET courses. The English Language Symposium highlighted that not all international students use IELTS scores to enter university or VET programs (O'Loughlin and Murray 2007). While international students from certain countries are required to undertake an IELTS test for visa purposes, students can enter university and VET courses through different English language pathways. One pathway is direct entry accompanied by an IELTS test for those from non-English speaking countries. Many students take other pathways however, including prior enrolment at a secondary school in an ESL course, enrolment in a foundation course, or previous study at a university in which English is the language of instruction. These options may include packaged visa allocations with guaranteed entry to target tertiary courses on completion of an English Language Intensive Course (ELICOS), without further language testing required. Therefore, depending on the circumstances, international students may enter VET or higher education institutions through pathway programs without completing a formal test of English (O'Loughlin and Murray 2007).

In addition, tests used for various points of entry have different purposes: some are proficiency tests which aim to measure the students' readiness for entry into study, such as the IELTS, while other pathways are achievement focused, where students are assessed on what has been learnt in the course. While systems like IELTS are validated testing instruments, O'Loughlin and Murray point out that there are

currently no common language levels to describe learner proficiency across these different pathways. They conclude that a key issue is related to the equivalence of results across the different entry courses (O'Loughlin and Murray 2007, p. 12). It appears that regardless of what pathway international students select as entry into university and VET courses, levels of English language ability can vary at the point of entry.

1.3.3 English language development within study at university and VET

There has been a great deal of research showing that many international students need to develop their English language skills while completing their courses. This was highlighted in the English Language Symposium in 2007 and supported from the available research (Arkoudis 2006; Arkoudis & Starfield 2007; Benesch 2007; Carroll & Ryan 2005; Harman 2005, Jacobs 2005; Morita 2004; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland & Ramia 2008). Findings from the various data sources converge on some core issues. These include:

- With widening participation across tertiary education and the increasing numbers of international students, it can no longer be assumed that students enter their university study with the requisite academic language skills. These need to be developed while they are studying for their degree.
- English language is one part of the wider graduate attribute agenda since English language communication skills are crucial for graduate employment.
- English language support is most effective for enhancing student learning when embedded into overall course design.
- Development of language and academic skills is more likely to occur when learning is linked to assessment tasks.
- Irrespective of the English language entry requirements of the University, a large group of students from language backgrounds other than English will require English language development throughout the course of their degree.
- Institutional thinking has been slow in grasping the complexities involved in academic language development and its important relationship with disciplinary learning.
- English language skill development has largely remained on the periphery of curriculum design, and is largely considered to be the responsibility of individual students and language learning skills advisors.
- Different disciplines have different English language requirements as well as different discourses of academic inquiry.

However, the issue of English language development in university and VET programs is a complex one. While international students have been growing in numbers and there has been increased concern about their English language proficiency, it appears that the role of English language learning has not been taken seriously within higher education and VET. As Arkoudis (2008) has argued, there are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, there is the widespread view that since international students have to meet certain English language hurdles for entry to university study, they require no further English language support once accepted into courses. These various English language pathways only indicate that students are ready to commence study at university. As indicated in the English Language

Symposium background paper, the various English language pathways do not measure the language skills that students need to complete their studies successfully (O'Loughlin and Murray, 2007; Arkoudis and O'Loughlin 2007). Whatever the method of entry, research has indicated that many international students need to develop their academic language skills while they are completing their courses (Arkoudis 2009; Benesch 2007; Duff 2007; Morita 2004).

Secondly, despite the obvious increase in diversity amongst the student population in recent years, there remains an implicit assumption that students come equipped with fully developed English language skills appropriate to the demands of university study. Therefore English language difficulties are viewed as a deficit, and any assistance seen to be remedial, as noted at the English Language Symposium (Arkoudis and Starfield 2007). It is left to international students to seek help with their language skills, often through the English language support programs. As such, English language development is positioned as institutionally separate from disciplinary teaching. However, many international students, especially from Southeast Asia, view their lecturer as critical for their learning, therefore any support from anyone other than their lecturers can be considered as inappropriate (Watkins 2007). Student attendance for support programs can be very erratic (von Randow 2005; Wingate 2006). Students may not see the relevance of such programs because they are not linked to the assessment of the subjects in which they are enrolled.

Thirdly, English language development is a complex process (Ellis 1997). One-off language support programs or a series of workshops may not necessarily address the English language needs of international students. A University of Melbourne survey of international students who had completed their courses indicated that at least 30% had struggled with English language throughout their course (University Planning Office 2005). One of the main outcomes of the 2007 English Language Symposium was that English language learning needs to be ongoing and linked to teaching, learning and assessment in the disciplinary subjects (Arkoudis and Starfield 2007).

Lastly, most English language programs involve the development of academic writing skills. However, research has also pointed to social communicative skills as important for international students especially in the context of developing skills for employment, (O'Loughlin and Arkoudis 2009; Duff 2008). Papers from the English Language Symposium highlighted that most of the research on English language development in universities and VET programs has largely ignored any links between English language development, study and employment (Arkoudis and Starfield 2007; Hawthorne 2007).

One of the few studies to link language learning during tertiary study with employment outcomes is that by Watty (2007) which demonstrated some of the concerns that emerge concerning the alignment between English language development and employer expectations. Her study found that while employers were satisfied with the technical competence of graduates, they often recruited graduates from fields other than accounting due to the need for employees with effective communication skills. Watty noted the reluctance of universities to insist on additional class requirements for students from non-English speaking backgrounds due to fear of jeopardising market position in the competitive and lucrative area of international education. For academic staff involved in teaching international students, there are tensions between teaching the content, which is seen as directly relevant to the students' future employment, and the communication skills that the students also needed for employment, but which were not necessarily taught within the course of study.

In addition, research into international students learning and socialisation has indicated that identity and student agency in seeking opportunities to interact seem to be important factors in determining the extent to which international students engage with their learning community and develop their English language skills (Arkoudis & Tran 2007; Kanno & Norton 2003; Kettle 2005). These studies explore notions of identity and agency as international students adapt to the academic discourses of their disciplinary communities. These studies have established the importance of international students developing social as well as academic English language skills during their period of study.

1.4 Key factors influencing employment outcomes and work place readiness

1.4.1 Introduction

This section of the literature review will discuss the key factors that influence the work-place readiness of both local and international students. What becomes evident in the discussion below is that while English language proficiency is clearly important for workplace readiness and employment outcomes, some ambiguity exists in defining English language proficiency for employment purposes. In addition, it seems that most of the research has categorised students in terms of local and international. Yet these two groups are not homogenous in terms of English language background. For example, both groups can have graduates who speak English as a first or second language. Further distinctions between local and international students in terms of whether they have English as a first or second language are relevant when investigating the influence of ELP on employment outcomes.

1.4.2 Recent studies

Australian Education International conducted a survey of 14,946 international students studying in higher education, VET, ELICOS and secondary education, as well as a control group of local students in 2005, resulting in the reports *2006 International Student Survey* (AEI 2007) for each sector. Follow-up surveys were conducted in 2007 (AEI 2008b). In particular, the survey supports the suggestion that international graduates for whom English is a Second Language do indeed face more difficulties finding employment in Australia than do local graduates for whom English is a first language.

The *2007 Follow-up International Student Survey* was not able to sample the entire group who completed the survey in 2006. The follow-up survey of higher education students achieved a response rate of 28% for international students (569 responses) and 34% for local students (1,581 responses). The differences in the response rates between international and local students make it difficult to draw conclusions and the findings should be treated as indicative of trends between the two groups.

The findings of the report on the VET sector have not been used in this analysis, as this had an extremely low participation rate: only 130 international students (of 1193 invited) and 68 Australian students (of 311 invited) responded to the follow-up survey. These low response and participation rates highlight the difficulties in tracking graduate movements common to such longitudinal studies.

The findings of the survey support other widespread evidence of the popularity of remaining in Australia after study for ex-international students. Most of the international students surveyed in 2006 were intending to be living in Australia in twelve months time (62%). Another 26% planned to live in their home country, 5% in another country and 7% did not know. PR in Australia was the most common route to remaining in Australia: of the 2007 sample, 36% were planning to apply for PR, 36%

had already applied and only 29% were not planning to apply. Of international students who had successfully found employment after graduation, 69% found work in Australia and 31% found work overseas, reflecting the high proportion who stay on to apply for PR.

There was also evidence that ex-international students had more difficulty finding a job than local students. Just over half of the international students surveyed in 2006 intended to find a job after graduation (5%), yet only 38% of those responding to the follow-up survey had found a job immediately after their studies, while 17% were still looking for a job. Australian students were more successful in finding a job: 48% had intended to find a job after graduation and 40% managed to do so; only 6% were still looking for a job. Among international students, the most successful in finding employment were those from Europe (51%) and the least successful those from Southern and Central Asia (22%). Southern and Central Asian students were the least likely to find work after graduation. They were, however, the most likely to find it in Australia, with 91% of those who found work finding it here.

Australian students were able to rely on pre-established connections in finding work in a way international student graduates were not: Australians were far more likely to use contacts and networks to find employment (23%) than international students (9 per cent). More international students who found work in Australia reported that it was very difficult or somewhat difficult to do so (33%) than those who found work overseas (21%), while 21% of Australian students found it difficult to find work. The most likely to report difficulties in finding work were students from Southern and Central Asia (44%), and those over the age of 26 (36%). These findings supported those of other studies, such as the 2006 skilled migration review (Birrell, Hawthorne and Richardson 2006).

The *2007 Follow-up International Student Survey* (AEI, 2008b) aimed to measure whether respondents' attitudes had changed over time and whether their career aspirations were achieved following their course completion. The proportion reporting satisfaction with studying in Australia declined slightly between 2005 and 2006. Compared with Australian respondents, significantly more international respondents found it difficult to find employment in Australia. In 2007 only 41% of international respondents had found full-time work. In addition, the majority of international students indicated that their English language skills were up to the level required for their studies or for seeking employment (90% for written and 86% for spoken English skills) (AEI, 2008b: 3).

The findings of the survey imply some ways in which universities might assist both Australian and international students and graduates in successfully gaining employment: neither Australian nor international students were particularly satisfied with getting work experience in their field of study (42% of international students and 50% of Australian students) or in receiving help obtaining good jobs (37% of international students and 40% of Australian students). This would seem to be an area in which universities could do more to assist students to become workplace-ready.

In a more recent paper, Birrell and Healy (2008) argue that migrants trained overseas have better chances of getting a job in Australia than ex-international students who undertook their education here (Birrell & Healy 2008), a finding which suggests that the English language advantage bestowed by Australian training is outweighed by the professional experience accumulated by older immigrants who trained overseas. Birrell and Healy found that ex-international students from non-English speaking countries are less successful at finding professional or managerial employment (22%) than those who also come from non-English speaking countries but who undertook their education or training overseas (36%). Even in accounting,

where there is a strong employer demand, Australian-trained ex-international students were the least successful group in finding professional employment: 68% of Australian graduates were employed in their field, as were 43% of overseas-trained workers; yet only 25% of ex-international students had found employment in their area of training. (It is worth noting, however, that some of the assumptions underlying Birrell and Healy's data require interrogation.)

Birrell and Healy focus on the differences in success between local and overseas students, concluding that language deficiencies are to blame (Birrell & Healy 2008: 18). For the purposes of the present study, the key implication of their work has been in their finding that even non-English speaking background, overseas-trained professionals were more successful in finding professional employment in their field than those who trained in Australia prior to immigrating here. This finding implies that work experience is an important factor, alongside recent training, and (although Birrell and Healy may disagree here) that such experience may be more important to employers than English language ability. This interpretation is supported by the AEI (2007) study, which indicated that the main difficulties faced by international graduates in finding jobs included lack of work experience, as well as permanent resident status, inability to find employment in field of interest, English language barriers, and an implication that employers prefer local to international students. It can be concluded that no one single factor is the key barrier to employment, indicating that perhaps there are factors other than English language proficiency that influence successful employment outcomes.

Table 1.1 (Graduate Careers Australia 2008) below compares the expectations between job applicants and employers across two surveys, *Universities and Beyond* and *Graduate Outlook*. The table below shows a mismatch between the skills graduates thought of as valued by employers and the skills employers themselves value. Students indicated that the most valuable attribute they could demonstrate was their drive and commitment, while employers placed this attribute third. Employers most valued communication skills, an attribute students ranked second. Perhaps the most important difference between students' expectations and the reality of employment was in the attribute "cultural/social alignment and values fit". Students did not see this attribute as very important at all, ranking it at number nine, while employers valued this attribute relatively highly placing it at number four:

Table 1.1: Importance of skills and personal attributes to graduate recruiters, ranking, all students, U&B 2007, GOS 2007.

	Students (University and Beyond)	Employers (Graduate Outlook)
Attitude, drive and commitment	1	3
Communication skills (written and oral)	2	1
Teamwork skills	3	6
Reasoning & analytical/technical skills	4	2
Emotional intelligence	5	7
Leadership skills	6	10
Academic qualifications	7	5
Work experience	8	8
Cultural/social alignment and values fit	9	4
Intra and extracurricular activities	10	9

Source: University and Beyond, Graduate Careers Australia 2008.

When considering the difficulties graduates from diverse cultural backgrounds may face in integrating into their new communities, it is evident that such challenges would be further compounded in a workplace, and even more so in the stressful situation of a job interview. Combining employers' expectations of cultural and social fit with the premium they placed on communication skills suggests that those from English as a Second Language (ESL)⁸ backgrounds and from countries which have very different work, social and cultural backgrounds to Australia will find it extremely challenging to source employment in Australia. In addition, the above table separated communication skills from cultural/social fit, teamwork skills and reasoning and analytical skills. Yet these skills would fall under the category of English language proficiency. The literature in second language acquisition has emphasised the importance of language use in context, meaning that appropriate register, negotiating with colleagues, use of humour and ability to interact informally with others, are important in demonstrating proficiency in a language. These skills cannot be easily isolated, because they all require the use of English language in different contexts. If they are grouped together, then clearly English proficiency is an important issue for all graduate students.

1.4.3 Summary

The above review has highlighted two key issues to do with nomenclature concerning international students and English language proficiency. It is important to have a common understanding of the terms used in the study, in order to address the key issues regarding English language proficiency and workplace readiness.

The first issue is concerned with identifying English language groupings within the broad categories of international and local students. In the above surveys and indeed in most of the research in this area, the two groups are presented as separate and homogeneous groupings of students. For example, in the 2007 AEI survey, 31% of respondents were from EFL countries China, Hong Kong and Indonesia, whereas 24% were from countries where English is used as a Second Language (Malaysia, Singapore and India). The other 45% of respondent were from countries of varied English language background such as USA, Norway, UK, Germany, Canada, Japan, Taiwan and Thailand. This has highlighted one of the problems with using 'international students' as a category when discussing issues around English language proficiency and workplace readiness, as former international students vary in their English language backgrounds from native speakers (UK, USA, Canada) to using English as a Second Language (Malaysia, China, Thailand). It has been argued that in the globalised world in which we live, where people have learnt English from a very young age and are connected to the English speaking world

⁸ English as a Second Language refers to the use of English by non-native speakers in a country where English is the main language of communication.

through television and the internet, that English language use is divided into those who speak English as a first language and those who speak English as a Second language (Phillipson 2008).

It is also difficult to treat local students as a homogeneous group, as this group can also be diverse in terms of speakers of English as a first or second language. This is especially true in a country such as Australia, where local residents come from very diverse linguistic backgrounds. For example 50% of local dental students and 33% of local medical students enrolled at the University of Melbourne are first generation migrants or refugees (including many relatively recent arrivals). Given such variability, it was important for the study to have two clearly defined groups of students/graduates in order to analyse the relationship between English language proficiency, workplace readiness and employment outcomes. Therefore, in the study presented in this report students/graduates were defined as follows:

- Australian born students/graduates who speak English as a first language
- International students/graduates who speak English as a second language.

Therefore, the study compared the experiences of two distinct English language groupings in order to investigate the research questions.

The second issue is concerned with defining English language proficiency. Within the literature, proficiency is defined in different ways. There is no clear agreement on what is meant by English language proficiency. Terms such as 'communication skills,' 'English language use' and 'English language ability' are used interchangeably and are frequently ill-defined, and it is likely that these terms mean different things to different stakeholders. For example, in Table 1.2 above, do the graduates and employers have a similar definition of 'communication skills'? It is important to explore how different groups define English language proficiency in relation to workplace readiness.

A final point that emerged from the review is the question of whose responsibility it is to develop the English language proficiency for workplace readiness. The expectation is that graduates come to the workplace ready with these skills. Where do they learn these? Is there scope within the workplace to develop these skills or should they be happening at the university level? Are the graduates responsible for developing their English language proficiency for workplace readiness? If so, how can they do this when there are limited opportunities for international students to gain work experience while they study?

1.5 Overlapping of factors influencing English language proficiency, work place readiness and employment outcomes

1.5.1 Introduction

Central to this project is the relationship between English language proficiency and workplace readiness, in order to achieve successful employment outcomes. This is defined within the current project as graduates finding employment in their qualified field of study or a comparable area that relates to their qualifications. Unsuccessful outcomes are defined as employment in a lower-level field that is not related to their qualification or training, under-employment, or unemployment.

There has been a growing trend for English language proficiency tests being used by employers to assess the English language skills of international students. Increasingly, employer groups are indicating their own minimum English language

requirements for graduates seeking employment in Australia. Internationally benchmarked tests such as IELTS and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) are used to indicate English language ability of graduates. As well as these international tests, there are also nationally-based tests such as the Occupational English Test (OET) which is designed to test language proficiency for the health professions. The data available on the IELTS website (2008) indicated that the frequency distribution by reasons for taking an IELTS test for 2007 was slightly higher for employment purposes compared to entry for higher education courses, revealing the growing trend of IELTS used for employment purposes. This section will discuss the increased use of language testing for employment, and unpack some of the key factors that form the nexus between English language proficiency, workplace readiness and successful employment outcomes.

1.5.2 The relationship between English language testing and employment

A strong body of evidence has affirmed the importance of English language ability to employment outcomes. A major finding of Australia's skilled migration review (Birrell, Hawthorne & Richardson 2006) was that recent onshore applicants were less successful than offshore Principal Applicants in finding professional work. The main reason for this, according to the authors was:

... that in most dimensions of labour market success, the key is to have a level of English language competence that enables the respondent to report that they speak English at least 'very well'.... [Those who do not] were much more likely to be unemployed; about half as likely as those with better English to be employed in a job commensurate with their skills; and about twice as likely to be employed in a relatively low skilled job (pp 86-7).

Successive reports since the 1980s have confirmed that despite possessing generally higher qualifications, various groups of migrants who use English as a second language in Australia experience reduced employment rates and work status — with recessions rendering them particularly vulnerable in terms of employment (Bureau of Labour Market Research 1986: 86; Wooden 1994). Comparable trends were evident in Canada, showing the higher a migrant's official language capability, the greater the employment and earning opportunities enjoyed (Chiswick & Miller 2000; Ferrer, Green & Riddell 2004). Increasingly the argument has been made that professionals cannot take their place in a knowledge economy if they lack sophisticated spoken and written English skills. Within professions such as medicine, nursing, teaching, accountancy and engineering, high level English ability is viewed as mandatory (Hawthorne 2007).

The 2006 DIMIA skilled migration review, and the resulting debate on English language standards, elicited a range of views from regulatory bodies and/or employers. By 2005-06, accountants represented around 25% of all skilled migration applicants. Regulatory officials interviewed for the 2006 review affirmed employer wariness concerning the perceived readiness of new graduates. In their assessment of membership applications, CPA was aware of employer demand for higher order English skills. Accountancy firm KPMG has introduced a requirement an IELTS score of 7 and Ernst & Young an IELTS score of 7.5 for job applicants. This has been in response to concerns about the ELP of international graduates. More recently, CPA's Australian Chief Executive and Universities Australia have welcomed changes to immigration rules which mean that only accountants who have good language skills or have completed a registered professional year program will be given visa priority (Australian Financial Review 2009).

Computing professionals have been the second main source of skilled migrants in recent times – half of these former international students applying through two-step migration. IT accounted for a third of skilled migration visas issued in 2003-04 and 22% in 2004-05 (Kinnaird 2005, 2006; Australian Computer Society 2005). As with accounting, substantial numbers of these IT professionals had first completed two year Australian Masters courses. While the information technology field remained unregulated in Australia, critics have been vocal in recent times about the scale and calibre of international student intakes, including the level of English language competence required for professional practice.

Evidence exists in relation to engineering, in particular the importance of effective communication skills for Australian employment. Communication is considered as vital, in particular graduates' capacity for organisational "verbal interaction" and knowledge of engineering jargon (Hawthorne 1994, Trevelyan 2006).

Given medicine and nursing's status as culturally and linguistically based professions, sophisticated language skills have long been required in these fields. As early as 1990, the Chairman of the Australian Medical Council's Examination Committee stated "...all English speaking developed countries take the view that foreign medical graduates who choose to emigrate must demonstrate in objective testing a good level of proficiency in English as well as the level of professional competence expected of graduates in their chosen country" (Blacket 1990: 129). Possession of IELTS Score 7⁹ (or equivalent) is now mandatory for practice in all Australian clinically-based professions, including for conditionally registered international students while in training. Since July 2005 Australian State and Territory Medical Registration Boards have also expanded mandatory testing to include temporary as well as permanent resident international medical graduates.

In terms of nursing, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council typically has handled around 2,000 credential assessments per year – two-thirds derived from onshore and one-third from offshore applicants. As with medicine, a minimum of IELTS 7 or Occupational English Test (OET) B, is currently required for practice or training, reflecting the critical importance of English in engaging with the 'personhood' of the patient.

Recently, the idea of international students taking an IELTS exit test on completion of their studies to indicate their English language proficiency, has been suggested by IDP, as reported in *The Australian* (Healy 2008). This view is supported by University of Queensland deputy vice-chancellor international, whose university offers IELTS testing for graduates. They both have argued that IELTS exit test offer students evidence of their English language proficiency that support their efforts to find employment.

1.5.3 Summary overlapping of factors influencing English language proficiency, workplace readiness and employment outcomes

On the basis of the evidence to date, it is clear English language ability represents a powerful component of work readiness and successful outcomes and testing has been used as a way of measuring the English language proficiency of graduates. However, the above discussion has also emphasised the increasing use of IELTS as a measure of English language proficiency on workplace readiness. According to Merrifield (2008: 286), IELTS is increasingly being used for "purposes of language assessment for immigration and entry to professions". She has indicated that the advantages of IELTS over its competitors are:

⁹ Defined as 'Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning'.

- easy accessibility to the Test by most candidates because of the extensive network of test centres available to them
- frequency of test dates, so that candidates can access the Test with a broad choice of dates
- rapid turn-around time for results to be provided to candidates (page 290).

O'Loughlin (2008) has argued that there is a need for more specific purpose language tests which have been designed to assess whether an individual has the language skills to assume the relevant professional or vocational duties. The Occupational English Test (OET) has been presented as an example of such a test. Australian-designed, the OET is recognised by local professional health associations as a valid indicator of readiness to work in an English-speaking environment. The strength of this test has been that the test tasks directly relate to the work of health professionals. Currently graduates are only required to take the general training module of the IELTS. O'Loughlin (2008: 78) has questioned whether it is appropriate to use IELTS test results for purposes other than entry for university study:

... the future of workplace assessment is unclear as the occupation-specific tests are increasingly forced to compete with the more large-scale tests that may have been originally developed for an entirely different purpose. For example, despite being developed solely as university selection tests of academic English, the IELTS and the TOEFL have recently been employed for the accreditation of health professionals and also proposed as university exit tests without any serious attempt to validate them for either purpose. The uses of both tests are therefore considered by many language-testing specialists to be unethical.

The one-size-fits-all module of language testing represented by language tests such as IELTS, may not provide employers and professional associations with the occupation-specific information they need to adequately determine workplace readiness.

1.6. Summary

The issues identified in this literature review —key factors influencing English language proficiency and workplace readiness on employment outcomes —inform the empirical part of the project (Sections 3 – 6). The key factors identified are summarised below:

Identify groupings of international graduates according to English language background:

- Graduates for whom English is a first language
- Graduates for whom English is a second language



Stakeholders' views on:

- Educational experiences of graduates before and during study
- Development of academic and social English language proficiency during study and the sites for learning these
- The significance of work experience within Australia and overseas, including the extent to which field of study and other experiences assist in successful employment outcomes
- Perceptions of the relevant skills required to achieve successful employment outcomes
- Preparation within course for employment
- The degree to which these factors vary for students for whom English is a first or second language
- How different stakeholders define the English language proficiency required for successful employment outcomes
- Any opportunities that may exist for English language proficiency development after employment.

1.7 Methodology

1.7.1 Quantitative analysis

A key aim of the quantitative analysis was to analyse all available data on former students' employment outcomes in the early post-migration period, and to compare these to those achieved by directly comparable offshore migrants. This goal was addressed by analysis of two sets of LSIA 3 data. Wave 1 was administered late 2005 (6 months following skilled migration). Wave 2 was administered late 2006 (18 months after achieving this status). LSIA 3 is based on a representative sample of all skilled migrants, administered at a time when former international students constituted over 50% of the GSM program. The great majority at that time held tertiary sector Australian qualifications, typically two-year Masters degrees, reflecting the dominance of professions until 2005 on Australia's Migration Occupations in Demand List.

Using the LSIA 3 data, employment rates at 6 and 18 months were assessed for Principal Applicants derived from a wide range of birthplaces, who were qualified in 5 professional and 3 trade fields (accounting, IT, engineering, medicine, nursing, hospitality, hairdressing and building). The level of their employment was also examined, allowing comparison of onshore versus offshore migrants, as well as to 'Others' (Business and other skilled category migrants not subject to points testing).

To allow further comparison with the employment outcomes achieved by comparably qualified recent migrants across all immigration categories, the 2006 Census and Australian Education International (AEI) data from 2002-2008 were analysed

Further information regarding the quantitative analysis is presented in Appendix A.

1.7.2 Qualitative analysis

Interviews were conducted with a total of 147 interviewees. Interview schedules for each category of interviewee are attached (see Appendices B – E). Interviewees were grouped according to the following categories:

- 40 international students for whom English is a second language (ESL).
- 18 local students and graduates for whom English is a first language
- 28 university and vocational education and VET staff (representing 10 institutions)
- 18 recent migrants with ESL with overseas qualifications
- 36 employers and members of regulatory bodies (in the fields of accounting, IT, engineering, medicine, nursing, hospitality, hairdressing and building)
- 7 policymakers based in the Federal government departments directly concerned with skilled migration, international students and employment outcomes (DEEWR and DIAC).

The inclusion of recent migrants educated overseas who were currently engaged in seeking employment in Australia broadened the study from its initial focus upon international students' who had studied in Australia. The aim of the interviews was to identify interviewees' understandings of the ELP required for the workplace, including any differences that might occur or be perceived across professions. It was also considered important to discern the different perceptions and experiences of international and local students as defined by whether they were speakers of English as a first or second language.

Many of the interviews were semi-structured, following the interview schedule but not confined to its questions, in order to encourage personal accounts. Interviews at educational institutions and those with employers were typically conducted individually. In the student and migrant categories, group interviews typically consisted of between two and seven interviewees, but a number of individual interviews were also conducted. On average, group interviews ran for between 20 and 60 minutes, and individual interviews between approximately 15 and 30 minutes. Those with employers and regulatory bodies lasted typically an hour. Most interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed; some interviewees however, elected to be summarised rather than recorded.

Interviews were conducted in person at the CSHE premises, relevant institutions, or by telephone to reduce travel. Plain English statements were provided to all interviewees and formal permission gained by way of a consent form, these being provided either at the time of interview or shortly afterwards by post, in the case of telephone interviewees. By agreement no individuals or organisations are identified in the report, with only generic organisational descriptions or pseudonyms used.

To recruit people, emails were sent via various university divisions and contacts, including international student services, student associations, student clubs and alumni offices. As a way of assessing their suitability to participate in the study, students/graduates were asked to respond to the email by indicating their nationality, first language background and the course or degree undertaken. Interviewees for the tertiary sector/VET interviews were recruited by contacting DVCs academic, Academic and Language Learning (ALL) unit leaders, or employment and career officers in institutions. E-mailed requests for participation were also used to solicit participation from employers' groups, registered training organisations (RTOs) and trade sector people.

2. Statistical analysis of employment outcomes for immigrants: All categories compared to skilled category

2.1 Introduction

In the past decade Australia has selected an increasing proportion of migrants with skills – a trend exemplified by analysis of 2006 Census data (which combines Skill, Family and Refugee/Humanitarian arrivals). This section explores the human capital characteristics of these migrants, including the variables associated with enhanced or decreased employment outcomes within the early settlement period (defined here as one to five years post-arrival).

Once ‘typical’ employment outcomes, derived from the 2006 Census, have been defined for degree or diploma qualified migrants from all immigration categories, there is a brief examination of trends in student enrolments between 2002 and mid-2008 using data from the International Research and Analysis Unit, Australian Education International (AEI).

Analysis of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (the LSIA) is then provided in the third part of this chapter, based on LSIA 3 data collected at 6 months and 18 months following arrival (late in 2005 and 2006). As noted earlier, this LSIA 3 analysis provides important comparative information, which allows the study to investigate the extent to which employment outcomes for skilled category principal applicants match or differ from the recent migration program norm (for people possessing comparable qualifications arriving within *all* immigration categories). Further, the LSIA 3 data allowed for the examination of any differential outcomes for recent offshore Independent compared to onshore Independent (former student) applicants participating in Australia’s Skilled Migration Program – a central issue for the current study.

More detailed notes on the study methods used in this chapter are presented in Appendix A.

2.2 2006 Census analysis

2.2.1 Australia’s growing recruitment of migrants with post-school qualifications

Australia has accepted a substantial number of migrants with skills in the recent period. From 2001 to 2006 596,188 migrants were approved to enter Australia (compared to 368,707 in 1996-2000). An unprecedented number of these migrants were university educated: 24.5% holding bachelor degrees, 9.0% with masters degrees or other postgraduate qualifications, and 1.1% with doctoral degrees. The qualifications of these recent migrants far exceeded those of the Australia and New Zealand-born, whose degree levels were 12.2%, 1.7% and 0.4% respectively. Substantial additional numbers of 2001-06 migrants held Diploma or Certificate credentials, though more were likely to have Advanced Diplomas (see Table 2.1). Many such migrants were qualified in the trades, and at this time few former international students were among them.

Interesting gender trends were also evident in relation to these migration flows – recent female migrants being very well-qualified overall, and slightly more likely than males to have bachelor degrees (25.5% compared to 23.4%), though males had more higher degree qualifications (See Table 2.3).

Table 2.1: Level of Australia/New Zealand and overseas born persons with degree or diploma level qualifications (2006), migrants grouped by time of arrival in Australia, percentages

Birthplace	Arrival time	Gender	Qualifications (a)								Total Number
			Doctoral	Master/ Postgraduate	Grad Diploma/ Grad Certificate	Bachelor	Advanced Diploma/ Diploma	Certificate IV	Certificate III/ Certificate	Other	
Australia/New Zealand		Male	0.6	1.7	1.3	10.6	6.2	1.7	23.6	54.3	4629770
		Female	0.3	1.6	2.2	13.8	8.7	2.6	9.2	61.6	4713311
		All	0.4	1.7	1.8	12.2	7.5	2.1	16.3	58.0	9343081
Overseas	Pre-1996	Male	1.4	3.7	1.4	14.9	8.2	1.5	21.6	47.4	1091400
		Female	0.7	2.7	2.0	16.0	10.1	1.9	7.7	58.9	1133581
		All	1.1	3.2	1.7	15.5	9.1	1.7	14.5	53.3	2224981
	1996-2000	Male	1.9	8.2	1.3	20.5	8.8	1.2	13.0	45.2	176546
		Female	0.9	6.0	1.5	21.7	11.3	1.4	6.4	50.8	192161
		All	1.4	7.1	1.4	21.1	10.1	1.3	9.6	48.1	368707
	2001-2006	Male	1.5	10.1	1.1	23.4	9.3	0.9	10.6	43.2	290711
		Female	0.8	7.9	1.3	25.5	11.2	0.8	4.8	47.7	305477
		All	1.1	9.0	1.2	24.5	10.3	0.8	7.6	45.5	596188
	S/Total arrivals	Male	1.5	5.4	1.3	17.1	8.5	1.3	18.5	46.4	1558657
		Female	0.7	4.1	1.8	18.5	10.4	1.6	7.0	55.9	1631219
		All	1.1	4.7	1.6	17.8	9.5	1.5	12.7	51.2	3189876

Source: 2006 Census (Australia).

Notes:

Excludes those for whom birthplace unknown.

a = Due to missing data, imputation and aggregation, numbers may not add up to 100% or exact total.

2.2.2 The impact of migration on key professions

As Table 2.2 shows, by 2006 Australia included very high proportions of migrants in the professional workforce, constituting 57.2% of all degree-qualified IT professionals, 51.7% of engineers, 45.4% of doctors, 44.3% of accountants, and 39.6% of business/commerce graduates. Disproportionate numbers of these migrants were very recent arrivals (2001-06), including 35.5% of Australia's total potential IT workforce, 28.3% of all engineers, and 24.8% of doctors.

Reflecting changes to Australia's Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) and Skill Occupation List (SOL), increasing numbers of trade-qualified migrants had also arrived or secured permanent residence in 2001-06. Interestingly, substantial numbers of such migrants reported holding degrees (further to their trade qualifications), including 39.5% of those qualified in the food/ hospitality industry, and 24.1% of those in hairdressing. Degree qualified migrants also comprised 24.1% of Australia's degree-qualified building workforce.

Trade arrivals with only lower level qualifications had also surged, by 2006 constituting some 20.5% of the diploma/certificate qualified building workforce, 22.4% of food/hospitality workers and 23.0% of those in hairdressing. Overall, in the three years to 2007-08, the skilled migration program alone delivered 6,500 cooks and 2,800 hairdressers to Australia (Evans 2008).

2.2.3 Labour market outcomes for 2001-06 skilled migrant arrivals

By 2006, recent migrants with qualifications (from all immigration categories) generally performed very well in Australia's booming economy. Just 1.3% of Australia/New Zealand born citizens with bachelor degrees were unemployed at this time, compared to 1.4% holding masters or postgraduate degrees and 1.1% of those

Table 2.2: Australian professional and selected trade workforce (2006) by qualification level and field, birthplace and year of arrival, percentages

Qualification level and field	Australia/ New Zealand born	Overseas-born (a)			Total Number	
		By year of arrival				
		All overseas- born	Pre-1996	1996-2000		
Degree/Higher degree						
Information technology	42.8	57.2	43.9	20.6	35.5	116,548
Engineering	48.3	51.7	57.6	14.1	28.3	159,985
Medicine	54.6	45.4	62.5	12.8	24.8	72,063
Nursing	75.0	25.0	72.6	9.2	18.2	162,318
Accounting	55.7	44.3	50.9	16.4	32.7	141,621
Business/Commerce	60.4	39.6	52.9	16.1	31.0	324,395
Teaching	75.3	24.7	69.5	11.1	19.4	443,241
Law	74.4	25.6	68.3	11.1	20.5	84,545
Building	63.1	36.9	61.0	14.8	24.1	9,005
Food hospitality	49.9	51.7	38.9	21.5	39.5	4,103
Hairdressing	48.3	51.7	60.3	15.5	24.1	242
Other	67.2	32.8	61.4	13.4	25.2	796,900
S/Total	64.9	35.1	59.1	14.2	26.7	2,314,966
Diploma/Advanced Diploma/Certificate IV & III/Other						
Information technology	66.5	33.5	60.5	15.5	23.9	102,210
Engineering	72.0	28.0	77.4	8.3	14.3	365,200
Medicine	62.9	37.1	61.6	13.0	25.4	17,147
Nursing	73.7	26.3	73.5	8.8	17.7	160,160
Accounting	60.3	39.7	68.3	13.0	18.8	100,350
Business/Commerce	75.2	24.8	67.8	11.5	20.6	349,951
Teaching	74.0	26.0	72.0	10.8	17.2	173,817
Law	82.9	17.1	75.6	10.2	14.3	32,978
Building	79.5	20.5	84.8	6.6	8.6	217,473
Food hospitality	77.6	22.4	69.0	12.4	18.6	208,143
Hairdressing	77.0	23.0	75.9	9.6	14.4	155,139
Other	71.0	29.0	74.9	9.7	15.3	9,076,174
S/Total	71.5	28.5	74.4	9.9	15.7	10,958,742

Source: 2006 Census (Australia).

Notes:

Excludes those for whom birthplace or year of arrival is unknown.

a = Due to missing data, imputation and aggregation, numbers may not add up to 100%.

with doctoral level qualifications. When compared with the Australia-born, the unemployment rate for 2001-06 arrivals was 7.5% for those with bachelor degrees, 7.3% for those with masters/ postgraduate degrees, and 4.2% for those with doctorates (See Table 2.3).

Although these data show that recent migrants with degrees were at greater risk of unemployment when compared with Australian/ NZ workers, they had unemployment rates that were historically low. These outcomes are excellent in global terms, and far exceed those achieved in the context of a similar migration program and a highly comparable economic cycle in Canada (Hawthorne 2008; Picot, Hou & Coulombe 2007).

Importantly substantial numbers of recently arrived migrants had secured work in their own or other professional fields in Australia within the first one to five years of arrival. In terms of doctorally qualified migrants employment rates were 42.8% (in own field) and 22.0% (in some other professional field), compared to 21.9% and 9.3% for masters/ postgraduate diploma qualified migrants, and 22.7% and 6.5% for those holding bachelor degrees. Such outcomes are striking - indeed not far short of or similar to the professional employment levels achieved by comparable Australia and New Zealand PhD qualified workers (51.0% and 18.8%). This finding strongly validates the recent Australian government decision to allocate substantial bonus points for this qualification level.

Table 2.3: Labour market outcomes (2006) by qualification level for Australia-born and migrants who arrived in Australia, by period of arrival, percentages

			Employed					Unemployed	NLF (a)	Total Number		
			Professional in own field	Other professional field	Admin/Manager	Associate professional	Trades					
Arrival years	1996-2000	Doctoral degree	39.7	28.7	6.1	9.1	2.4	4.5	90.5	3.3	6.2	2288
		Master Degree/Postgraduate degree	29.0	13.4	13.4	2.6	4.8	23.8	86.9	3.6	9.5	18622
		Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate	35.4	7.3	9.6	2.2	5.0	24.8	84.2	3.8	12.0	3658
		Bachelor degree	27.8	9.0	9.7	1.6	6.7	26.5	81.2	3.7	15.1	49462
		Advanced Diploma and Diploma	13.4	3.7	8.5	1.3	11.2	34.7	72.8	4.8	22.4	19703
		Certificate IV	11.0	4.5	7.9	1.3	9.2	41.5	75.3	5.2	19.5	2087
		Certificate III/Certificate	5.3	2.4	7.5	0.5	26.4	37.0	79.1	4.1	16.8	6459
		Other	14.4	3.4	7.6	0.8	7.6	34.5	68.3	5.3	26.5	7200
	2001-2006	Doctoral degree	42.8	22.0	4.7	8.9	1.3	4.4	84.0	4.2	11.8	3175
		Master Degree/Postgraduate degree	21.9	9.3	8.4	2.2	5.5	28.3	75.6	7.3	17.1	38401
		Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate	28.8	6.5	7.5	1.8	5.0	24.3	73.8	6.7	19.5	4808
		Bachelor degree	22.7	6.5	6.7	1.1	6.1	24.9	68.1	7.5	24.5	93393
		Advanced Diploma and Diploma	14.5	3.0	5.4	0.7	10.1	27.1	60.8	7.4	31.8	35112
		Certificate IV	13.0	3.5	7.7	0.1	12.2	31.5	68.1	6.4	25.5	2530
		Certificate III/Certificate	5.0	2.8	6.0	0.3	32.9	27.8	74.9	6.3	18.8	9246
		Other	16.8	3.7	5.7	0.8	7.1	26.4	60.5	7.2	32.3	12996
Australia/New Zealand born		Doctoral degree	51.0	18.8	10.6	7.2	0.8	3.6	92.0	1.1	7.0	16,834
		Master Degree/Postgraduate degree	36.3	12.0	27.7	3.8	1.8	9.6	91.2	1.4	7.4	101,697
		Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate	48.2	7.3	14.2	2.8	2.3	13.2	88.0	1.3	10.8	123,096
		Bachelor degree	50.1	7.4	12.5	2.1	2.9	13.8	88.7	1.3	10.0	718429
		Advanced Diploma and Diploma	24.7	4.3	12.6	1.5	9.3	31.3	83.7	1.9	14.4	375838
		Certificate IV	14.0	4.2	9.6	1.2	10.6	45.7	85.3	2.9	11.8	108982
		Certificate III/Certificate	3.5	2.6	9.1	0.5	34.0	36.0	85.8	3.0	11.2	315827
		Other	15.9	2.6	8.3	0.9	7.3	41.7	76.6	4.1	19.4	138883

Source: 2006 Census (Australia).

Notes:

Excludes those for whom birthplace or year of arrival is unknown.

a = Not in labourforce/Status unknown

Despite these generally impressive outcomes, it is important to note however that large numbers of recent degree and diploma-qualified arrivals were categorised as ‘not in the labour force’ (NLF) at the time of the 2006 Census, often a proxy for learning more English, or seeking to achieve qualification recognition. The groups most likely to be clustered here were new arrivals with very basic or no qualifications (32.3%), advanced diplomas/ diplomas (31.8%), and certificate IV or equivalent credentials (25.5%). Around a quarter of all bachelor degree qualified migrants were also defined as ‘NLF’ (24.5%). The details are provided in Table 2.3.

The risk of de-skilling or economic marginalisation was far greater for new arrivals than for well-established migrants. Table 2.3 demonstrates that the NLF rate among migrants with doctorates and masters degrees arriving in 2001-2006 was almost double the rate when compared with those arriving in 1996-2000 (at 11.8% and 17.1%, respectively). While not as dramatic, there were also large differences found for those with graduate diplomas or certificates (19.5%) and with bachelor degrees (24.5%). In general 2006 NLF rates for migrants were almost double those of the Australian/New Zealand born. Such patterns suggest that, in addition to those learning more English or seeking further qualification recognition, it may take migrants with skills several years to find work in their field of training.

2.2.4 The risk of de-skilling by birthplace group (2001-06 arrivals)

‘De-skilling’ or ‘skills discounting’ may be defined as occurring when migrants gain employment outcomes well below their formal qualification level, in this study operationalised as qualified migrants employed in sub-professional work (in associate professions, sales, clerical, or manual jobs).

Despite the generally positive outcomes defined above in terms of employment, this problem is serious in select professional fields, with some birthplace groups at far greater risk of de-skilling than others. As demonstrated by Table 2.4 below, the following employed birthplace groups were at greatest risk in Australia: those derived from China, Philippines, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka/ Bangladesh, North Africa/ Middle East etc.

This is of policy relevance, given the prominence of many of these groups in recent skilled migration. While outcomes varied from field to field, China and India are explored as examples below, with results for India qualified professionals by no means the worst found in the Census analysis (Commonwealth-Asian migrants¹⁰ generally being advantaged):

- **China:** 66.5% of recently arrived degree-qualified IT professionals by 2006 were employed in sub-professional work in Australia, along with 85.5% of lawyers, 81.9% of educators, 79.7% of business/commerce graduates, 68.2% of engineers, 63.6% of doctors, 63.6% of accountants, and 22.9% of nurses.
- **India:** 65.0% of degree-qualified IT professionals were employed in sub-professional work in 2006, along with 84.8% of lawyers, 80.3% of business/commerce graduates, 67.6% of accountants, 60.4% of engineers, 58.5% of educators, 15.8% of nurses, and 11.0% of doctors.

¹⁰ This includes the following countries as defined in the Census: Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh

Table 2.4: De-skilling: Proportion of degree qualified Australia and overseas born migrants in sub-professional employment (2006, a), by period of arrival (1996-2006), selected country of birth and professional fields, percentages

	Qualification field	Country of birth																	
		Australia/ New Zealand	UK/Ireland	Other Europe	Vietnam	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	China (excluding Taiwan & Hong Kong)	Hong Kong/Macau	Japan/South Korea	India	Sri Lanka/Bangladesh	Other Southern/Central Asia	Canada	USA	Central/South America	South Africa
Arrived 1996-2000	Information Technology	40.2	54.3	54.3	60.9	49.1	38.8	44.9	54.2	59.7	61.1	54.4	58.2	69.6	35.7	46.4	45.8	35.6	51.0
	Law	35.7	83.3	83.3	88.9	39.0	60.0	19.4	70.2	56.3	67.2	80.6	50.0	100.0	39.5	52.5	92.9	37.7	42.6
	Education	39.7	62.1	62.1	66.4	43.1	81.7	46.2	69.5	56.4	68.0	51.5	54.6	70.1	38.2	43.8	57.8	28.4	39.3
	Medicine	15.0	48.0	48.0	21.1	5.5	42.4	22.6	50.5	15.5	56.3	13.4	9.2	30.4	23.1	18.8	40.0	11.1	14.5
	Nursing	13.8	56.3	56.3	40.0	0.0	29.5	16.2	18.9	9.9	14.3	8.2	11.1	21.4	8.8	8.6	14.3	5.3	8.8
	Accounting	42.2	43.5	43.5	54.0	30.1	70.8	35.7	44.4	44.0	43.6	55.4	45.6	61.0	32.6	45.9	62.0	42.3	40.6
	Business, Commerce	63.5	71.9	71.9	73.9	55.8	87.0	61.2	68.4	61.4	79.0	71.3	74.0	71.5	60.1	68.6	71.9	61.5	70.5
	Engineering	50.6	47.6	47.6	56.7	36.2	72.5	32.2	58.7	36.0	71.3	45.9	39.8	48.2	43.2	48.9	56.9	46.6	44.6
Arrived 2001-2006	Information Technology	38.9	46.4	46.4	66.5	50.3	54.0	40.6	66.5	58.6	61.3	65.0	68.2	59.7	37.5	33.5	36.6	36.5	57.6
	Law	44.7	100.0	100.0	100.0	67.1	76.5	29.6	85.5	33.3	69.4	84.8	85.9	91.4	36.4	60.6	87.7	48.0	50.7
	Education	38.4	90.7	90.7	86.6	40.5	84.9	47.4	81.9	63.6	76.4	58.5	77.8	64.0	33.4	47.5	69.7	29.2	51.9
	Medicine	7.3	61.8	61.8	75.0	3.6	25.0	6.8	63.6	40.0	45.8	15.8	68.2	16.1	28.4	31.3	31.3	13.6	5.9
	Nursing	8.1	66.7	66.7	58.6	15.4	23.4	0.0	22.9	5.6	26.4	11.0	25.0	15.4	10.5	0.0	39.1	6.2	15.9
	Accounting	33.6	52.3	52.3	72.1	37.6	68.2	28.5	63.6	51.7	48.6	67.6	63.3	69.5	44.0	37.0	48.1	38.1	44.5
	Business, Commerce	61.8	82.3	82.3	81.1	66.0	86.0	69.3	79.7	73.7	84.7	80.3	79.9	83.8	58.0	65.8	74.8	62.6	74.0
	Engineering	41.8	56.7	56.7	69.1	46.4	74.5	42.0	68.2	44.0	70.9	60.4	48.2	55.2	30.4	49.1	52.5	34.2	42.3
Australia/NZ	Information Technology	39.4																	
	Law	30.2																	
	Education	28.3																	
	Medicine	39.4																	
	Nursing	18.0																	
	Accounting	35.2																	
	Business, Commerce	64.0																	
	Engineering	40.1																	

Source: 2006 Census (Australia).

Notes:

Excludes those for whom birthplace/year of arrival is unknown.

No totals are provided as the data represent the percentage of cases within each country of birth and qualification field.

a = Sub-professional employment defined as those not working in any of Information technology, Law, Education, Medicine, Nursing, Accounting, Business/Commerce, or Engineering professional fields

As is clear from this analysis, the level of Australian employment demand by field had a powerful impact on employment outcomes during this period. The fields of business/ commerce, accounting, IT and engineering were at this time flooded by new applicants, making it harder for migrants with these qualifications to obtain work at their professional level. By December 2008 this had become a matter of major concern for the Commonwealth government. The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship noted that “in the past three years just five occupations, out of hundreds available, accounted for almost half the visas granted to primary applicants... (in particular delivering) 28,800 accountants” (Evans 2008: 1, 4-7).

For comparative purposes, it should be noted that the risk of de-skilling was far lower for comparably qualified Australians and New Zealanders (many of whom would also have been at or near retirement age). For example, just 39.4% of degree-qualified IT professionals reported being in sub-professional work, along with 30.2% of lawyers, 28.3% of educators, 18.0% of nurses, 39.4% of doctors, 35.2% of accountants, 64.0% of business/commerce graduates, and 40.1% of engineers.

2.2.5 Access to work in ‘own field’ by region of origin

As shown in Table 2.5, select migrant groups were at serious risk of labour market displacement, focused here solely on work outcomes for degree-qualified migrants

Table 2.5: Labour market outcomes for degree-qualified migrants who arrived in Australia in 1996-2006, selected countries, by employment in their own profession, percentages

Country/region of birth (a)	Employment status				Unemployed	NLF (a)	Total Number
	Professional in own field	Other professional field (b)	Admin/Manager	Associate professional			
Australia	48.6	8.0	14.3	2.4	13.0	86.3	1.3
New Zealand	42.4	9.3	15.6	2.9	15.6	85.8	1.8
UK/Eire (Ireland)	42.8	9.5	16.4	2.7	12.1	83.5	1.7
Northern Europe	33.7	11.1	15.3	1.9	14.6	76.6	3.1
Western Europe	36.9	9.0	14.5	3.0	13.4	76.8	2.6
South Eastern Europe	36.2	10.1	11.2	2.6	19.5	79.5	3.0
Eastern Europe	31.3	10.7	8.9	2.3	20.8	74.1	4.1
Viet Nam	33.4	11.5	7.3	3.0	21.1	76.2	3.9
Indonesia	19.5	8.6	6.5	1.6	32.2	68.5	5.3
Malaysia	39.1	12.0	10.3	1.7	16.6	79.7	3.3
Philippines	22.0	6.7	4.7	1.0	39.9	74.3	3.2
Singapore	36.0	11.7	10.8	2.2	16.3	76.9	3.3
China (Not SARs/Taiwan)	17.8	9.1	7.2	1.8	26.7	62.6	7.9
Hong Kong/Macau	33.8	14.2	8.2	2.4	18.5	77.1	4.1
Japan/South Korea	17.4	6.5	9.5	3.4	21.5	58.4	4.9
India	24.8	9.5	8.4	1.2	32.0	76.0	5.9
Sri Lanka/Bangladesh	33.7	10.5	8.8	1.4	25.4	79.7	4.6
Remainder of Southern and Central Asia	23.3	7.9	6.5	1.1	29.1	67.9	6.2
Canada	39.4	10.1	15.0	2.9	13.1	80.5	2.3
USA	33.5	10.0	15.7	4.1	14.2	77.4	2.8
South/Central America	30.1	8.7	9.6	2.7	24.3	75.6	4.1
South Africa	44.2	9.9	18.1	2.3	11.6	86.1	2.0
Remainder of Africa (Sub-Saharan)	39.0	9.5	13.0	2.3	18.9	82.7	3.3
North Africa/Middle East	27.5	8.2	10.5	2.7	18.8	67.6	5.8
Other	37.0	7.8	10.4	2.4	18.1	75.7	3.2

Source: 2006 Census (Australia).

Notes:

Excludes those for whom birthplace or year of arrival is unknown.

a = Not in labourforce or status unknown

b = Other-professional employment defined as those working in any of Information technology, Law, Education, Medicine, Nursing, Accounting, Business/Commerce, or Engineering professional fields but not in their own profession

c = Includes those working in any employed position

within their first 1-10 years after arrival. Those most likely to secure immediate employment in their own profession were from South Africa (44.2%), New Zealand (42.4%), UK/Ireland (42.8%), and Canada (39.4%) compared to the Australian norm (48.6%). Such migrants are mainly from English speaking countries, and it can be assumed that they have high levels of English language proficiency. They also performed well in terms of access to other professions, or to managerial/administrative level positions.

By contrast the following groups had achieved very low access to their professional fields in the first 1-10 years in Australia: Japan/South Korea (17.4%), China (17.8%), Indonesia (19.5%), the Philippines (22.0%), and India (24.8%). This is a matter of serious concern, given the scale of recent migration from these countries, including the arrival of 49,283 degree-qualified migrants from India, 46,504 from China, and 28,899 from the Philippines from 2001 to 2006. Large numbers of these birthplace groups had secured work only in low-skilled positions by 2006, or were defined as 'not in the labour force'.

The introduction of a direct pathway for international students into skilled migration from 1999 was intended to address these disparities, by attracting young migrants with locally recognised qualifications and, it was hoped, superior English language skills. The LSIA analysis to be reported shortly examined the degree of 'protection' conferred by points-based selection, and (in the case of former international students) possession of an Australian qualification (see section 2.6 below).

2.3 Differential employment outcomes for recent migrants by select field

2.3.1 Outcomes in key Australian professions

The employment differences for recent migrants with credentials are illustrated below for key professions, in relation to both the highest and lowest achieving recent immigrant groups, with engineering, medicine and accounting taken as examples. Once again, 2006 Census data are used for this analysis (with all immigration categories included).

2.3.1.1 Engineering

First, Table 2.6 provides a detailed analysis of outcomes in engineering for 2001-2006 degree qualified arrivals. When compared with the employment rate of Australian/New Zealand born engineers, *all* migrant engineers were less likely to be employed in their own profession. Countries with relatively good outcomes however were Canada (34.6% of engineers working in their own profession within 5 years of arrival), Singapore (32.0%), South Africa (29.8%) and the UK/Ireland (29.3%). These were migrants from predominantly English-speaking countries.

Migrants from many other countries had achieved weak employment outcomes – most notably those from Indonesia (0.0% working in own profession), Malaysia (9.8%), China (1.6%), India (1.8%), South/Central America (2.9%) and North Africa/Middle East (1.4%). Each of these countries had double the proportion of engineers working in low-skilled occupations when compared with the Australia /New Zealand engineering population (proportions ranging from 28.2% for Malaysian engineers to 46.6% for those from South/Central America). Engineers from identical countries also reported high rates of unemployment (e.g. ranging from 8.6% for Malaysia to 23.9% for India) and 'not in the labour force' (e.g. ranging from 27.6% for India to 49.3% for engineers from the North Africa/Middle East).

Table 2.6: Engineering: Labour market outcomes (2006) for degree-qualified Australia-born and migrants by date of arrival (2001-2006) by birth country, percentages (a)

Birth Country	Employment status					Unemployed	NLF (b)	Total Number	
	Professional in own field	Other professional field (c)	Admin/Manager	Associate professional	Low skilled/Other (d)				
Australia/New Zealand (e)	53.8	9.7	7.6	1.9	17.8	90.8	1.4	7.7	62940
UK/Ire (Ireland)	29.3	17.5	7.6	2.6	27.7	84.7	2.9	12.4	887
Northern Europe		20.0			40.0	60.0		40.0	30
Western Europe	13.0	12.2	9.1	2.6	24.3	61.3	9.6	29.1	230
South Eastern Europe	4.4		4.4		45.6	54.4	8.8	36.8	68
Eastern Europe	5.5	2.7	2.7	2.7	41.8	55.5	11.8	32.7	110
Viet Nam				8.3	13.9	22.2	16.7	61.1	36
Indonesia				4.4	2.2	33.8	40.4	12.5	136
Malaysia	9.8	6.1	4.3		28.2	48.5	8.6	42.9	163
Philippines	14.3			5.4	41.1	60.7	10.7	28.6	56
Singapore	32.0	6.0		4.0	12.0	54.0		46.0	100
China (Not SARs/Taiwan)	1.6	4.1	3.7	1.4	28.5	39.3	11.9	48.9	438
Hong Kong/Macau	23.1				11.5	34.6	11.5	53.8	26
Japan/South Korea	7.2	11.0	16.3	2.3	22.7	59.5	6.8	33.7	264
India	1.8	5.5			41.1	48.5	23.9	27.6	163
Sri Lanka/Bangladesh	9.4				57.3	66.7	10.4	22.9	96
Remainder of Southern and Central Asia	5.3				56.1	61.4		38.6	57
Canada	34.6	5.8	11.5		11.5	63.5	21.2	15.4	52
USA	19.0	6.5	15.0	7.8	16.3	64.7	7.8	27.5	153
South/Central America	2.9	4.8	3.8	4.3	46.6	62.5	8.7	28.8	208
South Africa	29.8	15.4	20.0	2.1	19.6	87.0	1.1	11.9	285
Remainder of Africa (Sub-Saharan)	22.1	10.6	4.4	2.7	26.5	66.4	7.1	26.5	113
North Africa/Middle East	1.4	6.3	5.3	2.9	23.2	39.1	11.6	49.3	207
Other	15.3	4.4	1.5	4.4	34.0	59.6	4.4	36.0	203

Source: 2006 Census (Australia).

Notes:

a = Excludes those for whom birthplace or year of arrival is unknown.

a = Many of the cells are based on very small numbers, therefore the results should be regarded as indicative only. Empty cells are where there are insufficient cases for reliable reporting and issues of confidentiality.

b = Not in labourforce or status unknown

c = Other-professional employment defined as those working in any of Information technology, Law, Education, Medicine, Nursing, Accounting, Business/Commerce, or Engineering professional fields but not in their own profession

d = Trades, clerical, sales, personal services, production, technical fields, labourers and work not stated

e = Those born in New Zealand, and who migrate to Australia are not counted as migrants to Australia, although there is substantial two-way population movement between the two countries. Close to 10,000 degree-qualified New Zealanders reached Australia between 1996 and 2001. This movement is reflected in the table, given New Zealanders' important contribution to Australia's skilled workforce

2.3.1.2 Medicine

Stark differences were similarly evident in relation to recent employment outcomes in the field of medicine (see Table 2.7), despite Australia's problems of workforce maldistribution and undersupply favouring migrants' labour market integration¹¹ (Hawthorne, Hawthorne & Crotty 2007).

Non-Commonwealth Asian professionals were the least likely to gain medical work in Australia (just 8.9% of recently arrived Chinese doctors and 8.7% of Indonesians). This compared to 30.3% of doctors from Eastern Europe, 48.3% from the

¹¹ In the past decade an unprecedented number of temporary and permanent resident migrants holding medical qualifications have secured Australian medical employment in 'areas of need' where Australian qualified doctors prefer not to work. Most do so on a conditionally registered basis, prior to securing full qualifications recognition through the Australian Medical Council. By 2008 Australia was importing around 6,500 international medical graduates per year, the great majority temporary residents who would work on this basis. See Hawthorne, Hawthorne & Crotty (2007) for the most detailed analysis to date of this phenomenon. Australia has established 6 new medical schools in addition to a range of rural medical schools in the past decade to address the problem of workforce undersupply and maldistribution.

Table 2.7: Medicine: Labour market outcomes (2006) for degree-qualified Australia-born and migrants by date of arrival (2001=2006) by birth country, percentages (a)

Birth Country	Employment status					Unemployed	NLF (b)	Total Number	
	Professional in own field	Other professional field (c)	Admin/Manager	Associate professional	Low skilled/Other (d)				
Australia/New Zealand (e)	61.9	10.5	4.4	7.3	9.3	93.4	0.7	6.1	39382
UK/Ire (Ireland)	74.6	9.3	1.9	1.5	3.3	90.5	0.3	9.3	1027
Northern Europe	56.8				10.8	67.6		32.4	37
Western Europe	65.7	8.7	3.6	3.9	2.7	84.5	2.7	12.8	335
South Eastern Europe	52.3	4.7		2.3	17.2	76.6	4.7	18.8	128
Eastern Europe	30.3	7.9	1.8	1.8	18.2	60.0	9.7	30.3	165
Viet Nam	19.4			13.4	13.4	50.7	4.5	44.8	67
Indonesia	8.7				26.1	34.8	14.5	50.7	69
Malaysia	67.4	4.0		1.3	1.3	74.1	2.7	23.2	224
Philippines	48.3	10.3	1.1	3.4	14.9	78.2	4.6	17.2	261
Singapore	58.3	10.0			5.0	73.3	5.0	21.7	60
China (Not SARs/Taiwan)	8.9	12.2	1.0	7.0	28.8	58.0	9.1	32.9	583
Hong Kong/Macau	38.5	7.7		15.4	15.4	76.9		23.1	39
Japan/South Korea	20.4	6.1	4.1	9.2	9.2	49.0	6.1	44.9	98
India	63.3	1.5	0.2	2.7	9.2	77.0	7.5	15.5	1383
Sri Lanka/Bangladesh	58.7	2.6		2.6	11.9	75.8	7.1	17.1	690
Remainder of Southern and Central Asia	47.0	2.4			9.4	58.8	7.6	33.6	381
Canada	54.3	3.3	3.3	6.5	13.0	80.4		19.6	92
USA	46.0			8.0	13.0	67.0	3.0	30.0	100
South/Central America	40.3	7.6	2.5		19.3	69.7	10.1	20.2	119
South Africa	78.2	5.3	3.2	6.9	3.0	96.6	1.2	2.2	495
Remainder of Africa (Sub-Saharan)	77.6	1.8		2.1	2.9	84.4	6.2	9.4	340
North Africa/Middle East	49.6	5.3		2.1	6.0	63.1	8.8	28.1	566
Other	55.4	4.7	1.6	6.1	9.2	77.0	1.8	21.1	379

Source: 2006 Census (Australia).

Notes:

Excludes those for whom birthplace or year of arrival is unknown.

a = Many of the cells are based on very small numbers, therefore the results should be regarded as indicative only. Empty cells are where there are insufficient cases for reliable reporting and issues of confidentiality.

b = Not in labourforce or status unknown

c = Other-professional employment defined as those working in any of Information technology, Law, Education, Medicine, Nursing, Accounting, Business/Commerce, or Engineering professional fields but not in their own profession

d = Trades, clerical, sales, personal services, production, technical fields, labourers and work not stated

e = Those born in New Zealand, and who migrate to Australia are not counted as migrants to Australia, although there is substantial two-way population movement between the two countries. Close to 10,000 degree-qualified New Zealanders reached Australia between 1996 and 2001. This movement is reflected in the table, given New Zealanders' important contribution to Australia's skilled workforce

Philippines, 49.6% from North Africa/ Middle East, 63.3% from India, 67.4% from Malaysia, 74.6% from the UK/Ireland and 78.2% from South Africa.

2.3.1.3 Accounting

Large numbers of recently arrived degree-qualified accountants also fared poorly in Australia (Table 2.8). This is a highly relevant field as we shall see shortly for former international students. By 2006 less than 25% of accountants from China, India, Sri Lanka/ Bangladesh, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Remainder of Southern & Central Asia, and North Africa/ Middle East countries had found work in their own profession, despite no formal English requirements being imposed, and accounting in theory being an unregulated profession (hence reducing qualification recognition barriers; see Hawthorne 2008). The migrant groups most likely to be successful finding accounting or other professional work once again were derived from the UK/ Ireland, Western Europe, Northern Europe, Southern Europe and South Africa – in other words OECD countries with highly developed economies directly comparable to Australia's.

Table 2.8: Accounting: Labour market outcomes (2006) for degree-qualified Australia-born and migrants by date of arrival (2001-2006) by birth country, percentages (a)

Birth Country	Employment status					Unemployed	NLF (b)	Total Number	
	Professional in own field	Other professional field (c)	Admin/Manager	Associate professional	Low skilled/Other (d)	S/Total			
Australia/New Zealand (e)	51.1	8.3	18.3	0.5	13.0	91.2	1.1	7.1	78863
UK/Ire (Ireland)	53.2	7.7	22.9	0.2	7.7	91.7	1.9	6.4	1288
Northern Europe	44.1	8.8			17.6	70.6		29.4	34
Western Europe	48.5	4.6	15.4		13.8	82.3	4.6	13.1	130
South Eastern Europe	46.2				27.7	73.8	13.8	12.3	65
Eastern Europe	38.6	4.1		1.5	32.5	76.6	7.1	16.2	197
Viet Nam	25.4	1.6			29.6	56.6	14.8	28.6	189
Indonesia	15.9	3.3	1.4	0.7	47.7	69.0	6.6	24.4	900
Malaysia	43.9	4.7	8.4	0.3	20.6	77.8	6.5	15.7	1001
Philippines	20.3	3.1	3.0		47.3	73.8	8.9	17.3	900
Singapore	46.0	9.4	4.6		17.5	77.4	5.6	16.9	372
China (Not SARs/Taiwan)	21.0	2.5	2.4	0.3	38.2	64.3	11.4	24.3	4782
Hong Kong/Macau	28.4	4.1	2.3		32.4	67.1	11.4	21.5	395
Japan/South Korea	28.0	3.0	1.0	1.3	27.0	60.2	13.8	26.0	304
India	21.1	3.9	4.2	0.4	47.4	76.9	8.5	14.6	4067
Sri Lanka/Bangladesh	24.1	5.2	4.0		46.5	79.9	6.7	13.4	1115
Remainder of Southern and Central Asia	21.9	0.9	2.0		49.7	74.4	8.8	16.8	352
Canada	39.3	10.7	17.9		21.4	89.3	3.6	7.1	84
USA	45.7	3.5	16.8		12.1	78.0	1.7	20.2	173
South/Central America	36.2	3.7	7.0	1.1	28.8	76.8	5.9	17.3	271
South Africa	47.7	8.6	24.4	0.3	9.9	90.9	1.7	7.4	946
Remainder of Africa (Sub-Saharan)	43.3	5.8	13.7	0.5	25.3	88.6	2.6	8.9	586
North Africa/Middle East	13.8	3.1	5.3	0.6	30.3	53.2	14.5	32.4	491
Other	30.4	3.4	5.2	0.7	28.7	68.4	7.1	24.5	871

Source: 2006 Census (Australia).

Notes:

Excludes those for whom birthplace or year of arrival is unknown.

a = Many of the cells are based on very small numbers, therefore the results should be regarded as indicative only. Empty cells are where there are insufficient cases for reliable reporting and issues of confidentiality.

b = Not in labourforce or status unknown

c = Other-professional employment defined as those working in any of Information technology, Law, Education, Medicine, Nursing, Accounting, Business/Commerce, or Engineering professional fields but not in their own profession

d = Trades, clerical, sales, personal services, production, technical fields, labourers and work not stated

e = Those born in New Zealand, and who migrate to Australia are not counted as migrants to Australia, although there is substantial two-way population movement between the two countries. Close to 10,000 degree-qualified New Zealanders reached Australia between 1996 and 2001. This movement is reflected in the table, given New Zealanders' important contribution to Australia's skilled workforce

2.3.2 Outcomes for key Australian trades

The examination of employment outcomes for select migrant professions was replicated for the trades of interest to the present study (building, food/hospitality and hairdressing), given the recent international student attraction to courses in these fields. (See 2.5.3.) The overview results are presented in Table 2.9, followed by a detailed analysis of food/hospitality employment outcomes in Table 2.10 based on 2006 Census data.

As demonstrated in Table 2.9 a very high proportion of migrant tradespersons were working in *other* employment fields in Australia by 2006, particularly 2001-06 arrivals qualified in the building trades. 42.5% of UK builders, for example, were employed within their own field compared to just 3.6% of migrants from China, 4.0% from India, 4.8% from the Philippines and 13.6% from Indonesia. Rates were higher for trade-qualified migrants in food/ hospitality, despite overall employment levels remaining low (27.7% for recent UK/ Ireland arrivals, compared to 36.5% from India, 16.8% from the Philippines, and 12.7% from China). Hairdressers had a far more direct

translation to Australian work - employment rates in that field for recent arrivals being an impressive 100.0% for hairdressers from India, 83.3% from the Philippines, 82.4% from the UK/ Ireland, and 80.0% from Indonesia – the key exception in this trade being China (25.5%). Indeed far higher proportions of qualified tradespersons worked in hairdressing (79.2%) than in either the building (33.1%) or the food/hospitality industries (22.3%).

Table 2.10 provides a more detailed examination of employment outcomes for food/ hospitality workers, as a trades case study. 35.3% of food/ hospitality workers from Australia/ New Zealand were employed in their own trade, compared to 33.6% in other low skilled positions (e.g. clerical or labouring work). Migrants, regardless of country of origin, were in fact more likely to work in this sector than locals, given its status as one traditionally dominated by overseas-born workers. Countries with particularly high levels of food/ hospitality qualified workers employed in their own field were Canada (64.6%), Western Europe (55.9%), Sri Lanka/Bangladesh (53.3%), and the Remainder of Southern and Central Asia (50.0%). Countries by contrast with relatively poor outcomes (defined here as a high proportion of tradespersons employed in lower level positions) were Vietnam (38.0%), the Remainder of Southern and Central Asia (36.0%), and South/Central America (33.9%).

Table 2.9: Trade employment outcomes for migrants who arrived 2001-2006, by selected countries, by selected trade fields, percentages

Selected country of birth	Employment status	Selected trades, percentages			Total number
		Building	Food/Hospitality	Hairdressing	
New Zealand	Tradesperson in own field	30.6	24.3	79.4	1705
	Other trade field (a)	1.3	1.8	0.0	90
	Other status (b)	68.2	73.9	20.6	4035
UK/Ireland	Tradesperson in own field	42.5	27.7	82.4	2886
	Other trade field (a)	0.6	2.2	0.0	89
	Other status (b)	56.9	70.1	17.6	4325
Indonesia	Tradesperson in own field	13.6	15.8	80.0	123
	Other trade field (a)	0.0	0.9	0.0	6
	Other status (b)	86.4	83.3	20.0	591
Philippines	Tradesperson in own field	4.8	16.8	83.3	104
	Other trade field (a)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0
	Other status (b)	95.2	83.2	16.7	505
China	Tradesperson in own field	3.6	12.7	25.5	413
	Other trade field (a)	2.2	0.9	0.0	35
	Other status (b)	94.2	86.4	74.5	3037
India	Tradesperson in own field	4.0	36.5	100.0	432
	Other trade field (a)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0
	Other status (b)	96.0	63.5	0.0	859
Canada	Tradesperson in own field	25.3	17.2	70.0	82
	Other trade field (a)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0
	Other status (b)	74.7	82.8	30.0	323
South Africa	Tradesperson in own field	9.5	16.9	86.4	180
	Other trade field (a)	0.0	1.1	0.0	6
	Other status (b)	90.5	82.0	13.6	761
Total	Tradesperson in own field	33.1	22.3	79.2	5925
	Other trade field (a)	0.8	1.3	0.0	226
	Other status (b)	66.0	76.4	20.8	14436

Source: 2006 Census (Australia).

Notes:

Excludes those for whom birthplace or year of arrival is unknown.

a = Other-trade employment defined as those working in any other trade fields but not in their own

b = Includes those working in any other employed position, unemployed, not in the labourforce or status unknown

Table 2.10: Food hospitality: Labour market outcomes (2006) for Australia-born and migrants by date of arrival (2001-2006) by birth country, percentages (a)

Birth Country	Employment status					Unemployed	NLF (b)	Total Number		
	Tradesperson in own field	Other trade field (c)	Professional (d)	Admin/Manager	Associate professional	Low skilled/Other (e)	S/Total			
Australia/New Zealand (f)	35.3	3.2	2.0	6.3	0.4	33.6	80.8	4.7	14.5	163510
UK/Ire (Ireland)	46.4	2.4	2.6	5.5	0.9	22.8	80.7	5.8	13.6	1510
Northern Europe	25.6		7.3			26.8	59.8	7.3	32.9	82
Western Europe	55.9	1.2	4.7	6.7		14.0	82.4	3.0	14.6	494
South Eastern Europe	21.6	8.6		2.4		31.0	63.5	4.7	31.8	255
Eastern Europe	44.8	4.9	1.6	1.6		21.3	74.3	1.6	24.0	183
Viet Nam	40.8	4.2				38.0	83.1	4.2	12.7	71
Indonesia	38.9	1.1				23.3	63.3	12.4	24.4	283
Malaysia	49.8			1.3		13.4	64.5	10.8	24.7	231
Philippines	42.0		1.7	5.1		29.5	78.4	1.7	19.9	176
Singapore	35.5			2.5		17.4	55.4	5.0	39.7	121
China (Not SARs/Taiwan)	39.3	1.3	0.7	0.3		30.1	71.7	6.4	21.9	895
Hong Kong/Macau	39.6			1.8		14.2	55.6	1.8	42.6	169
Japan/South Korea	41.4	0.5	1.1	0.9		17.1	61.0	6.1	32.9	638
India	47.3	0.3	0.6	2.0		27.0	77.2	6.4	16.4	984
Sri Lanka/Bangladesh	53.3	0.9		0.9		24.0	79.0	7.7	13.3	338
Remainder of Southern/Central Asia	50.0					36.0	86.0	9.0	5.0	100
Canada	64.6	3.7				15.9	84.1	3.7	12.2	82
USA	37.5			11.3	3.8	16.3	68.8	7.5	23.8	80
South/Central America	41.3	3.2	1.6	1.6	1.6	33.9	83.1	4.2	12.7	189
South Africa	42.9	1.6	4.8	10.6	1.6	23.3	84.7		15.3	189
Remainder of Africa (Sub-Saharan)	41.0	1.1	3.0		1.1	28.0	74.3	10.4	15.3	268
North Africa/Middle East	40.2	6.4		2.4		17.1	66.1	7.2	26.7	251
Other	47.7	0.8		1.8		22.4	72.7	7.4	19.9	733

Source: 2006 Census (Australia).

Notes:

a = Excludes those for whom birthplace or year of arrival is unknown.

a = Many of the cells are based on very small numbers, therefore the results should be regarded as indicative only. Empty cells are where there are insufficient cases for reliable reporting and issues of confidentiality.

b = Not in labourforce or status

c = Working in another trade

d = Professional employment defined as those working in any of Information technology, Law, Education, Medicine, Nursing, Accounting, Business/Commerce, or Engineering professional fields

e = Clerical, sales, personal services, production, technical fields, labourers and work not stated

f = Those born in New Zealand, and who migrate to Australia are not counted as migrants to Australia, although there is substantial two-way population movement between the two countries. Close to 10,000 degree-qualified New Zealanders reached Australia between 1996 and 2001. This movement is reflected in the table, given New Zealanders' important contribution to Australia's skilled workforce

Finally, Table 2.10 presents the proportion of recent trade-qualified migrants who were unemployed or not in the labour force in food/ hospitality. Countries with particularly high rates of unemployed tradespersons were Indonesia (12.4%), Malaysia (10.8%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (10.4%). Countries with very low rates of unemployment were South Africa (0.0%), Eastern Europe (1.6%), Philippines (1.7%) and Hong Kong/Macau (1.8%).

Recently arrived migrants from Hong Kong/Macau (42.6%), Singapore (39.7%), Northern Europe (32.9%), and South Eastern Europe (31.8%) were particularly likely to be 'not in the labour force' by 2006. In sum, trade qualifications (except in hairdressing) were unlikely to translate to Australian trade-sector employment. As demonstrated in chapter 6, this was also deemed to be the case for trade-qualified former students. It is important to establish this fact given the recent prominence of trade fields in the skilled migration program, and VET sector courses' attraction to international students (see 2.5).

2.4 Discussion of employment outcomes for selected fields (2006 Census)

2.4.1 Case study: Employment access in a profession compared to a trade

Tables 2.6 and 2.10 provide greater detail in relation to the engineering and food/hospitality fields, by major birthplace. This allows analysis of the extent to which select migrant groups find work in their qualified field in the first 5 years post-arrival, secure de-skilled employment, fail to find any work or are not in the workforce. By definition, as noted earlier, 2006 Census data includes all immigration categories.

Comparison of a major profession with a trade suggests that far higher proportions of migrants with food/hospitality qualifications get work in their field than do professionally qualified engineers. In general, higher proportions of migrant engineers are not in the labour-force; they experienced greater levels of unemployment; they were more likely to be working in de-skilled positions, and they were less likely to be able to obtain work in their own professional field when compared with both Australian/New Zealand born engineers and with migrant food/hospitality tradespersons.

Comparable findings were evident in the other professions. These outcomes are policy relevant. They suggest that barriers related to credential recognition and English language ability for new migrants may be *less* prevalent in Australia in the trades, a finding to be tested later in this chapter through the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia data analysis.

2.4.2 The relevance of the 2006 Census data to the current study

While employment disadvantage generally diminishes over time, as demonstrated by Table 2.3, initial barriers for migrant professionals can be associated with long-term labour market exclusion. Such risks are particularly serious for migrants qualified in the fields of education, accounting and the law (data shown for degree qualified migrants from all periods of arrival, see Table 2.4). The barriers to immediate professional work however are most extreme for young recently qualified graduates – the group of interest to the present study.

Having established the relatively poor professional outcomes achieved in Australia by new migrant graduates (all immigration categories), the statistical analysis in section 2.6 examines work access post-migration solely for skilled category points-tested principal applicants (PA's). In particular, it assesses the extent to which superior outcomes are achieved in Australia by young *onshore* compared to *offshore* independent applicants, in a context where onshore migrants are mostly former international students.

What is the relevance of the 2006 Census data just described to this analysis? Put simply, the Census provides essential control data. It provides the typical employment rates achieved by degree or diploma qualified migrants in their first 5 years of settlement of Australia. In addition, it identifies the differential outcomes achieved by select birthplace and occupational groups (such as new migrants from China). These Census findings will be returned to for comparative purposes in 2.6, in order to demonstrate the superior overall results enjoyed by points-tested skilled category migrants at 6 and 18 months post-arrival (both onshore and offshore principal applicants). In terms of former international students, in particular, the Census allowed the authors to define the level of ‘protection’ afforded by possession of an Australian diploma or degree for groups (such as young migrants from China) who might otherwise be highly disadvantaged.

2.5 Australian Education International data: Enrolment trends

2.5.1 International student enrolments 2002-2008 by field and sector

To contextualise the following analysis, it is important first to provide brief detail on recent trends in international student enrolments in Australia, defined from January 2002 to June 2008 for trade and professional courses offered by the higher education and VET sectors.

As demonstrated by Table 2.11, growth in demand has accelerated rapidly in the recent period for VET sector courses (in particular attracting 11,551 food/ hospitality students and 6,514 hairdressing students to diploma/ certificate courses in the year to June 2008 – a striking development). New enrolments remained greatest however in the first 6 months of 2008 for university courses in business/ commerce (48,922 enrolments), accounting (20,210), IT (13,528) and engineering (11,052), creating a risk of over-supply in these fields for newly graduated, minimally experienced young applicants.

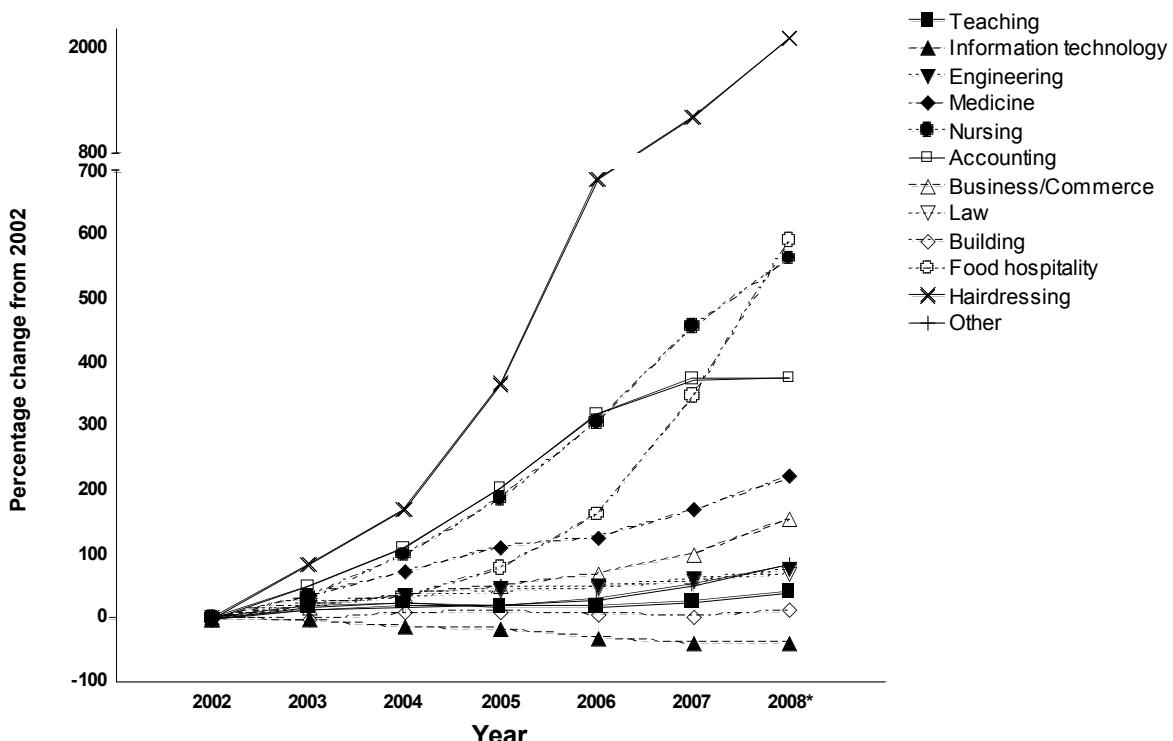
Table 2.11: Growth in new international student enrolments in Australian education institutions, 2002-June 2008, by field of qualification, qualification level, percentages

	Year of commencement						
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008*
Degree/higher degree							
Information technology	19061	20581	20207	20681	17511	14596	13528
Engineering	6991	8050	9532	10203	10146	10455	11052
Medicine	469	590	768	944	1053	1270	1524
Nursing	1006	1280	1780	2464	3481	4519	5363
Accounting	4187	6528	9347	13648	18775	20615	20210
Business/Commerce	29068	34423	39430	43036	45111	46341	48922
Teaching	2948	3671	4416	5103	5503	5702	5796
Law	1125	1383	1505	1616	1686	1811	1941
Building	394	406	442	433	399	367	331
Food hospitality	541	788	1145	1342	1392	1428	1506
Hairdressing	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
Other	27471	32554	36402	38387	38962	39206	40106
Diploma/Advanced Diploma/Certificate IV & III							
Information technology	11013	8564	5863	4537	3742	4022	5006
Engineering	546	709	869	969	1130	1578	2082
Medicine	48	118	143	165	143	151	175
Nursing	71	172	372	596	781	1317	1718
Accounting	988	1206	1470	2096	2980	3943	4455
Business/Commerce	14316	17253	20057	23017	28838	41269	62351
Teaching	1699	2294	2310	2588	3188	3477	4108
Law	16	11	10	8	6	9	15
Building	71	65	83	101	118	124	201
Food hospitality	1264	1498	1329	1962	3482	7020	11551
Hairdressing	272	523	773	1360	2319	3887	6514
Other	9871	11375	11761	12041	12992	17965	25917
Other							
Information technology	538	496	401	236	161	190	237
Engineering	148	130	165	222	239	336	344
Medicine	11	4	0	13	1	0	0
Nursing	15	7	24	82	187	255	167
Accounting	1	2	0	1	0	0	0
Business/Commerce	909	950	944	1004	1177	1418	1890
Teaching	25232	29441	30080	27759	26863	28362	31853
Law	8	7	11	12	4	0	0
Building	18	0	1	0	1	10	9
Food hospitality	122	119	106	134	171	177	285
Hairdressing	24	21	29	26	17	12	9
Other	44126	47402	48266	47955	53733	67157	83466
Total	204589	232621	250041	264741	286293	328990	392632

* = To June 2008

Source: International Research and Analysis Unit, Australian Education International, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Figure 2.1: Cumulative changes in new enrolments by international students, 2002-June 2008, by field of education (any level), cumulative percentage changes compared with 2002 new enrolments



Source: International Research and Analysis Unit, Australian Education International,
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Recent enrolment trends are summarised in Figure 2.1, which shows the strength of recent expansion in select VET sector (e.g. hairdressing, food/ hospitality) and professional courses (nursing and accounting), along with progressive decline in demand for IT.

2.5.2 International student enrolments 2002-2008 by source country and sector

As previously noted, China and India now dominate international student enrolments to Australia, with China the source of 93,387 students by June 2008 (markedly higher if Hong Kong SAR is included – an additional 15,500 students by June 2008), compared to 65,377 from India. (The comparable numbers for 2002 were 33,735 and 8,574.)

While many other student source countries were relatively small, rapid growth was often evident – for example enrolments from Vietnam surging from 3,258 to 10,695 in the 2002-2008 period. Similar growth was also experienced from South/ Central America, with enrolments rising from 5,547 to 18,654 in Australia (the great majority of students enrolled in ELICOS¹² sector courses). The three countries/regions with declining student numbers were Indonesia (dropping from 16,797 to 11,929), Singapore (from 10,186 to 7,466 students in the 2002-08 period) and the Other category (from 9,744 to 8,556). Full details are provided in Table 2.12.

Given the scale of Chinese and Indian student enrolments, these students will be the primary focus in section 2.6 when comparing labour market outcomes for recent skilled migrants, based on the LSIA 3 and 2006 Census data analysis.

¹² English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students

Table 2.12: International student new enrolments (2002-June 2008) in Australian education institutions, by year, qualification level, and country/region of birth, numbers

Country/Region of birth	Qualification level	Year						
		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
UK/Eire (Ireland)	Degree/Higher degree	1507	1745	1938	1957	1946	1884	1823
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	748	875	892	1022	1183	1390	1600
	Other	536	622	640	625	615	682	707
	S/Total	2791	3242	3470	3604	3744	3956	4130
Europe	Degree/Higher degree	7257	8068	8056	7481	7063	6780	6417
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	3880	4679	4787	4544	4780	5145	5290
	Other	6648	7269	6757	6766	6914	7487	8174
	S/Total	17785	20016	19600	18791	18757	19412	19881
Viet Nam	Degree/Higher degree	1397	1709	1833	2053	2165	2445	3087
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	928	627	568	672	810	1291	2529
	Other	933	922	1136	1376	1874	2865	5079
	S/Total	3258	3258	3537	4101	4849	6601	10695
Indonesia	Degree/Higher degree	9689	9665	9073	8295	7561	6733	6251
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	4026	3773	3312	2845	2761	3097	3733
	Other	3082	3018	2531	2124	1778	1738	1945
	S/Total	16797	16456	14916	13264	12100	11568	11929
Malaysia	Degree/Higher degree	11552	13392	14214	13907	13321	13423	13892
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	1520	1816	1698	1700	1825	2139	2437
	Other	1685	1909	1705	1564	1595	1592	1752
	S/Total	14757	17117	17617	17171	16741	17154	18081
Philippines	Degree/Higher degree	351	370	397	433	494	531	611
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	341	264	219	320	507	770	1117
	Other	112	100	101	118	125	132	218
	S/Total	804	734	717	871	1126	1433	1946
Singapore	Degree/Higher degree	8906	8977	8232	7446	6964	6392	6406
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	543	586	565	547	494	500	501
	Other	737	794	804	769	631	615	559
	S/Total	10186	10357	9601	8762	8089	7507	7466
China (Not SARs/Taiwan)	Degree/Higher degree	11823	17356	24151	32787	38849	40047	41812
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	3988	6379	8494	10503	11292	14267	18808
	Other	17924	20054	21175	19691	19148	24149	32767
	S/Total	33735	43789	53820	62981	69289	78463	93387
Hong Kong/Macau	Degree/Higher degree	7043	8732	9781	9745	8888	8117	7837
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	4269	4821	4542	4033	3966	4074	4023
	Other	5271	5404	4500	3894	3847	3930	3640
	S/Total	16583	18957	18823	17672	16701	16121	15500
Japan/South Korea	Degree/Higher degree	5271	6155	7010	7609	7788	7893	7893
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	6690	6438	6373	7069	8312	9238	10006
	Other	15772	18623	20208	19591	20872	21910	19978
	S/Total	27733	31216	33591	34269	36972	39041	37877
India	Degree/Higher degree	6575	8334	12270	17084	19396	20497	21111
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	1827	1180	1013	1979	5662	16971	36045
	Other	172	293	779	713	1456	4717	8221
	S/Total	8574	9807	14062	19776	26514	42185	65377
Sri Lanka/Bangladesh	Degree/Higher degree	3225	3807	4337	4803	4883	4912	4692
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	1596	1594	1998	2684	3459	4832	5976
	Other	294	610	922	923	868	1182	1054
	S/Total	5115	6011	7257	8410	9210	10926	11722
Remainder of Southern and Central Asia	Degree/Higher degree	6340	6905	7005	6705	6582	7694	8680
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	3722	4240	4107	4550	5879	9667	17117
	Other	5239	5312	4779	4662	5208	6301	7856
	S/Total	15301	16457	15891	15917	17669	23662	33653
Canada	Degree/Higher degree	1190	1638	1983	2309	2536	2773	3021
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	215	259	302	325	437	418	381
	Other	485	526	616	594	600	560	577
	S/Total	1890	2423	2901	3228	3573	3751	3979
USA	Degree/Higher degree	1622	1926	1993	2123	2111	2096	1993
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	558	670	675	703	834	804	766
	Other	4636	5445	5709	5586	5185	4840	4712
	S/Total	6816	8041	8377	8412	8130	7740	7471
South/Central America	Degree/Higher degree	1149	1521	1666	1606	1616	1762	1960
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	1559	1504	1459	1826	2690	4084	5602
	Other	2839	2402	2518	3550	5840	8154	11092
	S/Total	5547	5427	5643	6982	10146	14000	18654
South Africa	Degree/Higher degree	199	235	231	237	266	276	291
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	108	110	129	156	157	179	231
	Other	79	63	39	30	28	40	45
	S/Total	386	408	399	423	451	495	567
Remainder of Africa (Sub-Saharan)	Degree/Higher degree	2706	3545	4069	4261	4199	4244	4248
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	1013	1263	1342	1524	1869	2415	3383
	Other	265	334	302	237	242	291	436
	S/Total	3984	5142	5713	6022	6310	6950	8067
North Africa/Middle East	Degree/Higher degree	1182	1667	2111	2578	3122	3694	4388
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	779	807	840	932	1300	1938	3007
	Other	842	1061	1306	1552	2293	3402	6299
	S/Total	2803	3535	4257	5062	6715	9034	13694
Other	Degree/Higher degree	4278	4507	4624	4438	4270	4118	3866
	Diploma/ Advanced Diploma/ Certificate III & IV	1865	1903	1725	1506	1502	1543	1541
	Other	3601	3818	3500	3079	3435	3330	3149
	S/Total	9744	10228	9849	9023	9207	8991	8556
Total		204589	232621	250041	264741	286293	328990	392632

Source: International Research and Analysis Unit, Australian Education International, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

It is important in relation to the trends defined above, to affirm the relevance of MODL-driven birthplace shifts by sector. In 2004 Australia increased the number of points required for skilled migration from 115 to 120. Within this context the MODL had the capacity to provide the necessary additional points. A year later the proportion of skilled principal applicants naming a MODL qualification had surged from 9% to 43%, most notably from former international students who aligned course choices with new list developments (Birrell, Hawthorne & Richardson 2006). Indian students represent a primary example of this trend. By June 2008 36,045 Indian students were enrolled in Australian VET sector courses, compared to 21,111 in degree courses in the higher education sector. This compared to 1,827 and 6,575 respectively for these sectors in 2002. Students from China, by contrast, remained far more attracted to Australia's higher education sector (41,812 enrolled in degrees by June 2008 compared to 18,808 in the VET sector).

Regrettably, it is too early in terms of the 2006 Census or LSIA 3 data to assess the impact of this shift on Australian employment outcomes, as the data for both were collected by late 2006.

2.5.3 International student preference by field of study 2002-2008

Table 2.13 allows detailed assessment of international students' enrolments by field of study for the period 2002 - 2008. The preference for business/ commerce, accounting, IT and engineering are confirmed here, with interesting differences evident by birthplace group. For example:

China: 41% of degree level students were enrolled in business/ commerce, compared to 19% in accounting, 12% in IT and 5% in engineering. This preference was directly replicated in VET sector enrolments, for example with 60% of students selecting business/ commerce, and 6% IT courses (followed by 6% in food/ hospitality and 4% in hairdressing).

India: By contrast 34% of degree level students were enrolled in IT courses, 21% in business/ commerce, 20% in accounting and 9% in engineering.

Again this preference was mirrored in the trade sector, where 52% of Indian students were enrolled in business/ commerce, and 10% in food/ hospitality courses.

In December 2008, it is important to note, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship moved to reduce the dominance of accounting graduates in skilled migration flows (28,800 accountants in the three years to June 2008). Access to skilled migration for former international students was tightened – with accounting graduates from January 2009 required to have good language skills (IELTS 7) or to have completed a registered professional year in order to be prioritized for selection¹³. The changes also reflected concern for the scale of student demand for hospitality and hairdressing courses, which had delivered 6,500 cooks and 2,800 hairdressers to Australia in the past three years. According to a Ministerial paper, these students were "nominat(ing) occupations on the MODL, which advantaged the person's application when they had no intention of working in those jobs" (Evans 2008: 4).

¹³ Please note that from January 2009 DIAC tightened skill migration selection criteria, with priority given to applicants sponsored by employers or states/territories, or a new 'Critical Skills List' (CSL). This is far narrower in range than the continuing MODL, which does not afford priority, and is due for review in 2009 (Evans 2008). The introduction of the CSL is certain to reduce VET sector-skilled migration study pathways, while also affecting the 'dominant' student migration professions.

Table 2.13: International student enrolments (2002-June 2008) in Australian education institutions, by birthplace, field of qualification and qualification level, percentages

	UK/Ireland	Other Europe	Vietnam	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	China (excluding Taiwan & Hong Kong)	Hong Kong/Macau	Japan/South Korea	India	Sri Lanka/Bangladesh	Other Southern/Central Asia	Canada	USA	Central/ South America	South Africa	Rest of Sub-Saharan Africa	North Africa/Middle east	Other	
Degree/Higer degree																					
Information technology	5%	7%	15%	17%	8%	11%	8%	12%	11%	8%	34%	29%	17%	2%	2%	6%	6%	11%	16%	11%	
Engineering	3%	3%	10%	8%	14%	3%	12%	5%	6%	3%	9%	8%	7%	2%	2%	5%	7%	17%	4%	4%	
Medicine	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%	3%	2%	
Nursing	3%	3%	1%	1%	1%	20%	1%	2%	2%	6%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	4%	2%	3%	
Accounting	3%	2%	9%	8%	4%	5%	2%	19%	7%	6%	20%	18%	9%	0%	0%	3%	2%	4%	3%	3%	
Business/Commerce	21%	31%	37%	36%	29%	25%	24%	41%	38%	26%	21%	26%	37%	10%	18%	37%	24%	31%	22%	38%	
Teaching	9%	3%	4%	1%	2%	6%	2%	3%	1%	10%	1%	2%	3%	37%	9%	3%	7%	4%	5%	6%	
Law	3%	3%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	8%	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%	1%	
Building	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	
Food hospitality	1%	0%	1%	2%	2%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	
Hairdressing	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Other	50%	46%	21%	27%	38%	26%	47%	16%	32%	38%	11%	14%	22%	38%	62%	38%	47%	34%	29%	32%	
S/Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Diploma/Advanced Diploma/Certificate IV & III																					
Information technology	7%	11%	15%	16%	9%	19%	7%	6%	11%	7%	6%	18%	12%	2%	2%	8%	6%	11%	19%	12%	
Engineering	2%	1%	2%	2%	4%	2%	3%	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%	5%	8%	3%
Medicine	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Nursing	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%	4%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	4%	0%	1%
Accounting	2%	2%	9%	3%	2%	10%	1%	3%	3%	2%	2%	15%	9%	0%	0%	2%	2%	4%	4%	2%	
Business/Commerce	19%	41%	43%	49%	44%	30%	43%	60%	53%	41%	52%	39%	45%	9%	5%	44%	16%	36%	37%	41%	
Teaching	10%	5%	3%	3%	5%	2%	6%	3%	8%	5%	0%	2%	1%	58%	71%	2%	24%	7%	3%	5%	
Law	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Building	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	
Food hospitality	6%	2%	4%	5%	7%	10%	6%	6%	4%	6%	10%	8%	8%	2%	3%	5%	6%	6%	3%	5%	
Hairdressing	10%	2%	6%	1%	4%	3%	4%	5%	2%	6%	4%	3%	2%	3%	1%	1%	4%	3%	2%	3%	
Other	42%	35%	16%	19%	23%	18%	27%	15%	17%	30%	24%	11%	21%	23%	16%	36%	37%	21%	22%	27%	
S/Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Other																					
Information technology	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	
Engineering	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	
Medicine	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Nursing	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Accounting	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Business/Commerce	1%	1%	1%	3%	3%	2%	2%	1%	2%	0%	2%	4%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	3%	1%	1%	
Teaching	45%	14%	44%	50%	76%	50%	88%	47%	59%	31%	4%	15%	17%	26%	17%	6%	57%	54%	13%	33%	
Law	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Building	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Food hospitality	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	
Hairdressing	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Other	51%	83%	54%	45%	19%	41%	8%	50%	38%	69%	90%	78%	80%	73%	81%	90%	40%	40%	84%	66%	
S/Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Total	24937	134242	36299	97030	118638	7631	61968	435464	120357	240699	186295	58651	138550	21745	54987	66399	3129	42188	45100	65598	

Source: International Research and Analysis Unit, Australian Education International, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Note:

The table reports the number of new enrolments in courses, not the number of students since students can have multiple enrolments

Students enrolled in double-degrees counted in 'Other' category

2.6 Employment outcomes for onshore compared to offshore skilled migrants

2.6.1 The research data

How do former international students fare in terms of labour market outcomes, particularly in Australian fields saturated by demand for skilled migrants who have taken the onshore application pathway? The following section provides insight on this issue, directly complementing the qualitative research findings to be reported in section 6.

Since the mid 1990s Australia's Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) has provided an exemplary level of data concerning labour market and settlement outcomes for a representative sample of migrants (derived from all immigration categories). In terms of the present study, the third iteration of this survey (LSIA 3) was analysed in order to assess the attributes associated with early labour market success for skilled migrants - most importantly permitting comparison of employment outcomes for onshore compared to offshore Independent principal applicants. This issue is central to the current study questions.

'Offshore' Independent migrants are defined here as points-tested principal applicants who have applied overseas and been selected by Australia. Onshore Independent migrants by contrast are those who have applied to migrate within Australia – the great majority of these former international students who have lodged migration applications immediately on course completion. A third category ('Other') was also included within the analysis for contrastive purposes – typically dependents/accompanying relatives who have not been points-tested for selection, but who possess qualifications in the target fields. Traditionally such migrants (though formally counted in the skilled category) secure inferior employment outcomes.

These LSIA 3 findings for the skilled migration category are briefly compared below with those for degree and trade-qualified migrants entering Australia through *all* immigration categories (their typical outcomes defined before through the 2006 Census analysis). This comparison allowed us to assess the extent of advantage conferred by points-based selection overall, as well as the level of 'protection' afforded to otherwise disadvantaged groups by completion of an Australian degree. Outcomes for Chinese and Indian students are described in most detail, given their strong participation in onshore skilled migration once it became an option in 1999.

The findings below are derived from LSIA 3 data which included two waves of data collection: Wave 1 at 6-months post-arrival in late 2005 and Wave 2 at 18 months following arrival, in late 2006. Full methodological detail is provided in Appendix A.

As demonstrated in Table 2.14, a number of similarities exist between Wave 1 and Wave 2 skilled category migrants:

- Age of respondents remained stable, with 48% of respondents at prime workforce age in Wave 2 (47.8% aged 25-34 years), followed by substantial older (23.3% aged 35-44 years) and younger age cohorts (15.4% aged 18-24 years).
- The main regions of origin for respondents to both surveys were the UK/Ireland (16.4% of respondents by Wave 2), China (12.5%), Europe (9.6%), India (8.3%), and Other Southern/ Central Asia (8.4%).¹⁴

¹⁴ Definitions of variables used in the data analyses for the LSIA-3 are provided in Appendix A

- The proportion of offshore Independent respondents in Waves 1 and 2 was reasonably constant (6.6% in Wave 1 compared to 9.2% in Wave 2).

However a number of important differences should also be noted:

- The number of respondents dropped from 9,865 (in Wave 1) to 5,183

Table 2.14: Demographic characteristics of LSIA-3 participants, 6-months (Wave 1) and 18-months (Wave 2) after arrival

Variable	Classification	Wave 1 (6-months) (a)		Wave 2 (18-months) (b)	
		N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Gender	Female	5432	54.7	2553	49.3
	Male	4433	44.6	2630	50.7
Age group at start of LSIA	18-24	1500	15.2	800	15.4
	25-34	4795	48.6	2475	47.8
	35-44	2193	22.2	1205	23.3
	45-54	854	8.7	436	8.4
	55-64	303	3.1	154	3.0
	65-89	220	2.2	112	2.2
Country/Region of birth	Australia/New Zealand	12	0.1	10	0.2
	UK/Ire (Ireland)	1415	14.3	846	16.4
	Other Europe	1037	10.5	499	9.6
	Indonesia	431	4.4	258	5.0
	Malaysia	345	3.5	217	4.2
	Philippines	537	5.4	269	5.2
	Singapore	177	1.8	107	2.1
	China (Not SARs/Taiwan)	1260	12.8	645	12.5
	Hong Kong/Macau	168	1.7	108	2.1
	Japan/South Korea	410	4.2	191	3.7
	India	682	6.9	427	8.3
	Sri Lanka/Bangladesh	374	3.8	241	4.7
	Remainder of Southern and Central Asia	1102	11.2	433	8.4
	Canada	120	1.2	45	0.9
	USA	218	2.2	87	1.7
	South/Central America	256	2.6	126	2.4
	South Africa	226	2.3	159	3.1
	Remainder of Africa (Sub-Saharan)	262	2.7	173	3.3
	North Africa/Middle East	623	6.3	227	4.4
	Other	208	2.1	103	2.0
Partnered	Yes	7816	79.4	3732	72.3
	No	2022	20.6	1430	27.7
English language status	Very well (c)	5234	53.7	1058	34.6
	Well	2714	27.9	1436	47.0
	Not well	1531	15.7	490	16.0
	Not at all	263	2.7	74	2.4
IELTS (d)	<6.0	N/A		184	16.3
	6.0-6.9			489	43.2
	7.0-7.9			347	30.7
	8.0-9.0			111	9.8
Type of visa (e)	Onshore Independent	1781	18.1	1348	26.1
	Offshore Independent	648	6.6	478	9.2
	Onshore Business/ENS/RSMS	816	8.3	635	12.3
	Offshore Business/ENS/RSMS	333	3.4	223	4.3
	Other onshore (e)	2494	25.3	990	19.1
	Other offshore (f)	3793	38.4	1497	28.9
Visa application place	Offshore	5031	51.0	2405	46.5
	Onshore	4831	49.0	2764	53.5

Source: LSIA 3

Notes:

a = LAIA-3 Wave 1 (N=9939). Missing data may be calculated by subtracting the table total from the total N.

b = Wave 2 cases are a sub-set of Wave 1 cases (N = 5183). Missing data may be calculated by subtracting the table total from the total N.

c = Includes those for whom English was their first language

d = IELTS were reported only for selected Wave 2 participants

e = Spouse, Other family, SDAS

f = Australian sponsored, Other family, Spouse and Fiancées

(Wave 2) due to (a) under-sampling of Wave 1 Family participants and (b) loss to follow-up.¹⁵

- A higher proportion of former international students were included in Wave 2 (26.1% of total respondents compared to 18.1% in Wave 1).
- Female respondents slightly predominated in Wave 1 (54.7%), while males (50.7%) were the slight majority in Wave 2.
- The proportion of respondents self-reporting that they spoke English ‘very well’ was markedly lower in Wave 2, perhaps due to the high representation of former students (34.6% compared to 53.7% in Wave 1). Alternatively, new migrants at 6 months might have been more confident about their English levels than those in Australia for 18 months, when employment experience could have provided a reality check.
- Finally, self-reported IELTS scores were solely available for a sub-set of Wave 2 (all but 16.3% of respondents self-reported to have an overall IELTS Band 6.0 or higher).

Based on this sample, the next section describes the key LSIA 3 findings.

2.6.2 Major findings from the LSIA 3 data analysis (Waves 1 and 2)

2.6.2.1 Number of informants by field

Firstly, it is important to note from the start that the number of trade-qualified Independent migrants remained minute at the time of LSIA 3 Wave 2 (late 2006). This reflected that trade occupations had only recently been listed on Australia’s MODL. Just 52 building-qualified migrants were included among skilled category respondents to the LSIA 3 at this time, compared to 82 qualified in food/ hospitality and 42 qualified in hairdressing. These numbers inevitably constrained the level of analysis which could be applied to these fields (an issue described in more detail in Appendix A). As demonstrated by Table 2.15, far more substantial numbers of respondents were from degree-qualified professions, most notably engineering, information technology, business/ commerce, and accounting.¹⁶

2.6.2.2 Qualification level by field

As shown in Table 2.15, highly variable qualification levels were also evident for onshore compared to offshore Independent migrants by field. Unsurprisingly, bachelor degree qualifications were the norm for most professions, compared to diploma/ certificate level qualifications for those in the trades. Possession of doctorate/masters degree qualifications was common in the fields of business/ commerce, medicine, teaching, information technology and accounting. No clear pattern was evident however as to whether offshore versus onshore Independent migrants were more qualified by field (for example 50.0% of offshore teaching professionals holding higher degrees compared to 33.3% of onshore teachers, but a reverse pattern prevailing in IT and engineering).

Overall 29.9% of onshore Independent migrants (former international students) held higher degrees, compared to 25.0% who had applied offshore. 64.5% were qualified at bachelor or postgraduate diploma level, compared to 51.5% of offshore applicants. Former international students were also far less likely to be trade qualified (5.6% of

¹⁵ See Appendix A for an explanation of the study design of the LSIA-3.

¹⁶ Please note in relation to this that the majority of former international medical students initially secure temporary resident employer nominations, covering their internship year. They are thus not immediately ‘visible’ in the data as onshore Independent applicants.

Table 2.15: Qualifications of LSIA-3 Wave 2 participants at 18-months post-arrival (a), by visa category, qualification field and qualifications, percentages

Qualification field	Visa Status	Qualification (percentages)			Total Number	Statistics (c)
		Doctorate/ Masters (b)	Bachelor degree/ Post graduate diploma	Diploma/ Certificate 3/4 / Trade/ Other (b)		
Information technology	Onshore independent	25.0	72.8	2.2	372	
	Offshore independent	31.0	57.7	11.3	71	
	Other (d)	13.5	40.6	45.9	133	143.53 ***
Engineering	Onshore independent	27.8	68.3	4.0	126	
	Offshore independent	16.0	42.4	41.6	125	
	Other	13.6	33.6	52.9	420	116.96 ***
Medicine	Onshore independent	40.0	60.0	0.0	5	
	Offshore independent	40.0	60.0	0.0	5	
	Other	31.2	57.1	11.7	77	0.87
Nursing	Onshore independent	3.4	96.6	0.0	29	
	Offshore independent	0.0	54.8	45.2	31	
	Other	2.6	47.0	50.4	115	32.15 ***
Accounting	Onshore independent	33.9	64.4	1.7	298	
	Offshore independent	31.5	65.8	2.7	73	
	Other	16.3	47.5	36.2	141	108.30 ***
Business/Commerce	Onshore independent	40.6	50.3	9.1	187	
	Offshore independent	47.4	50.0	2.6	38	
	Other	24.5	41.7	33.8	453	64.89 ***
Teaching	Onshore independent	33.3	50.0	16.7	12	
	Offshore independent	50.0	40.0	10.0	10	
	Other	9.1	54.5	36.4	77	12.74 **
Law	Onshore independent	20.0	80.0	0.0	10	
	Offshore independent	0.0	0.0	0.0	0	
	Other	17.0	58.5	24.5	53	3.13
Building	Onshore independent	0.0	100.0	0.0	6	
	Offshore independent	16.7	16.7	66.7	6	
	Other	2.5	17.5	80.0	40	18.12 ***
Food hospitality	Onshore independent	10.5	10.5	78.9	19	
	Offshore independent	0.0	14.3	85.7	7	
	Other	1.8	5.4	92.9	56	4.98
Hairdressing	Onshore independent	0.0	0.0	100.0	7	
	Offshore independent	0.0	0.0	100.0	6	
	Other	3.4	0.0	96.6	29	1.22
Other	Onshore independent	32.3	62.4	5.3	189	
	Offshore independent	29.9	59.7	10.4	77	
	Other	21.7	47.7	30.6	872	76.12 ***
Total	Onshore independent	29.9	64.5	5.6	1286	
	Offshore independent	25.0	51.5	23.5	460	
	Other	17.8	41.7	40.4	2561	519.63 *** (e)

Source: LSIA 3

Notes:

a = Includes only Wave 2 cases. Qualification field was not asked in the Wave 1 questionnaire

b = Combined due to small cell size

c = Fisher Exact Test; * = <0.05, ** = <0.01, *** = <0.001

d = Other: Onshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Offshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Other onshore and Other offshore. See Table 25 for full details.

e = Chi-square, df = 4; * = <0.05, ** = <0.01, *** = <0.001

the total sample, compared with 23.5% of those selected offshore). In terms of formal qualifications, on this basis former international students were 'better qualified' than comparable offshore Independent migrants.

2.6.2.3 Overall employment outcomes

As demonstrated by Table 2.16, by late 2005 (when LSIA 3 was first administered), close to three-quarters of all Independent migrants had been recruited onshore. Interestingly, the largest occupational category was for clerical, sales and service workers (35.5%), with relatively small numbers qualified in fields such as IT and accounting.

2.6.2.4 Employment outcomes by region of origin at 6 months

In line with the Census data analysis, employment rates varied markedly by new migrants' country/ region of origin. As demonstrated by Table 2.17, Independent migrants born in English speaking background countries were greatly advantaged six months post-arrival – 92.9% of offshore applicants employed within 6 months,

Table 2.16: Visa categories of LSIA-3 Wave 1 participants at 6-months post-arrival for selected professions, percentages

	Visa type		
	Onshore independent	Offshore independent	Other (e)
Managers & Administrators	1.6	2.2	5.1
Natural & Physical Science Profs	0.9	1.3	0.7
Engineer Professionals	2.4	3.9	0.9
Accountants, Auditors & Corp Treas	7.2	8.0	1.0
Other Business/Planning and Info Prof	1.3	1.7	1.1
IT - Computing Professionals	8.2	12.2	2.0
Medical Practitioners/Specialists	0.4	0.6	0.8
Nursing Professionals	2.1	6.4	1.9
Lawyers	0.3	0.0	0.1
Education	3.3	3.1	1.9
Social, Arts & Misc. Prof	1.6	0.9	1.8
Allied Health & Miscellaneous health Profs	1.1	2.2	0.7
Other professionals/Associate Professionals	9.0	8.6	6.2
Builders	0.1	1.6	1.2
Food/Hospitality	2.4	1.6	2.1
Hairdressers	0.3	1.1	0.4
Other trade persons	1.4	7.4	4.0
Clerical, Sales & Service Wkrs	35.5	10.8	17.5
Prod & Tech Wkers; Labrs & Related	5.3	8.1	11.1
Unemployed	8.0	10.0	15.4
Not in Labour force/NS Labour force	7.6	8.3	24.0
Total Number	1741	639	7343

Source: LSIA-3

Notes:

Statistics: Chi-square = 1465.34, df = 40, p <0.001

e = Other: Onshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Offshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Other onshore and Other offshore.

compared to 91.1% of offshore migrants from India, 77.6% from other Commonwealth-Asia (e.g. Singapore, Malaysia), but just 54.7% from China ($\chi^2 = 66.85$, df = 3, p < 0.001).

Australian qualifications, it is pleasing to note, statistically significantly improved overall outcomes for principal applicants from NESB regions. From the data in Table 2.17 it can be calculated that overall 84.8% of NESB onshore Independent migrants were employed at 6 months compared to 78.9% recruited from offshore ($\chi^2 = 9.39$, df = 2, p = 0.002) – both of which were excellent rates. When examined by individual country/region, however, the only country where there was a statistically significant difference between onshore and offshore Independent migrants was China (74.8% of onshore versus 54.7% of offshore Independent migrants; $\chi^2 = 19.03$, df = 2, p = 0.02). However this only considered who was employed in the labour force. The next section will address the more critical issue of actual *level* of employment.

Please note that, as anticipated, labour market outcomes for ‘Other’ skilled category migrants (dependants) were found to be poor overall – 15.3% unemployed and 23.3% classified as ‘not in the labour force’. This group is not further investigated here, given their marginal relevance to the present study.

2.6.2.5 Employment outcomes by field at 18 months

Employment outcomes for skilled migrants remained very positive 18 months post-migration, as demonstrated by Table 2.18. Their type of employment however is very revealing. When a direct comparison between onshore and offshore Independent categories was made (excluding the Other category, and after dichotomising the data between professionals employed in their own field or another professional field), offshore Independent migrants were significantly more likely to be employed in their own profession (53%) compared with onshore Independent migrants (44.1%) ($\chi^2 = 5.90$, df = 1, p = 0.02).

Regarding specific qualification fields the data showed that:

Table 2.17: Labour market outcomes of LSIA-3 Wave 1 participants at 6-months post-arrival by visa category, by selected countries/regions, percentages

Country/Region	Visa status	Labourforce participation status			Total Number	Statistics (a)
		Employed	Unemployed	NLF		
ESB (b)	Onshore independent	86.7	7.2	6.0	83	
	Offshore independent	92.9	1.8	5.3	169	
	Other (c)	83.4	4.4	12.2	1731	14.86 **
Commonwealth Asia (d)	Onshore independent	84.5	8.2	7.3	452	
	Offshore independent	77.6	14.1	8.2	85	
	Other	56.8	20.8	22.5	525	93.54 ***
China (e)	Onshore independent	74.8	10.9	14.3	357	
	Offshore independent	54.7	27.4	17.9	95	
	Other	47.6	20.7	31.7	801	81.71 ***
India	Onshore independent	92.2	7.3	0.6	179	
	Offshore independent	91.1	5.9	3.0	101	
	Other	64.4	20.1	15.4	402	70.3 ***
Other Asia (f)	Onshore independent	87.6	6.9	5.6	540	
	Offshore independent	80.0	12.2	7.8	90	
	Other	51.4	18.4	30.1	1829	247.8 ***
Europe (g)	Onshore independent	91.2	5.3	3.5	57	
	Offshore independent	91.7	5.6	2.8	36	
	Other	65.3	13.2	21.5	939	26.9 ***
North Africa/Middle East	Onshore independent	89.5	10.5		19	
	Offshore independent	71.4		28.6	7	
	Other	40.0	25.5	34.5	592	22.4 *** (h)
Other	Onshore independent	89.8	3.4	6.8	86	
	Offshore independent	90	6.7	3.3	60	
	Other	63.7	15.5	20.9	575	38.39 ***
Total	Onshore independent	84.9	7.9	7.2	1776	
	Offshore independent	82.6	10.0	7.5	643	
	Other	61.4	15.3	23.3	7395	449.91 ***

Source: LSIA-3

Notes:

Excludes those with Other undefined degree qualifications, and those with missing data from the Wave 2 LSIA-3 survey

a = Chisq (χ^2) unless otherwise stated df=6, * <0.05; ** <0.01; ***<0.001

b = Australia/New Zealand/Eire/UK/Canada/USA/South Africa

c = Other: Onshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Offshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Other onshore and Other offshore. See Table 23 for full details.

d = Malaysia/Singapore/Hong Kong (Macau)/Sri Lanka/Bangladesh

e = Excludes Hong Kong/Macau

f = Indonesia/Philippines/Japan/South Korea, South-Central Asia

g = Excludes Eire/UK

h = Fisher Exact Test. * <0.05; ** <0.01; ***<0.001

- Offshore Independent migrants were statistically significantly more likely to be employed in their own professional field than former students in education (60.0% compared to 30.8%), IT (56.3% compared to 35.2%), and accounting (47.9% compared to 34.9%).
- Former international students, by contrast, had better outcomes in engineering (23.0% employed in their own profession compared to 13.6% of PA's recruited offshore), and also in law (50.0% and 0.0% respectively).
- Outcomes however were near identical in the high demand fields of medicine (40.0% and 40.0%) and nursing (89.7% of onshore migrants compared to 87.1% of offshore) – former students by definition having been resident long-term in Australia to complete 3-6 year courses – and also business/commerce (5.3% and 2.6% respectively).
- Large numbers of both groups however remained at risk of low-skilled work – most notably 55.6% of onshore and 42.1% of offshore business/ commerce graduates, 46.3% of onshore accounting graduates, 41.6% of offshore engineering graduates, and 38.5% of onshore education graduates.

Overall however, skilled principal applicants selected offshore did substantially better. 40.8% of all onshore Independent migrants were clustered at 18 months in low skilled work, compared to 28.0% of those recruited offshore. Notwithstanding this, excellent overall employment rates prevailed, with 92.5% of onshore and 92.0% of

offshore Independent migrants reporting some type of employment at 18 months. (See Table 2.19.)

How did recent onshore and offshore degree-qualified migrants from China and India fare in the Australian labour market, compared to comparably qualified migrants selected across all immigration categories? This can be answered with reference back to the 2006 Census data. At 6 months 74.8% of skilled migrants from China were in some form of work, compared to a high 92.2% from India.

Outcomes were far worse for 2001-2006 degree-qualified arrivals in their first 5 years in Australia (combining all immigration categories). Just 55.3% of engineers from China and 76.7% from India had found any type of work. The rates for accountants were 64.3% (China) and 76.9% (India); and for doctors 58% (China) compared to 77% (India). Far smaller numbers of these migrants had found higher level work in their own or another profession – for example just 10.9% of Chinese engineers within professional engineering employment and 14.1% from India. As the LSIA and Census comparisons make clear, points-tested migrants secured far superior and

Table 2.18: Labour market outcomes of LSIA-3 Wave 2 participants at 18-months post-arrival for selected professions by visa category, by field of qualification, percentages

Qualification field	Visa status	Employment status, percentages			Unemployed/ NLF (a)	Total Number	Statistics (d)
		Professional in own field	Other professional employment (b)	Low skilled/Other (c)			
Information Technology	Onshore independent	35.2	17.7	38.4	91.4	8.6	372
	Offshore independent	56.3	16.9	14.1	87.3	12.7	71
	Other (e)	30.6	16.4	31.3	78.4	21.6	134
Engineering	Onshore independent	23.0	46.8	23.0	92.9	7.1	126
	Offshore independent	13.6	37.6	41.6	92.8	7.2	125
	Other	8.3	37.1	39.8	85.2	14.8	420
Medicine	Onshore independent	40.0	20.0	40.0	100.0	0.0	5
	Offshore independent	40.0	40.0		80.0	20.0	5
	Other	46.8	18.2	10.4	75.3	24.7	77
Nursing	Onshore independent	89.7		3.4	93.1	6.9	29
	Offshore independent	87.1	3.2		90.3	9.7	31
	Other	62.6	2.6	20.9	86.1	13.9	115
Accounting	Onshore independent	34.9	10.7	46.3	91.9	8.1	298
	Offshore independent	47.9	16.4	26.0	90.4	9.6	73
	Other	18.4	18.4	44.0	80.9	19.1	141
Business/Commerce	Onshore independent	5.3	27.3	55.6	88.2	11.8	187
	Offshore independent	2.6	47.4	42.1	92.1	7.9	38
	Other	4.6	31.1	40.1	75.8	24.2	454
Education	Onshore independent	30.8	7.7	38.5	76.9	23.1	13
	Offshore independent	60.0	20.0	20.0	100.0	0.0	10
	Other	16.9	13.0	29.9	59.7	40.3	77
Law	Onshore independent	50.0	30.0	20.0	100.0	0.0	10
	Offshore independent						0
	Other	7.5	41.5	28.3	77.4	22.6	53
Total (b)	Onshore independent	29.9	20.5	40.8	91.2	8.8	1040
	Offshore independent	36.3	26.6	28.0	90.9	9.1	353
	Other	16.9	26.8	35.6	79.2	20.8	1471
							159.11

Source: LSIA-3

Notes:

Excludes those with Other undefined degree qualifications, and those with missing data from the Wave 2 LSIA-3 survey

a = Unemployed, Not in labourforce or status unknown

b = Other-professional employment defined as those not working in their own profession, but working in any of Information technology, Law,

c = Trades, clerical, sales, personal services, production, technical fields, labourers and work not stated

d = Chisq (χ^2) unless otherwise stated df=6, * <0.05; ** <0.01; ***<0.001

e = Other: Onshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Offshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Other onshore and Other offshore.

f = Fisher Exact Test. * <0.05; ** <0.01; ***<0.001

Table 2.19: Labour market outcomes of LSIA-3 Wave 2 participants at 18-months post-arrival by visa category, by selected countries/regions, percentages

Country/Region	Visa status	Labourforce participation status			Total Number	Statistics (a)
		Employed	Unemployed	NLF		
ESB (b)	Onshore independent	94.9	1.7	3.4	59	
	Offshore independent	94.5	1.6	3.9	127	
	Other (c)	87.1	2.7	10.2	960	8.58 * (d)
Commonwealth Asia (d)	Onshore independent	93.5	3.6	3.0	338	
	Offshore independent	92.4	4.5	3.0	66	
	Other	71.7	13.4	14.9	269	58.47 ***
China (e)	Onshore independent	87.3	5.6	7.1	268	
	Offshore independent	77.4	11.3	11.3	62	
	Other	60.0	8.3	31.7	315	65.16 ***
India	Onshore independent	95.7	2.9	1.4	139	
	Offshore independent	93.7	3.8	2.5	79	
	Other	79.4	5.7	14.8	209	26.67 ***
Other Asia (f)	Onshore independent	92.4	4.9	2.7	410	
	Offshore independent	93.2	5.1	1.7	59	
	Other	65.0	8.8	26.2	682	127.6 ***
Europe (g)	Onshore independent	97.8	2.2		46	
	Offshore independent	96.8	3.2		31	
	Other	73.9	4.5	21.6	421	28.2 *** (h)
North Africa/Middle East	Onshore independent	100.0			15	
	Offshore independent	50.0		50.0	4	
	Other	55.3	19.7	25.0	208	13.3 ** (h)
Other	Onshore independent	94.5	2.7	2.7	73	
	Offshore independent	100			49	
	Other	79.3	9.3	11.4	280	21.63 *** (h)
Total	Onshore independent	92.5	4.1	3.4	1348	
	Offshore independent	92.0	4.0	4.0	477	
	Other	74.0	7.4	18.6	3344	271.8 ***

Source: LSIA-3

Notes:

Excludes those with Other undefined degree qualifications, and those with missing data from the Wave 2 LSIA-3 survey

a = Chi sq (χ^2) unless otherwise stated df=6, * <0.05; ** <0.01; ***<0.001

b = Australia/New Zealand/Eire/UK/Canada/USA/South Africa

c = Other: Onshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Offshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Other onshore and Other offshore. See Table 23 for full details.

d = Due to the small numbers in the cells, for this analysis Unemployed and NLF combined during data analysis

d = Malaysia/Singapore/Hong Kong (Macau)/Sri Lanka/Bangladesh

e = Excludes Hong Kong/Macau

f = Indonesia/Philippines/Japan/South Korea, South-Central Asia

g = Excludes Eire/UK

h = Fisher Exact Test. * <0.05; ** <0.01; ***<0.001

faster outcomes. As we shall see, former international students were also relatively advantaged, compared to the norm for those birthplace groups.

2.6.2.6 Labour market outcomes at 18 months by region of origin

As demonstrated by Table 2.20, former international students remained less likely than offshore Independents to have work in their professional field at 18 months: 29.9% overall compared to 36.3%. The outcomes were worst for the following groups (mainly those associated with high levels of recent student migration):

- Commonwealth-Asia (29.6% of onshore migrants compared to 42.9% from offshore);
- Other Asia (28.8% compared to 36.4%); and
- Other (41.2% compared to 29.6%).¹⁷

Detailed analysis of the data from Commonwealth Asia, China and India showed significant differences between these three countries/regions. Independent onshore migrants from China were slightly advantaged by completion of Australian studies (30.0% working in their own field compared to 25.5% of those selected offshore), along with migrants from India (27.2% compared to 25.8%).

¹⁷ See Appendix A for definition of countries/ regions for all reported groupings.

Table 2.20: Labour market outcomes of LSIA-3 Wave 2 participants at 18-months post-arrival for selected countries/regions by visa category, percentages

Qualification field	Visa status	Employment status		Unemployed/N LF (a)	Total Number	Statistics (d)
		Professional in own field (b)	Other professional employment (c)			
ESB (e)	Onshore independent	43.6	17.9	33.3	94.9	5.1
	Offshore independent	42.2	31.1	21.1	94.4	5.6
	Other (f)	28.6	43.8	20.7	93.1	6.9
Commonwealth Asia (g)	Onshore independent	29.6	22.7	41.3	93.5	6.5
	Offshore independent	42.9	23.2	25.0	91.1	8.9
	Other	18.9	21.7	33.6	74.1	25.9
China (h)	Onshore independent	30.0	14.1	41.4	85.5	14.5
	Offshore independent	25.5	17.0	29.8	72.3	27.7
	Other	4.4	25.2	34.1	63.7	36.3
India	Onshore independent	27.2	24.8	41.6	93.6	6.4
	Offshore independent	25.8	30.6	38.7	95.2	4.8
	Other	13.4	19.3	47.1	79.8	20.2
Other Asia (i)	Onshore independent	28.8	18.2	43.5	90.4	9.6
	Offshore independent	36.4	20.5	36.4	93.2	6.8
	Other	8.1	13.7	52.6	74.4	25.6
Europe (j)	Onshore independent	42.4	39.4	15.2	97.0	3.0
	Offshore independent	44.4	44.4	5.6	94.4	5.6
	Other	11.4	29.3	31.5	72.3	27.7
North Africa/Middle East	Onshore independent	11.1	11.1	77.8	100.0	9
	Offshore independent			50.0	50.0	2
	Other	11.8	11.8	42.6	66.2	33.8
Other	Onshore independent	29.6	31.5	33.3	94.4	5.6
	Offshore independent	41.2	23.5	32.4	97.1	2.9
	Other	21.2	17.4	43.2	81.8	18.2
Total	Onshore independent	29.9	20.5	40.8	91.2	8.8
	Offshore independent	36.3	26.6	28.0	90.9	9.1
	Other	16.9	26.8	35.6	79.2	20.8
						1471
						159.11 ***

Statistics comparing between Commonwealth Asia, China and India, where employment outcomes are professional in own field/other work/unemployed-NLF:

Onshore independent Chisq (χ^2) = 11.85, df=4, p = 0.02

Offshore independent Chisq (χ^2) = 18.66, df=4, p = 0.01

Other Chisq (χ^2) = 19.46, df=4, p = 0.001

Source: LSIA-3

Notes:

Excludes those with Other undefined degree qualifications, and those with missing data from the Wave 2 LSIA-3 survey

a = Unemployed, Not in labourforce or status unknown

b = Other-professional employment defined as those not working in their own profession, but working in any of Information technology, Law, Education, Medicine, Nursing, Accounting, Business/Commerce, or Engineering professional fields, or as managers/administrators or working as associate professionals

c = Trades, clerical, sales, personal services, production, technical fields, labourers and work not stated

d = Chisq (χ^2) unless otherwise stated df=6, * <0.05; ** <0.01; ***<0.001

e = Australia/New Zealand/Eire/UK/Canada/USA/South Africa

f = Other: Onshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Offshore Business/ENS/RSMS, Other onshore and Other offshore. See Table 23 for full

g = Malaysia/Singapore/Hong Kong (Macau)/Sri Lanka/Bangladesh

h = Excludes Hong Kong/Macau

i = Indonesia/Philippines/Japan/South Korea, South-Central Asia

j = Excludes Eire/UK

k = Fisher Exact Test. * <0.05; ** <0.01; ***<0.001

2.7 Multi-variable LSIA analysis: The predictors of employment

2.7.1 The analysis

The tables from the 2006 Census and the AEI presented information exploring cross-sectional relationships between variables based on census information. (The 2006

Census is based on Australia's entire population data. The AEI provides a census of student enrolments.)

The final two tables (Tables 2.21 and 2.22) use the LSIA-3 dataset (based on a sample of all immigrants) in a logistic regression analysis to provide models of employment outcomes predicted from previously collected data, at 6- and 18-months post-arrival where employment was dichotomised (employed/other). Put simply, this analysis was designed to test which factors were most important in predicting employment outcomes, including the way these factors correlated to each other. The results presented in these two tables are 'adjusted' results; i.e. results after adjusting the data for the other variables in the model. In this, they are fundamentally different analyses to all the other tables of the report which present univariate or unadjusted models. For greater detail on these analyses, please see the information provided in Appendix A.

2.7.2 The predictors of being employed for skilled onshore and offshore migrants

2.7.2.1 *Outcomes 6 months post-migration*

Subject to two caveats described in Appendix A, Tables 2.21 and 2.22 explore the adjusted predictors of skilled migrants being employed at 6- and 12-months post-arrival. Although gender, in a univariate analysis, was a significant predictor of employment (when compared with females, males were 3.4 times more likely to be employed (odds ratio (OR): 3.42, 95%CI: 3.12 – 3.76), when entered into the multivariable model shown in Table 2.21, gender confounded the model suggesting an association between gender and the other predictors in the model. It was therefore excluded.

Table 2.21, after adjustment for all the variables in the model, shows the strongest statistically significant predictor of employment at 6-months was applicant status. Onshore Independent applicants were 3.72 times more likely to be employed when compared with Business/Other applicants. Offshore Independent applicants were 2.14 times more likely to be employed. This is a very positive finding in relation to former international students.

The second strongest predictor of employment was the level of spoken English language skills. Those who self-reported as speaking English very well or for whom English was their first language were 3.6 times more likely to be employed when compared with those with poor English (who self-reported as speaking English not well or not at all). Those who self-reported as speaking English well were 74% more likely to be employed. There was thus a strong relationship between people's perceived levels of spoken English language skills and employment. It should be noted that this category included English speaking background migrants.

Region of birth also shows the comparative advantage of English proficiency. Skilled migrants from ESB countries – Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Ireland, Canada, the USA and South Africa – were statistically more likely to be in employment. As demonstrated in the table, when compared with those from ESB countries, those from Commonwealth Asia were 67% less likely to be employed, those from China were 69% less likely, from India 57% less likely, from Europe 52% less likely and from the rest of the world 60% less likely to be employed.

If the odds ratios presented in Table 2.21 are expressed using the Other (rest of the world) category as the base, skilled migrants from ESB countries were 2.47 times more likely to be employed at 6 months (OR: 2.47, 95%CI: 2.03 – 3.01). Regarding the other background regions/countries, again using the Other category as the base, when compared with Other migrants those from Commonwealth Asia were 18% less

Table 2.21: Logistic regression predicting employment for LSIA Wave 1 participants

Predictor	Base group (a)	Comparator group	Odds ratio	95.0% C.I.	
				Lower	Upper
Age group (b)	18-24	25-44	1.56	1.31	1.86
		45-64	1.35	1.07	1.72
Region of birth	English-speaking (ESB)	Commonwealth Asia	0.33	0.26	0.42
		China	0.31	0.24	0.39
		India	0.43	0.33	0.55
		Europe	0.48	0.38	0.60
		Other	0.40	0.33	0.49
Applicant status	Business/Other	Onshore independent	3.72	3.12	4.45
		Offshore independent	2.14	1.69	2.71
Qualifications	Dip/Cert 3/4 /Trade/Other	Doctorate/Masters	0.86	0.73	1.03
		Bachelor/Post grad dip	0.79	0.69	0.90
English spoken	Not well/Not at all	Very well (c)	3.64	2.99	4.43
		Well	1.74	1.44	2.10

Source: LSIA-3

Notes:

Based on 7245 cases with complete data available

Excludes gender because inclusion confounded the model

Model statistics: logistic regression, Hosmer & Lemeshow Chisq (χ^2) = 10.84, df = 8, p = 0.21

75.2% of cases correctly classified

a = Group against which the comparator groups are compared

b = Excludes those aged 65+ years

c = Includes those speaking English as their first language

likely to be employed (OR: 0.82, 95%CI: 0.68 – 0.98), and those from China were 24% less likely to be employed (OR: 0.76, 95%CI: 0.63 – 0.91). There were no statistically significant differences for those from India (OR: 1.06, 95%CI: 0.85 – 1.32) or Europe (OR: 1.19, 95%CI: 0.98 – 1.43).

The other significant predictor in Table 2.21 was age group. When compared with younger migrants (aged 18-24), those aged 25-44 were 56% more likely to be employed, and those aged 45-64 were 35% more likely to be employed. It is likely this finding reflects the number of young migrants studying, and the value that employers place on previous (post-qualification) experience..

Finally, Table 2.21 shows that qualification level was a statistically significant predictor of employment at 6-months post-arrival. When compared with those holding a diploma or lower qualification, those with a bachelor or post-graduate diploma were 21% less likely to be employed. There were no statistically significant differences in employment outcomes between migrants holding a degree or diploma, and those qualified at higher degree level (masters or doctoral degree).

2.7.2.2 Outcomes 18 months post-migration

Table 2.22 shows the same multivariable logistic regression analysis, but with employment at 18-months post-arrival as the outcome. Again, gender was excluded for the same reason it was excluded from Table 2.21. Similarly, however, in a univariate analysis it significantly predicted employment; when compared with females, recently arrived males were 3.7 times more likely to be employed (OR: 3.74, 95%CI: 3.21 – 4.36).

The strongest predictor of employment at 18-months post-arrival was self-reported spoken English language levels. Those who self-reported as speaking English very well or for whom English was their first language were 4 times more likely to be employed when compared with those with poor English (who self-report as speaking English not well or not at all). Those who self-reported as speaking English well were 82% more likely to be employed. There was thus a strong relationship between

Table 2.22: Logistic regression predicting employment for LSIA Wave 2 participants

Predictor	Base group (a)	Comparator group	Odds ratio	95.0% C.I.	
				Lower	Upper
Age group (b)	18-24	25-44	1.66	1.27	2.18
		45-64	1.21	0.84	1.73
Region of birth	English-speaking (ESB)	Commonwealth Asia	0.51	0.36	0.74
		China	0.40	0.27	0.59
		India	0.60	0.39	0.90
		Europe	0.53	0.37	0.77
		Other	0.51	0.38	0.70
Applicant status	Business/Other	Onshore independent	3.92	2.97	5.18
		Offshore independent	2.54	1.75	3.68
Qualifications	Dip/Cert 3/4 /Trade/Other	Doctorate/Masters	1.08	0.81	1.43
		Bachelor/Post grad dip	0.81	0.66	1.01
English spoken	Not well/Not at all	Very well	3.98	2.88	5.51
		Well	1.82	1.33	2.47

Source: LSIA-3

Notes:

Based on 4192 cases with complete data available

Excludes gender

Model statistics: logistic regression, Hosmer & Lemeshow Chisq (χ^2) = 9.54, df = 8, p = 0.30

85.4% of cases correctly classified

a = Group against which the comparator groups are compared

b = Excludes those aged 65+ years

people's perceptions of their spoken English language skills and employment. The second strongest predictor was applicant status. Onshore Independent applicants were 3.9 times more likely to be employed when compared with Business/Other applicants. Offshore Independent applicants were 2.5 times more likely to be employed. Once again, encouragingly, former students were relatively advantaged in terms of accessing work.

Region of birth continued to show the comparative success of English proficiency. Skilled migrants from ESB countries – Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Ireland, Canada, the USA and South Africa – were statistically more likely to be in employment. As shown in the table, when compared with those from ESB countries, migrants from Commonwealth Asia were 49% less likely to be employed, those from China were 60% less likely, from India 40% less likely, from Europe 47% less likely and from the rest of the world 49% less likely to be employed.

Similarly to Table 2.21, when compared with younger migrants (aged 18-24), those aged 25-44 were 66% more likely to be employed. There was no statistically significant difference in employment between those aged 18-24 and those aged 45-64. Qualifications were not statistically significantly related to employment at 18-months post-arrival.

2.7.2.3 The critical policy findings

In conclusion, the statistical analysis established the following highly relevant policy points:

- As demonstrated by the 2006 Census, many degree and diploma-qualified migrants have difficulty securing Australian employment in their first 5 years post-arrival, even at a time of sustained economic boom (the 2001-2006 period).
- Select birthplace groups encounter greater disadvantage in this process (all immigration categories), most notably recent skilled migrants from China.

- Within major fields, few such migrants are likely to secure any form of professional work (for example just 5.6% of Chinese medical graduates gaining employment in medicine and 10.9% in engineering in their first 5 years in Australia). This finding stands despite overall achievement of reasonable employment outcomes (ie acceptance of any type of work).
- As demonstrated by the LSIA 3 analysis, far superior employment outcomes are achieved in Australia by points-tested skilled category principal applicants (both onshore and offshore), than those selected through all immigration categories.
- Many of the points-tested skilled category migrants have excellent employment rates at 6 months, and even lower unemployment at 18 months than the Australia-born norm (around 4%).
- Possession of Australian qualifications was found to confer significant protection for degree-qualified migrants from typically disadvantaged birthplace groups.
- Most notably (in relation to international student flows) 85.5% of onshore PA's from China were employed at 18 months, compared to 72.3% from offshore (Table 2.20). Of these, 30.0% of former international students were employed in their professional field, compared to 25.5% qualified in China.
- Outcomes were also positive for Indian PA's at 18 months. 93.6% of former international students had found Australian work, compared to 95.2% recruited offshore. 27.2% of former students were employed in their own profession, compared to 25.8% offshore graduates. Possession of an Australian qualification was thus less critical for Indian compared to Chinese PA's in terms of securing employment.
- After adjustment of the data for age, region of birth, applicant status and qualifications the strongest predictor of long-term employment outcomes at 18-months post-arrival was level of English spoken. Those who reported they spoke English well were almost 4 times more likely to be employed when compared with those with poor English.

These are excellent outcomes for these country of origin groups (compared to the 2006 Census norm), and compare impressively to those achieved in countries such as Canada (Hawthorne 2008). Overall, the statistical analysis strongly affirms the merits of Australia's current points-tested skilled category pathway. This is very important, given that the challenges of labour market integration are certain to be intensified in the context of the global economic downturn. As established by past Australian research, new migrants are at disproportionate risk of employer rejection at such times – most notably excessive representation among the unemployed, and high degrees of marginalisation which persist through periods of post-recession recovery (Brooks & Williams 1995; Hawthorne 1994; Ackland, Williams & Marshall 1992).

The qualitative analysis provided in the following sections explores the likely impact of English language proficiency on employment outcomes from the perspective of different stakeholders. International students' ELP training is first described in their period of Australian study (from both student and provider perspectives). Students' attempts to find work are defined, in particular any perceived barriers related to English (compared to the experience of domestic graduates and recent offshore migrants). Finally, the views of employers and regulatory bodies in relation to the

perceived ‘work readiness’ of new graduates are described, in terms of English as well as other essential attributes (for initial recruitment as well as workplace progression). In line with the statistical findings reported in chapter 2, employer views were secured in relation to five professions and three trade fields (accounting, IT, engineering, medicine, nursing, hairdressing, food/hospitality and building). All of these, as established in 2.5, are highly relevant to recently qualified international students.

3. Analysis of interviews with final-year students and recent graduates

This section of the report presents the findings from interviews conducted with final-year students and recent graduates. The aim was to explore international and local students/graduates' perceptions about the factors affecting workplace readiness and employment outcomes, including the role and importance of English language proficiency (ELP). In addition, the study aimed to gain insight into the experiences of recent graduates in finding work in their chosen field of study.

In this study, 'local' students/graduates refers to Australian students and graduates (typically permanent residents or Australian citizens) who have completed most or all of their education in Australia, and who speak English as a first language. Recent graduates are defined as those who completed tertiary degrees in Australia within the past two years.

Overall, the findings from the interviews suggest that there are several factors affecting international students/graduates' workplace readiness and employment outcomes. The large majority of all interviewees – both local and international – believed that ELP was essential in finding work in their chosen field and, more importantly, for performing well once in the workplace. ELP was not however, the sole or even most important factor affecting employment outcomes. Previous work experience in the field of study, diversity of experiences and personal characteristics or attributes were generally considered to be equally as important, or more important, than ELP. The biggest obstacle to finding work from the perspective of international students/graduates was the limited opportunity to gain relevant work experience and internships in their field of study.

3.1 Data collection

This stage of the project involved semi-structured interviews with final-year students and recent graduates. Eleven group interviews (consisting of between two and six interviewees in each group) and seven individual interviews were conducted. On average, group interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and individual interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

To recruit interviewees, emails were sent via various university divisions and contacts, including international student services, student associations, student clubs and alumni offices. As a way of assessing their suitability to participate in the study, students and graduates were asked to respond to the email invitation by indicating their nationality, first language background and the course/degree undertaken.

3.1.1 Interviewees

Interviewees were international final-year and recent graduates for whom English is a second or additional language ($n=40$), and local students and recent graduates for whom English is a first language ($n=18$). In total, 58 students/graduates from various language backgrounds and fields of study participated in the study.

The final-year students were recruited from two Victorian tertiary institutions with diverse student cohorts. Most of the international students had been studying in Australia between one to four years, with the exception of three students who had been in Australia for more than six years.

Although the intention was to interview international students and graduates from the top four birthplace groups as indicated by Australian Census data (ABS 2006) —

China, India, Malaysia and Indonesia — interviewees from South Korea were also included owing to the difficulty in recruiting recent graduates from the four targeted birthplaces.

Demographic information for final-year international students and recent graduates (former international students) is shown in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 – Nationality of interviewees: final-year international students and recent graduates

No. of Interviewees	Gender		Nationality				
	F	M	Chinese	Indian	Indonesian	Malaysian	Korean
Final-year students	20	14	6	7	5	3	0
Recent graduates	20	12	8	10	1	1	0
Total	40	26	14	17	6	4	8

The courses completed by the international graduates were undertaken at a range of institutions including universities, TAFE institutions and private colleges. The time spent living in Australia ranged from two to nine years. Table 3.2 below shows the types of institutions attended and the field of study undertaken by the international students and recent graduates (ESL).

Table 3.2 – International students and graduates by type of institution and field of study

Type of institution	No. of interviewees	Field of study						
		Accounting	Commerce	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine	Nursing	Hospitality
University	30	9	8	4	4	4	1	
TAFE	3						1	2
Private college	7						2	5
Total	40	9	8	4	4	4	2	7

Ten local final-year students and eight local recent graduates participated in the study. Of these, thirteen were male, five were female and all were completing or had recently obtained degrees from universities, with the exception of the hairdressing graduate who had obtained her qualification from a private college (see table 3.3).

Table 3.3 – Local final-year students and graduates by type of institution and field of study

Type of institution	No. of interviewees	Field of study					
		Accounting	Commerce	Engineering	Information Technology	Medicine	Hairdressing
University	17	1	7	4	3	2	
Private college	1						1
Total	18	1	7	3	2	2	1

3.2 Workplace readiness and the role of tertiary institutions

As shown in tables 3.2 and 3.3, the majority of interviewees in the study (81%) were completing or had recently completed courses at universities. The remaining 19% of interviewees were undertaking or had recently undertaken studies in TAFE institutions or private colleges (hairdressing or hospitality). The interviewees' perceptions about the extent to which their courses had prepared them for the workplace seemed to vary depending on their field of study. Students and graduates whose courses included periods of workplace training, such as clinical placements for nursing and medical students, or hands-on training for hospitality and hairdressing students, believed their course had prepared them with the necessary skills for the workplace. Commerce students and graduates, on the other hand, commented that their course lacked a focus on developing practical skills for the workplace.

3.2.1 Course experience

Most international students (over 90%) generally felt their courses were very useful in teaching the fundamental or 'basic' concepts and theories they need to know for their work, although they also recognised that there were limitations in the extent to which their courses could fully prepare them for the workplace:

I guess what we're learning periodically is good. It's definitely good. But when it comes to practice how much can be implemented is the question... So I can't say the university prepares me a hundred per cent into going and facing the outside world and a lot of it was in my hands as well. (P8, Indian Commerce student)

A number of international students commented that although their courses lacked practical aspects for workplace readiness, they did not see this as necessarily the role of the university. Rather, they felt that this was something they would have to develop on their own:

I think the education did a good job in teaching us the theory, but like for the practical skills in the workplace I think it's more up to me to learn it. (P2, Chinese Commerce student)

Doing a degree in the university is only as sort of like a passport for you to go to another place. Over there you're going to have to re-learn everything all over again. (P9, Indonesian Commerce student)

This view was supported by the local students/graduates. Although they acknowledged that the university courses focused more on theory than practice, they commented that they did not expect the university to provide practical skills necessary for the workplace. Rather, they felt that these skills could only be learnt through part-time work or "on the job". As one local commerce student noted:

It's something that you can't really just teach in a classroom. The most important thing trying to get those skills is just going out and working in whatever field yourself... So I wasn't really going into university expecting to get those experiences from my learning itself in the first place. (P41, local Commerce student)

A number of students also acknowledged that their course had prepared them to socialise with people through discussion and group activities. Some students mentioned the benefits of participating in group assignments as a way of developing communication skills such as negotiating and "how to deal with disagreement or argument".

The international graduates, on the other hand, had mixed views about the extent to which their course had prepared them for the workplace. Although the majority

recognised that they had acquired theoretical or basic knowledge about their field of study, a number of graduates expressed disappointment that their courses had not been practical enough. For example, one Accounting graduate, who was working as an administrative assistant, commented:

The course doesn't provide students practical skills, only with knowledge. That's what I've been through the three years university in Australia and I feel it doesn't give me that much. (P25, Chinese Accounting graduate)

3.2.2 Support programs and services

A number of interviewees (mainly university students) mentioned the various support programs and services offered by their institutions. These included language and academic skills courses, professional skills workshops and programs run by the Careers Employment Units. Students who participated in these programs found them to be useful, particularly those on writing CVs and preparing for interviews.

While a number of international students/graduates used the academic language programs offered by university support services and found these to be helpful for their studies, they did not think these programs were useful for developing skills necessary for the workplace. Most students commented that programs on 'every day' language skills for interacting with colleagues and for understanding Australian workplace relations would be more useful. As one student commented:

If they hire some people to give us some skills, about how to interact with our own colleagues and how to interact with the foreign partners, because there are some ethical issues as well as some manner when you have to talk and what to disclose, what not to disclose, how close to be with your partner, what is the borderline between relationship and communication (P1, Indian Engineering student)

3.3 Workplace readiness of final-year students

Interviewees were asked to assess their readiness for the workplace. Specifically, they were asked to indicate whether they had the necessary skills to work in their chosen field and how they had developed, or planned to develop, the necessary skills.

Of the twenty final-year international students interviewed, only the four medical students had secured full-time positions for the following year (2009). Most of the other students indicated that they had already started, or would soon start, to apply for full-time positions in their field of study.

The majority of international students interviewed (over 70 %) generally felt that they had the necessary skills to work in their chosen field. A number of them commented that although they still had much to learn, their skills would be adequate for a starting position in a company:

As far as I know, that as a graduate, the first step is to do very basic work which means even though never learn accounting before you can do that ...basically I think as a graduate I have got basic skills which can qualify me to do the job. (P4, Chinese Accounting student)

Yes, if not a hundred per cent, yes, competitive enough... I think I can start as a new graduate freshman. But I'm not ready enough to handle managerial post, given my lack of experience and lack of skills of communicating with mass people. But I can definitely start work as a beginner in that level. (P1, Indian Engineering student)

International students who had applied unsuccessfully for graduate positions were not as confident about their skills. Three students stated that they were “definitely not ready” for work and four students expressed some doubt as to whether they had the skills necessary to work in their chosen field. For example, one postgraduate accounting student who had been in Australia for almost two years and had received assistance in preparing his CV revealed his confusion about what was expected by Australian companies:

Maybe not [ready to work], because all my CV was denied by the Australian company... So I'm not so confident about it because I don't know what the company, the Australian companies, I don't know what they expect or they're expecting. (P5, Chinese Accounting student)

When asked how they planned to develop the skills necessary for the workplace, all the interviewees referred to ‘self-study’ activities such as reading, watching television or listening to the radio. A couple of students mentioned trying to practice speaking with local people. No one mentioned enrolling in a formal language course to develop his/her language skills and only one person mentioned using the language support services available at her university.

In contrast to the international students, half the local students interviewed for this study had already secured full-time graduate positions for the following year. The other five students had not begun actively seeking graduate positions as they still had one to two semesters remaining in their degrees. Although some of these students did not believe they currently had the necessary skills to work in their chosen field, all of them felt confident that they would be able to find work in their chosen field before graduating from their course. A few students planned to develop the necessary skills before completing his degree. For example:

I'm currently trying to find some vacation work just for the pure objective of trying to gain some experience so that when I go for a job I've got that experience and I kind of know. So I don't think I'd have the skills right now to step out into a full-time job, but I'm aiming to have that by the end of my degree. (P44, local Commerce student)

“Song”¹⁸
(Commerce graduate)

Song is a recent university graduate in Commerce (Finance). He came to Australia six years ago as an international student after completing high school in South Korea. After applying unsuccessfully for a couple of graduate positions in the accounting/finance field, Song took on a full-time position as an embroiderer in a small company. For the time being, he is happy working in this role, as there is little pressure to speak English and adjust to ‘the Australian culture’. Song believes that to work as a professional in the Commerce field, he needs to have excellent language skills – at least IELTS 8 or 9. He therefore feels that it is too difficult to find work as a professional in finance or commerce and even if he did find work, it would be almost impossible to ‘move up’.

Since graduating from his course at the end of 2006, Song believes his English language skills have deteriorated because he has had less need to communicate in English: his colleagues are all Korean or Chinese, and he shares a house with other Koreans. Despite acknowledging that his language skills need improvement, Song has no plans to work on developing his language skills. Instead, he plans to develop other important skills such as leadership and small business management. He adds: “I have never thought about my plans to improve my English skills. But, I don’t think the English is, is only problem to be better in this society. If I have something else I want to improve those things. So I don’t want to only focusing on the English, learning English, getting English it’s not a problem, so I want to do something else.”

With the knowledge and skills acquired from his Commerce course, Song hopes to one day own a small business. In the meantime, he will continue working in the small embroidery business.

3.4 Employment outcomes and graduates’ experience in finding work

At the time of interviews, fewer than half of the international recent graduates had found full-time positions in their chosen field. A few graduates who could only find part-time work in their chosen field supplemented their income by working in restaurants or shops. Three graduates were working full-time in an area unrelated to their studies, although they were continuing to look for jobs in their field of study.

Generally, all the international graduates — regardless of field of study — expressed difficulty in finding work in their chosen field, and a large proportion reported that they had failed, on numerous occasions, to be short-listed for an interview. There was the perception among some of the graduates that employers did not want to hire overseas students:

First we just looking for job and, it’s really hard for us, like the overseas student. We’ve got no experience, not very good English. And... just have the degree paper, it doesn’t mean anything and they really didn’t want to

¹⁸ To ensure confidentiality of interviewees’ identities, pseudonyms are used throughout the report.

hire us. And there's very, very little choice to get interview, even. So, most of them will look for the jobs on the internet, maybe half a year, and they quit. (P40, Chinese Accounting graduate)

If I find the job in the internet they say if you are not, they want to sometimes the local people. They don't like the Asian people, and then they always ask your English quite good or not. So sometimes I'm nervous to give them my resume (P26, Korean hairdressing graduate)

The majority of graduates knew peers who were working in jobs unrelated to their field of study. The most common reason given for this was that graduates could not find work in their chosen field. One local IT graduate whose university course had been dominated by international students spoke about his friends and peers who had intended to live and work in Australia, but had found it too difficult to find work in their chosen fields:

Some of them [international friends] have [found work], but unfortunately the majority of the students I know have returned home because the only jobs they could find was the part-time casual work in restaurants and taxi driving that they did during university. The higher-level jobs were closed to them, or at least that's what they felt. (P56, local IT student)

Another reason for people moving outside their field of study was related to limited opportunities for promotion or advancement:

I know most of the students doing accounting, they want to get a job in accounting area and because in this area it is very hard to be promoted and salary and the pay no good, so... many of my friends that have been after three or five or, after several years they would like to consider to changing to other areas. (P3, Chinese Accounting student)

In stark contrast to the experience of the international graduates, all but one local graduate had been successful in finding full-time work in their chosen field. This graduate, who completed an honours degree in Commerce (Finance), was working as a sessional university tutor and had decided to pursue a career in higher education. The other local graduates had secured full-time positions in their field of study either before completing their courses, or shortly after graduating.

“Ben”
(*Accounting graduate*)

Ben has been in Australia for almost four years, during which time he has completed a university accounting degree. For the past year, he has been working as a part-time accountant in a small company run by Chinese-speaking employers. To supplement his income, he also works as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant. According to Ben, he has applied for “hundreds, maybe a thousand” full-time accounting positions but has been unsuccessful each time. He believes that his university course prepared him extremely well for the workplace and that he has the necessary language skills to perform well in an entry-level accounting position, but for some reason, he says, “they really don’t want to hire us.”

Ben believes that international graduates are disadvantaged by the hiring process, especially when potential employers call applicants by telephone before arranging a face-to-face interview. For Ben, whose first language is Chinese, communicating on the telephone (without the cues from body language) is far more difficult than talking face to face. He notes: “There is very little choice to get interview, they just call me and say, hello, and [speak] very quickly and maybe if you say, ‘pardon’ or ‘sorry’, they will think, oh, you are not good communicator”.

Ben has a number of Chinese friends who also graduated with Australian accounting degrees, but, after six months, have given up applying for positions in their field of study. They are mostly working in the restaurant industry now.

Despite the numerous rejections and setbacks he has faced, Ben plans to continue applying for full-time positions in accounting. He is also exploring options for further postgraduate studies in commerce.

3.5 Employment outcomes and the role of English language proficiency

International students and graduates 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. The issue of accent (and employers’ perceptions of graduates with different accents) was raised as a potential obstacle to gaining work in their chosen field.

Local students, on the other hand, focused less on ELP, although they recognised the importance of communication skills for the workplace. Just over a half of them believed that ELP was essential, and a few thought it was not important for finding work in their field of study.

3.5.1 Finding work: The interview

Almost all the international students and graduates thought that ELP, especially speaking skills, was essential for finding work, particularly for the job interview. A number of students stated that ELP was the most important factor for success in job applications: ELP not only affected one’s ability to communicate, but it affected their confidence and hence performance in interviews. For example:

I think if I want to rank the elements that would help you to find a job I would rank English first and then working experience, I mean, the previous

work experience... I think English is important in two ways. The first one is to make you more confident when you are in the interview or when you were, when you started your job. Another thing is of course the employers would compare, you know, the applicants based on English language skills. (P22, Chinese Commerce student)

I think if you want to find a job in English speaking companies, English skills definitely will be the most important thing, especially for the interview. If you can't express yourself very well or the company don't think you have the necessary skills to communicate with the customers, I don't think you can go through the interview. (P7, Chinese Accounting student)

Although most international students and graduates believed ELP to be very important for gaining work in their chosen field, some interviewees indicated that the importance of English language skills depended upon the type of work one was doing. For example, in some areas of work in IT and Engineering, technical skills and knowledge were considered far more important and thus sought after by employers. English language skills were not considered to be very important in these fields. As one student commented:

I think it depends on, like [for] commerce students of course English is essential. Yeah, you have to go to contact with kind of clients. But for IT students like those who develop software and, take my cousin as example, his English is very, very poor but he can find IT job, write programs, something like that, and got very high pay, so it depends. (P4, Chinese Accounting student)

3.5.1.1 The issue of accent

A number of students questioned whether “not being a native English speaker” would affect their employment outcomes. The issue of accent was raised by several students, mainly students from an Indian background who identified themselves as bilingual – English and Hindi:

There is one problem with accent actually. People say, my friends say that my accent ... Employers might want to speak with some person whose accent is similar with them. I'm not quite sure about it (P1, Indian Engineering student)

I think my communication skills are fine. They're just as good as any local. It's the accent that I have a problem adapting to. It's not that I can't understand them, but there's been situation where they can't understand me. And it's only the accent that's an issue, so that's something I may have to work on. ... if I think I'm still finding it hard, then that's something I'll adapt to. But, there are a lot of Indians here who still have the Indian accent and are working and doing really well. (P16, Indian IT student)

Other students also felt that having a different accent affected employers’ perception of an applicant, and that having a different accent could be an obstacle to finding work in their chosen field:

At the interview you're sort of being interviewed along with the locals. And it's quite obvious, not in terms of just physical appearance but just the way you carry yourself and of course when you open your mouth I think if you sound a lot different, I don't know how it's sort of being marked or how people, how the interviewers sort of view it, but sometimes it doesn't look as smooth and slick. (P12, Malaysian Medical student)

Most students felt they would have to continue working on their English language skills after finding a job. Most planned to do this informally through communicating with colleagues and clients. Others mentioned spending time reading and watching television to do this.

In comparison to the views of international students and graduates, most of whom thought ELP to be essential for finding work in their chosen field, just over a half of the locals mentioned ELP or 'communication skills' as being critical to successful employment outcomes:

It's very important. Like, it's such a competitive market out there at the moment. Even in my industry, IT, you, they don't, I don't think they'll choose you based on your marks. Like, I'm sure that comes into it, but I believe that they do make decisions upon your face-to-face, how you communicate and things like that when you go for the job. (P27, local IT student)

Critical, absolutely critical...if you can't get your point across because they drill you with questions and you've got to be able to handle that and answer their questions clearly, and if you can't do that, you're not going to get the job, just flat out you're not. (P23, local commerce student)

In contrast to these views, several local students/graduates commented that language skills were not very important to find work in their particular field of study. For a medical student, this was because the interview did not play an important role in the overall application/selection process:

I think to actually get a job, you do have to sit an interview but it's not worth a lot, it's worth maybe 10 to 15% of your entire job application... so I don't think it will play a big role in getting a job. (P30, local medical student)

Similarly, for IT and Engineering students/graduates, ELP was not necessarily important for finding work in their fields of study. It depended on the type of work a graduate was going to be doing. For jobs requiring mainly technical skills, ELP was not an important factor influencing employment outcomes:

It's a very technical field, 9/10 probably more experience and performance that gets you the job rather than speaking ability because in IT unless you're doing BA [Bachelor of Arts] work or dealing with stakeholders regularly, you tend to be behind the scenes so you don't have to communicate much verbally. (P58, local IT graduate)

Because sometimes, you know, if, like with a program you can be like just a code monkey and sit at the front of the computer and do that. You can be really good at that, but you don't really need that much English experience. (P45, local Engineering student)

Another perspective was offered by the medical students/graduates, who mentioned that employment outcomes and the role of ELP depended upon where a student wanted to work. They noted that interviews were not a part of the recruitment process in states outside Victoria, so ELP was not as important in finding work in these states, although it would become essential in performing well as medical practitioners once in the workplace.

As one medical student pointed out that due to the high demand for doctors, an applicant's ELP did not necessarily influence whether he/she would find work in medicine, but rather it determined the choices he/she would have:

Especially when you've got a climate of not enough doctors in Australia, the problems with getting a job probably aren't as relevant as getting the

job that a person wants... and in presenting themselves for interview or otherwise, if English isn't their first language, a person's first language or they haven't graduated from an Australian university, they're less likely to get highly sought-after city jobs. (P29, local medical student)

3.5.2 ELP and job performance

Whereas not all interviewees agreed that ELP was crucial for finding work in their chosen field, they all agreed ELP was essential for performing well in the workplace, particularly for promotion to more senior positions. For a number of interviewees, ELP or 'communication skills' was the most important factor in performing well in the workplace:

You need to be able to communicate well with your fellow employees or the people above you in the workplace and below you or clients and everyone. It's just, it's probably the most, communication is the most important thing in a job, like just making sure everyone knows where everyone stands, yeah; it seems integral. (P24, local Engineering student)

3.5.2.1 Self-assessment of ELP

Interviewees were asked to assess the level of their ELP using the IELTS descriptors, and indicate the level necessary to perform well in the workplace. Most international students assessed their current skills at between 7 and 8 overall. The four Indian interviewees assessed their skills at between 8 and 9. A Malaysian IT student and two Chinese accounting students assessed their language proficiency at 6. The large majority of students indicated that they would have to be at level 8 to perform well in their chosen field, and one student thought she needed to be close to IELTS 9 to perform well.

The medical students felt that graduates could perform well as doctors with an IELTS level of 5 or 6. They added however, that they would need a higher level to converse with peers or consultants:

In terms of talking to patients, I think that's just normal conversational English and that will be like a five. But in terms of talking to consultants, even other doctors, that would be definitely an eight. (P11, Malaysian medical student)

International graduates' views of their English language skills varied from IELTS 5 to 8. Graduates from private colleges (hairdressing and hospitality) tended to assess their skills at being between 4 and 6. Other graduates assessed their skills as being between 6 and 8.

The hairdressing graduates agreed that they would need a minimum level of 7 to perform well:

'Cause, you know, the Western, they can spend much more money to your salon. And they sit in your salon like 2 or 3 hours at least and they like to talk, I know that. Yeah, the Western like to talk. And if your communication skill is a bit lower, sometimes it's hard to communicate, and sometimes it's, you know, hard to take care of her, yeah. (P25, Chinese hairdressing graduate)

And especially hairdressing, have to talk with customer every single time and I have to explain everything. And sometime I need to, like, talk about, like, private, private story or something... so, I think, English it's quite important for get a job. (P38, Korean hairdressing graduate)

On the other hand, the graduates from hospitality indicated that working in the kitchen did not require a high level of English skills (level 5 or 6), as long as they could communicate with the head chef and other workers in the kitchen.

Like most of the international graduates, the majority of local students and graduates assessed their ELP as being between IELTS 7 and 8, with four graduates assessing themselves as IELTS 9. Most thought that the absolute minimum level needed to perform well at work was IELTS 6, with a few interviewees saying that levels 8 and 9 would be the necessary level.

In terms of performing well in the job, one local university graduate currently working as an engineer commented on the importance of being able to adapt language use to suit the specific context. This requires quite sophisticated knowledge and control of the English language. In particular, he mentioned the importance of having an understanding and control of register:

Absolutely [important] in a project office... there's a lot of the typical construction guys who are walking around and just sort of swearing and grunt a lot and then at the same time I deal with a lot of the, professional, the public, the very professional people who work for Melbourne Water and my company, and I have to, the language I use with dealing with those different people changes, abruptly... Like, I'll have a conversation with someone where we're both swearing and then next time, then I'm on the phone to someone being very polite. (P52, local Engineering graduate)

Both the international and local students mentioned that the level of ELP required to perform well in the workplace depended largely on the type of work involved. For example, a high level of ELP was not required for some types of IT work, although a high level of ELP would be very important for a more senior, managerial position:

In IT, depending on what area you're in, you may not need to have a fantastic knowledge of the language, especially if you're like a code monkey, and you're just sitting there writing code. Like, there's only one language you need to know and that's like Java. And you can be a very good coder if you're a six or a seven and you don't really need to communicate too... But if you're going to be like in any kind of managerial position or any kind of documentation position you're probably going to need to be a, like an eight or a nine to do well. (P27, local IT student)

A commerce graduate also commented that higher level of ELP would be essential for promotion to a more senior position. She mentioned that she would probably not be promoted to a position as team leader because she would not be able to attain the high level of ELP necessary for that position:

My opinion - you can start any job, let's say with level 5/6, but if you want to be the senior in that job you've got to be 9. Seriously, I work as a graduate accountant and I see my possibility that, okay, I can become a team leader in future years and I can become the senior team leader, things like that, but I can't see myself there because I don't have level 9, yeah. (P33, Korean Commerce graduate)

3.5.3 ELP and social interaction with peers

ELP and the ability to communicate socially with colleagues in the workplace was also considered to be important for performing well in the workplace and for job satisfaction:

Like, for the job itself, I guess because it's not just doing the job with the computer, it's also about like talking to the employees and other co-workers. So communication is very important. Besides, because I did some

casual work and I find like communications with the co-workers is also important, like during the lunchtime. So how to speak well, especially like speak, like the slang, you know how to speak the slang, you understand how they talk about the footy, is important. (P2, Chinese Commerce student)

Another commerce graduate also commented on the social aspects of work. Although he had been working in IT support for over a year, he still felt that he lacked the language skills to interact comfortably with his Australian colleagues. This affected his confidence, workplace relations and his overall job performance:

Just I think affecting my performance to some degree because I feel not very confident to speak to local people especially. I think my workmates, some of them may feel, I am not so friendly and sometimes I feel worried about the relationship between my workmates and this can cause my stress. (P23, Chinese Commerce graduate)

Being able to communicate socially with colleagues was also mentioned by a number of other graduates, including an accounting graduate who noted the importance of using informal language to 'fit in':

We need to have more socialising skills, as well, like adopting into the culture. And learning informal languages also is important. Yeah, to fit into the society it's really hard (P33, Korean Accounting graduate)

"Yoonhee"
(Nursing graduate)

Korean-born Yoonhee has been in Australia for four years and has recently completed a degree in Nursing (Division 2) from TAFE. She is currently working casually as a nurse at several different hospitals and aged-care facilities while completing a higher nursing qualification at Deakin University. Overall, Yoonhee believes that her course prepared her well for the workplace, as there were plenty of clinical placements where she had opportunities to practise her skills.

Although Yoonhee feels capable to perform her basic duties as a nurse, she believes that she is "always struggling with communication", especially with doctors and elderly people who, according to Yoonhee, "are really mumbling, so it's really hard to understand". She also finds it difficult to communicate with other nurses who use a lot of slang. Yoonhee believes that she will have to improve her language skills substantially in order to perform as a higher-level (Division 1) nurse. She is also desperate to improve her language skills and communicate "like a little Australian" as she feels that this is the main obstacle preventing her from "fitting in" and socialising with her Australian colleagues.

Yoonhee hopes to work as full-time Division 1 nurse in the next couple of years, but if she cannot improve her language skills or continues to feel lonely and isolated in the workplace she does not know whether she will be able to pursue a long-term career in nursing.

3.6 Workplace readiness and employment outcomes: Other important factors

In addition to the role of ELP, the interviewees identified several other factors as influencing workplace readiness and employment outcomes. Previous relevant work experience (or lack thereof) seemed to be one of the most important factors influencing the employment outcomes of international students/graduates. Other influencing factors mentioned by interviewees included part-time work (in any area), diversity of experiences, and ‘personal characteristics’ or attributes.

3.6.1 Prior work experience in the field of study

Both international students and graduates mentioned the importance of providing opportunities for practical work experience and training, i.e. internships. A number of students emphasised the importance of gaining experience in Australian companies specifically, rather than in foreign exchanges:

I think they should give us more opportunities in Australian companies so we get to know the culture, we meet, hopefully, future bosses. So it's very important for us to get internships in Australian market because you're studying Australian education. It's very important to, you know, get a feel of Australian companies, rather than going in a foreign exchange. (P6, Indian IT student)

Some of the main obstacles in gaining relevant work experience were the employment and visa restrictions placed on international students. Interviewees raised the issue that international students are not permitted to apply for internship programs, which are generally open to Australian citizens only. Although work placements were a compulsory part of some courses, opportunities to obtain placements in Australia were limited:

Yeah, that's my problem. So when they, the Faculty offer internships and all the companies require permanent residency at least, yeah, a visa. So, as an international student, we can't do anything. And also, like, it's automatically, like, you know, stopping our way to, like, trying to get into the workforce here... (P18, Indonesian IT student)

All the internship program, they are only available for the Australian citizen. Because we are international students, so we are not allowed to apply for internship. So if the university can organise some internship especially for international students, that would be much better. (P7, Chinese Accounting student)

A number of students also mentioned the limited opportunities and the difficulty in gaining that initial work experience:

Yeah, and also people said if you don't have the first working experience it's difficult for you to find a job. I don't know why the Australian people they are so, pay so much attention on the first working experience because if we don't start we can't get the first experience. If they don't give us the opportunity, how can I get the first working experience? (P10, Chinese Engineering student)

Prior work experience was also considered to be important by a few local graduates. One commerce graduate applied unsuccessfully for several positions in the private sector, before finding full-time work in a government department. The reasons given for not being offered the position in the private sector were mainly related to not having the relevant experience sought by employers.

In contrast to the dominant view held by international students/graduates that work experience was essential for successful employment outcomes, one local engineering graduate did not feel that prior work experience in the field was necessary or helpful:

No, not [important], not necessarily at all. I mean if you're doing a civil engineering degree to become a civil engineer... can't get that practical experience [until] you become a civil engineer, I don't see how doing work experience prior to graduating is going to help you (P52, local Engineering student)

3.6.2 Part-time work and extra-curricular activities

The views of international and local students/graduates differed considerably on the question of how important or valuable part-time work or extra-curricular activities were to workplace readiness and employment outcomes. Whereas all the local students/graduates had worked part-time while studying — either in sales, restaurants or customer service — under one third of the international students/graduates reported that they had worked part-time or participated in voluntary extra-curricular activities while studying.

On the whole, local students and graduates thought that having diverse experiences, including part-time jobs and volunteer work, played an essential role in finding work and in developing useful workplace skills:

Obviously any kind of part-time work is crucial. So that's probably the number one thing...and on top of that being involved in everything... gave me quite good skills I think in being able to deal with different kinds of people and trying to communicate things from one group of people to another. (P24, local Commerce student)

It sort of teaches you how to deal with bosses as well, not just the customers or people you serve, people you usually deal with, and your co-employees as well. It sort of teaches you how to sort of maintain a good relationship with them I guess. (P21, local Commerce student)

Similarly, the small number of international students/graduates who did have part-time jobs while studying generally found this to be useful for developing communication skills, as well as an understanding of Australian culture:

I gained a lot of communication skills through part-time job and some volunteer work... I have different kinds of part-time jobs and the longest one is working as a sales assistant in a bakery.... It will help me to build commonsense and to understand the culture of Australia, how people relate to each other. (P7, Chinese Accounting student)

Most of the international students/graduates, however, 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, most of the local students/graduates saw this and a diversity of experiences as being valued and sought after by employers. One local student commented on the importance of having diverse experiences and being ‘well-rounded’:

I know you have to be really well-rounded, you know. It's not just about your marks or anything, it's about going out and maybe getting involved in the community, playing some sports, you know, and what you do outside of your studies, if you work and that sort of thing. And you really do need to have a good balance. I think the balance is the crucial thing that employers are looking for. But it's not always painted that way by the university and it's not always that obvious. (P43, local Commerce student)

3.6.3 The role of cultural understanding and ‘cultural fit’

The importance of being able to understand and adapt to Australian work culture was raised by a number of interviewees – both local and international. One local graduate thought that employers’ perception of a graduate’s ‘cultural fit’ was a factor influencing employment outcomes. A number of other interviewees also commented on the importance of being able to understand the cultural meanings behind the language:

I think even if an international student might be brilliant at doing accounting for example, but if the employer feels that this particular student can't make small talk...football scores on the weekend...and help put customers at ease, then I think it's not so much the language that's the problem, but the perception of cultural fit that might sometimes get in the way. (P56, local Commerce graduate)

I think language is a big problem. Not because of the grammar, the pronunciation, but because of the culture. People think about the same thing from different angles. But so it's quite difficult to make friends with some local friends because you always think things differently. (P28, Chinese Commerce graduate)

3.6.4 Personal characteristics/attributes

Although most of the interviewees agreed that ELP and work experience were important for finding work and performing well, a number of students/graduates thought that other characteristics and attributes were equally or more important. A couple of international students mentioned the ability to learn quickly and adapt to different situations as being the most important characteristics sought by employers:

I think the most important thing for me is like quick learning skills because most of the knowledge is learned from college or university, is not a very related what they need for their business. So if you, what university taught, is the basic knowledge and what you need is to quick learning of what they need and to transfer your knowledge into work for, to work, to adapt. (P3, Chinese Accounting student)

A local hairdressing graduate supported this view and commented on the importance of being willing to adapt and learn:

To get a job in hairdressing, I don't think you need to have perfect English, but I think you need to be willing to adapt and be willing to learn things. (P51, local hairdressing graduate)

3.6.5 Networks and personal contacts

It seems that an important factor in the employment outcomes of international students was their personal contacts and networks. Most of the international graduates who found work in their chosen field commented that they had found work through personal contacts: either their course teachers, in the case of two hairdressers; or their friends, in the case of two accountants. One accountant secured an interview for a position through her landlord.

In contrast to this, the local graduates found work by going through the process of written applications and job interviews. With the exception of one hairdressing graduate who found her current work through family contacts, all the graduates had found work in their chosen field by responding to advertisements.

“Rina”

(Hairdressing graduate)

Rina has been in Australia for two years and has recently completed a hairdressing course at a private college. While most of her friends from college have found work in salons, she has been unsuccessful in her search for a junior position. She believes that her lack of hands-on experience is the most important factor affecting her success at finding work. Unlike many of her international-student peers who had experience working in salons before coming to Australia, Rina is new to hairdressing and feels that she is disadvantaged because of her young age (20 years) and her lack of experience. Although she is not very confident about her general English language skills, she feels her language skills are good enough to work as a hair stylist because she believes that technical skills, not language skills, are the most important for working in this field.

Rina knows that she needs to develop her skills through work experience but the only salons that will give her the opportunity to work and gain experience are “Chinese” businesses that attract a predominately Chinese-speaking clientele. She worked for a short period in one of these salons but left because she was underpaid and felt exploited. Rina would prefer to work in a large Australian salon, but her attempts to find work have all failed to date. She believes that if she were given the opportunity to work in an English-speaking salon, she would improve both her technical skills and communication skills.

Despite the difficulties she is currently facing in finding work, Rina is determined to persist with her career in hairdressing. She hopes to own her own salon one day.

3.7 Improving graduates’ workplace readiness and employment outcomes

The interviewees provided numerous suggestions for tertiary institutions to assist students in developing skills necessary for the workplace, and ensuring successful employment outcomes. The findings from the interviews with students and recent graduates also suggest several areas for tertiary institutions to consider. These include:

- Providing more opportunities for work placements and internships
- Focusing more attention on engagement with small businesses, not just large organisations that participate in careers fairs

Working with employer groups to raise their awareness of the cultural issues facing international students.

- Offering programs on developing professional skills, including interview skills and skills for interacting with colleagues
- Promoting opportunities or incentives for local-international student engagement.

Several international students and graduates commented on their desire to interact more with local students. They saw this as one of the most useful ways to improve their communication skills, as well as their understanding of Australian culture.

It was clear that the opportunities for local-international student interaction outside of class seemed to be limited. While the international students were perhaps expecting to interact with and befriend local students at university/TAFE, the local students spent limited time on campus due to their other commitments. As one local graduate observed:

Most of the local students drove to and from uni; they would turn up for 2 hours then disappear again... What that meant was limited interaction between local and international students. I was frustrated for 2 things. A lot of international students felt kind of let down, that they wanted to make lots of local friends, but quite literally couldn't put themselves in a position to meet them, and on the flipside I was fairly cranky at the Australian students...I thought "You all talk about going on working overseas holidays and seeing the world; this is a fantastic opportunity to live and work with people from Thailand or Malaysia or wherever, that you can build a network for the future". (P56, local IT graduate)

The interview data show that the majority of local students have part-time work and see the experience and skills gained for this as being very important for workplace-readiness. Perhaps universities should consider ways to assist international students find casual work so that they have more opportunities to interact with Australians, while at the same time gaining a range of experiences that are valued by employers.

3.8 Summary of findings

Most international students indicated that they hoped to work in Australia after completing their courses, and most planned to find work in their chosen field of study. Generally, all the international graduates, regardless of field of study, expressed difficulty in finding work in their chosen field. At the time of interviews, fewer than half of the international recent graduates had found full-time positions in their chosen field. A few graduates who could only find part-time work in their chosen field supplemented their income by working in restaurants or shops. Most of the graduates mentioned that they had not even been successful in reaching the interview stage. This is despite having received professional assistance with their CVs. A few graduates mentioned being involved in a pre-interview 'screening' process over the telephone — with unsuccessful outcomes.

In contrast to the experience of the majority of international graduates, all but one of the local graduates had full-time positions in their field of study. In addition, half the local final-year students had secured full-time graduate positions for the following year.

3.8.1 The role of ELP

International students and graduates agreed that English language skills were 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. The issue of accent — and employers' perceptions of graduates with different accents — was raised as a potential obstacle to gaining work in their chosen field.

Whereas not all the local students/graduates agreed that ELP was crucial for finding work in their chosen field, they all agreed that it was essential for performing well in the workplace, particularly for promotion to more senior positions. For a number of

interviewees, ELP (or ‘communication skills’) was the most important factor in performing well in the workplace.

Both the international and local students/graduates mentioned that the level of ELP required to perform well in the workplace depended largely on the type of work involved. For example, a high level of ELP was not required for some types of IT or engineering work, although it would be essential for a more senior, managerial position.

3.8.2 Other factors

In addition to the role of ELP, the interviewees identified several other factors as influencing workplace readiness and employment outcomes. Previous relevant work experience (or lack thereof) seemed to be one of the most important factors influencing the employment outcomes of international students/graduates. Other influencing factors mentioned by interviewees included part-time work (in any area), diversity of experiences, and ‘personal characteristics’ or attributes.

The views of international and local students/graduates differed considerably on the question of how important or valuable part-time work or extra-curricular activities were to workplace readiness and employment outcomes. Whereas all the local students/graduates believed that diversity of experiences and ‘well-roundedness’ were highly valued and sought-after by employers, the majority of international students and graduates seemed to place most importance on relevant work experience in their field of study. For these interviewees, the biggest obstacle to finding work in their chosen field was limited opportunity to gain relevant work experience and internships in their field of study, as well as visa restrictions.

4. Analysis of interviews with universities and VET providers

This section presents the findings from the interviews conducted with university and vocational education and training (VET) sector providers. It analyses the perceptions of staff regarding the influence of ELP on workplace readiness and employment outcomes of international graduates. In addition, this section identifies best-practice strategies designed to enhance the ELP and workplace readiness of international students. The findings from the interviews suggest that institutions are developing programs to address the growing concern regarding ELP and employment outcomes for international graduates. The interviews also indicated that there are interrelated factors that impact on the workplace readiness and successful employment outcomes for international students, of which English language proficiency is a major (but not the sole) issue of importance.

4.1 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff employed in universities and the VET sector. Interviewees were recruited by contacting either Deputy Vice Chancellors responsible for teaching and learning, Academic and Language Learning (ALL) unit leaders, or employment and career officers in institutions, and briefly describing the aims of the project. This allowed the researcher to gain information about the relevant people to contact within the given institution. In total 28 interviews were conducted. These included:

- Ten interviews with employment and career officers (referred to as career services)
- Eight interviews with ALL unit leaders
- Two interviews with Heads of English language centres
- Eight with disciplinary staff involved in teaching accounting, commerce, medicine, engineering, nursing, hospitality and IT.

There were three universities from the Group of 8, three from the Australian Technology Network and four institutions that were not affiliated with either of these groupings. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Overall themes and issues raised in each of the interviews were noted for comparison across the interviews. Examples of current practice were also noted for inclusion in the analysis.

4.2 Influence of ELP on workplace readiness

All the interviewees indicated that English language proficiency was important in terms of workplace readiness for international graduates. The study sought to gauge the interviewees' perceptions of the English proficiency levels of international graduates for whom English is a second language (referred to as international) and local graduates for whom English is a first language (referred to as local), at both commencement and completion of course. While this information was based on the interviewees' perceptions, the aim was to gain insights into the perceived similarities and differences between the two groups of graduates in terms of ELP and workplace readiness. The findings are summarised below.

On commencement of their course international students were perceived to range from 5.5 – 8.0 overall IELTS score, with most interviewees indicating the average range at 6.5 – 7.0. Local students ranged between 5.0 - 9.0, with most interviewees indicating the average range at between 7.0 – 9.0.

On completion of their course international graduates' ELP was perceived to range from 5.5 – 8.0 overall IELTS, with the average range between 6.5 – 7.5. The local students ranged between 6.0 – 9.0, with an average score of 8.0.

Most of the interviewees perceived a slightly greater variability of ELP within the local graduates compared to the international graduates. This appeared in part due to several interviewees commenting that students from low socio-economic status (SES) who speak English as a first language may begin their studies with poor English language proficiency.

Interviewees commented that they believed only a few international graduates achieve IELTS scores of 7.5 – 8.0 at the end of their degree. The common perception was that many international graduates progressed only slightly in their IELTS levels, while some may complete their courses with lower IELTS scores than they had achieved on entry. It appeared that many in the latter group tend to return home after their studies and did not seek work in Australia.

Most interviewees indicated that local graduates generally score higher on the IELTS scale on entry and completion compared to international graduates. Yet the large range of IELTS levels that exist within the reported perceptions of both local and international students indicated that IELTS scores were not necessarily a consistent variable within the two groups of graduates. In other words, the interviewees perceived that some local and international students could complete their degrees with a similar range of IELTS scores, thereby indicating that low ELP can be an issue for some local as well as international students.

Most of the interviewees commented on the growing trend of companies demanding minimum IELTS scores for international graduates interested in applying for employment. Some typical responses included the following comment:

When the accounting firms announced that they would consider employing international graduates who had an IELTS of 7.5, I thought that this was a travesty. The firms were proud to say that they were accepting international graduates and really, at that score, they will be getting very few of them applying. Many local Australian students would have difficulty achieving a 7.5 IELTS score. It seems to me that these companies do not understand the purposes of IELTS as a test for ELP, or they are discriminating against international graduates. (ALL Unit Leader)

The above comment highlighted the ethical concerns of using IELTS as an indicator of workplace readiness expressed in the interviews. Over half of those interviewed considered the use of IELTS as a discriminatory measure, particularly given that IELTS was not originally designed as an assessment of ELP and workplace readiness. Just under half of the interviewees suggested that some form of assessing ELP was needed for the workplace and this was occurring in courses where students were assessed in the clinical practice or undertaking capstone subjects in their final year of study.

Most of the interviewees expressed concern about the growing use of IELTS for employment purposes, as international graduates' studies do not adequately prepare them for sitting the IELTS test. For example, the texts that students are required to write during their course of study may be different to what they are required to write in the IELTS test. Some suggested that IELTS is "more about exam strategies" than ELP. Furthermore (and this was stressed by three-quarters of the interviewees), the English language skills required for successful employment outcomes may be different to the English language skills that graduates have had to develop in order to successfully complete their course (see section 4.3 for further discussion). What did

appear to be clear from the interviews was that most of the university and VET sector staff perceived IELTS as relevant to university and VET study rather than to workplace readiness, where ELP is perceived as requiring much broader skills than those that were assessed through IELTS. As one person stated:

There's English language proficiency for university study and then there's workplace English language proficiency (Nursing academic)

Nearly all the interviewees perceived ELP for workplace readiness to involve effective oral communication skills in a range of different activities, such as effective email communication, the ability to transfer information quickly to colleagues, and the ability to explain complex ideas succinctly to staff. These aspects of ELP will be discussed further in the next section.

Three of the people interviewed believed that there would be an increasing focus on having IELTS exit tests for international graduates and considered this to be a positive move forward. At the time that the study was conducted only one university, the University of Queensland, which offered exit IELTS test for their international student graduates. This was introduced at the beginning of 2008 and international students were offered the option of taking an IELTS test on the completion of their studies, which the university provided free of charge. The main rationale was to provide international students evidence of their English language proficiency level, which may assist them in finding employment.

4.3 ELP and employment outcomes

All the interviewees indicated that international graduates generally faced greater challenges concerning their ELP and successful employment outcomes compared to local graduates. The study sought to identify the aspects of ELP that appeared to be important for successful employment outcomes. It seemed that social language skills were identified as important in getting graduates through the interview process and in working successfully once employed. The following comment from a careers officer was typical of the observations made in the interviews:

The most common issue we hear mentioned is about the ability of international graduates to explain themselves and be understood, and the ability to listen and understand what is being said to them.

This highlighted the importance of international graduates finding opportunities to develop their social English language skills during their studies. The common perception amongst the interviewees was that academics were mainly focused on teaching their subjects and had little time to concentrate on ELP for the workplace. Similarly, international students were perceived generally to place greater emphasis on completing their degrees. In addition, most of the interviewees indicated that there were fewer opportunities for international students to develop their social English skills given the difficulty of interacting with local English speakers.

All of the interviewees highlighted that graduates required good social language ability in order to be successful in their employment interviews. Two main issues were mentioned regarding this.

First, English language pronunciation appeared to be a particular obstacle for international students achieving successful employment outcomes. Ten of the interviewees suggested that the workplace might not be ready for speakers of English as a second language, particularly if they were from Asian countries. For example, there may be greater acceptance of a French English language speaker rather than a Chinese English language speaker, because there appears to be

greater community tolerance toward European languages compared to the tonal languages of most Asian countries. One person referred to this as “linguistic prejudice”. While some acknowledged that international graduates could often be understood, they also pointed out that employer attitudes to accent could influence their judgments about the level of international graduates’ ELP.

Secondly, about two-thirds of the interviewees commented that international graduates would use the incorrect register in the interview situation. It seemed that their ELP influenced their performance in interviews. This was in part due to their lack of confidence with the English language. As one participant stated:

Our international students don't have the confidence to make a mistake, whereas our local students do. (Accounting academic)

In addition, some international graduates may not understand the purpose of the interview:

International students don't know how to market themselves. When you ask them a question in the interview, they give you a two-word answer... A lot of them think that the degree is going to get them the job. It's really difficult to get across to them that they need to be able to talk about themselves, what they have achieved and what sort of skills they can offer the employer. They need to learn how to market themselves to an employer. (Career Advisor)

Rather than asking questions and displaying their personal and academic qualities, they tend to be quiet and respectful of the people on the interview panel. While this may seem to be a stereotypical view of international graduates (particularly from Asia), it appeared that for many cultural issues can influence the register used by international graduates, which can impact negatively on employer perceptions of their English language ability. Within the workplace the different levels of communication required by graduates further complicated the issue of register. For example:

As far as communication is concerned, one of the main issues that we hear from students on work experience is being able to communicate one message at different levels. For example, up at executive level, across to their colleagues and then to the people they may be working with on teams they are leading (ALL Unit Leader).

For the local group, the most at-risk graduates in terms of ELP and workplace readiness were those from low SES. These students may be first generation attendees to tertiary study and they may struggle with the ELP requirements for the workplace. Their particular issues relate to use of correct register in interacting with clients and colleagues in the workplace, as well as poor writing skills. This is supported by the findings of a recent study at Victoria University (Messinis, Sheehan & Miholicic 2008). It is difficult to define the group most at-risk within the international graduates. The interviewees were reluctant to identify groups from particular countries, as they believed that the issues were not necessarily country-specific. They did not want to stereotype certain groups of graduates, as most stated that this did not assist in understanding the particular issues that confront international students. In general terms, the main area of difficulty for international graduates appeared to be social interaction in the workplace. Twenty of the interviewees stressed that the ELP issues faced by international graduates were different from those faced by local graduates.

4.4 Other factors influencing employment outcomes

Work experience and cross-cultural understandings of the workplace also appeared to be important in influencing the employment outcomes of international students. Sixteen of the interviewees identified work experience as equally important as ELP in influencing employment outcomes. Eight of the interviewees indicated that work experience was more important than ELP. International graduates have fewer opportunities to gain work experience during their course. None of the interviewees mentioned the recent visa changes in September 2007 that allow for an 18-month work experience period post-graduation. It seemed that the central concern was for international graduates to gain work experience while completing their course. While placements were organised in professions such as medicine, nursing, hospitality and hairdressing, it was in areas such as accounting, engineering, commerce and IT that international students struggled to find work experience relevant to their field of study.

The importance of work experience was further emphasised in the comments interviewees made about the cross-cultural issues that relate to successful employment outcomes. Most of the comments related to the actual employment interviews. Typical comments included:

I think the cultural component of needing to put oneself forward and behaving in a way that might come across in their (international students') eyes as arrogant or self-centred. But it is necessary to be like that in some settings. I think this is the cultural challenge for international graduates.
(Nursing academic)

Three-quarters of the interviewees stated that it was only through work experience that graduates gained better understandings about the culture of the workplace and their role within it. Perceptions of the interviewees were that cultural awareness was a separate issue from ELP, as it involved the broader workplace context rather than the use of ELP to enhance intercultural communication. In certain professions, clinical placements offered international graduates insights into the workplace culture. However, limited access to work experience influenced the extent to which international students could achieve successful employment outcomes. This seemed to be particularly important for graduates from accounting, commerce, engineering and IT.

On the other hand, local graduates did not appear to encounter difficulties in obtaining work experience while completing their studies. This was in part due to the networks that they have established, through the support of their parents. Most of the interviewees mentioned that local graduates had the support of their parents, who were usually educated and had connections within the field of study. This support resulted in assistance with writing résumés, developing skills for job interviews and understanding the culture of the workplace. Many international graduates did not have these networks established in Australia. This appeared to influence the opportunities international students had for gaining work experience and understanding the workplace culture. The lack of these experiences seemed to negatively influence employment outcomes of international graduates.

Some international graduates may select to study a course because it was listed as a skills. The international graduates may not necessarily seek employment in their field of study after gaining their residency, due in part to their lack of interest in working within that profession. While only one of the interviewees mentioned this aspect, it seemed to be an important consideration for the academic involved in training nurses:

Because nursing is a skills shortage, a lot of people apply for the program without having an interest in the area... Their ultimate aim is permanent residency. They believe they just want to do the program so that they can get the points required to stay in Australia. But some of them do not work in this area because there are cultural differences. For example, nursing in Korea is very different from nursing in Australia. In Korea, the relatives do the basic care that nurses are expected to do in Australia. The students find that very difficult and often do not stay in the profession.

The above observation was not made by any of the other interviewees, indicating that they believed most of the international graduates were indeed interested in finding employment within their field of study.

Institutions have found it difficult to keep information about the number of international students who gain employment within their field of study. Most of the institutions have attempted to gain this information, but it has been problematic due to losing contact with the students after graduation and the poor return on any surveys sent to international graduates. Most source their information from the Graduate Destination Survey, which has a very low return rate and only surveys students four months after the completion of their course. It is therefore difficult for institutions to gain information about the long-term employment of international graduates.

4.5 Models of practice

This section will discuss the different models that exist within the institutions interviewed in order to identify the best practice strategies designed to enhance international students' ELP and workplace readiness. Programs were offered within centralised services, through careers and employment, as well as within particular faculties. ALL units were involved in sessions where the focus is on ELP. More recently programs have emerged within institutions where subjects with a particular focus on ELP and workplace readiness are being offered to students as part of their course of study. The data collected has indicated that most of the sessions offered through Career Services concentrated on developing students' interview skills, writing résumés and developing networks. There were very few workshops that actually focused on ELP in relation to employment, and these were usually supported by the ALL unit. A few programs that do focus on ELP and workplace readiness were taught within the disciplinary context. The different programs are discussed below.

4.5.1 ELP and employment: Centralised services

Workshops were organised in a variety of ways across institutions. All institutions offered two-hour stand-alone sessions; most had a series of three two-hour sessions, and short courses ranging from eight to twelve two-hour sessions. All of these were voluntary and some attempted to address ELP to varying degrees within the sessions. The workshops are available to all students.

All of the institutions interviewed offered workshops on writing résumés, developing interview techniques and finding employment. These include mock interviews where students were given direct feedback on their performance. They also organised events where employers offered advice to students regarding job interviews and finding employment. These were generally arranged through career services. ALL may also be involved in developing and presenting these sessions.

Most of the institutions offer individual consultations with students, where résumés and employment applications were discussed and advice was given to students. This

usually involved correcting grammar and syntax, as well as suggestions on how the application and résumé could be strengthened.

All of the institutions interviewed organised Career Days. These included skill training, panel discussions, presentations by local and international employers, and networking opportunities. These organized events were reported as being very successful for expanding students' employment networks.

Specific workshops were designed for international students. Five of the interviewees mentioned organising pronunciation classes for international students. These were offered mainly within ALL units. These typically consisted of two-hour stand-alone sessions, with the aim of offering strategies for improving oral communication skills. The interviewees indicated that little could be achieved in a two-hour session. One institution organised a series of three two-hour pronunciation classes, and was inundated with applications from international students. The program concentrated mainly on word and sentence stress, and the interviewee commented that there was a great need for more of these types of programs for international students, which were limited due to lack of sufficient funding resources.

Most institutions also organised workshops that aimed to raise international students' awareness of the Australian workplace culture, seeking permanent residency and developing strategies for gaining employment in Australia. These sessions were available only for international students.

Only one of the institutions interviewed had a dedicated team of career advisors for international students, which assisted in finding internships but also in preparing for interviews, CV writing and employer expectations. Their brief was to maximise the preparation of international students, so that they could achieve successful employment outcomes. Limited attention was given to ELP, with most of the emphasis placed on finding employment. Further ELP work, separate from employment strategies, was organised through the ALL unit. The service had only two career officers and they found it difficult to meet the growing demand from international students.

One way of addressing the work experience gap was by organising work experience for international students with Australian companies who operate overseas. This involved working very closely with major Australian companies in Asia and organising work experience for students. International students returning to their home countries for holidays were placed with an Australian company in that country. This meant that there were no issues with visas (as is common when international students look for work experience in Australia), and several veterans of these programs have gone on after graduation to get jobs in the same firms in Australia. However, organising placements was time-consuming and the number of students involved has been only around 40-50. This option, while a good alternative, only resolved the work experience issue for a small number of graduates.

4.5.2 ELP and employment: Discipline-embedded approaches

Most of the activity around ELP and workplace readiness seemed to occur within discipline specific courses. A variety of models exist within these programs, some which were support programs that specifically focus on ELP preparation for clinical practice, while others were offered as subjects within courses and address communication skills in the workplace. The following examples illustrate how these operated within the different institutions interviewed.

Courses such as medicine, nursing and hospitality have placement subjects, where students are required to work within their field. It was within these subjects that international students could develop their communication skills, where English

language support was linked to the clinical practice or workplace experience. Examples of these include:

- Nine-day program organised for nurses in developing their ELP. This was available for all students and it involved developing the communication skills that were required for the workplace.
- Workshops offered to all medical students to assist them in developing the communications skills they would require in their clinical placement and on the ward. Staff were also available upon request to observe students and give them feedback regarding their communications skills.
- Nursing students who were identified on their work placement to be experiencing difficulty in workplace communication, participated in a workshop called 'Clinically Speaking' before being allowed to proceed with the placement. The focus of the workshop was on developing the students' communication skills in dealing with the ELP demands of the workplace.
- An international support unit within the medicine and health services, where staff within the unit worked with faculty staff to address the ELP needs of students, as they related to their studies and workplace.
- The development of support materials to assist international students with ELP for the workplace. For example, DVD had been produced at one institution with four simulated patient interviews, delivered in a pre-clinical environment for medical students. Students observe the interaction and discussion followed regarding ways of improving communication, with the aim of understanding and managing clinical communication in an Australian context.

Within VET programs, employability skills and ELP skills were written into all competencies that form the assessment for the subjects within the courses. Some of the ALL units within the VET sector were becoming increasingly involved in developing ELP within the disciplines, which was considered by the interviewees interviewed as a way forward in addressing the issue of ELP and workplace readiness. This was occurring in some of the universities as well.

A few VET providers were developing ELP and workplace subjects to be taught at the beginning of the course. The aim was to emphasise the importance of communication skills for the workplace and to increase students' awareness of the level of ELP that they will require by the completion of their degree. This also assisted in identifying students who will require additional English language support during their study in order to develop their ELP skills. Hospitality courses included subjects dealing with oral presentation and developing interpersonal skills. The course also delivered a four-week preparation course before students have their placements in restaurants, with the focus on developing students' ELP. This was seen as important for local as well as international students by staff interviewed.

A few of the institutions interviewed were in the early stages of developing specific credit-bearing subjects that addressed issues of ELP and the workplace. For example, engineering and nursing courses developed a series of subjects that students selected as electives, which included a subject on ELP in the workplace. The topics covered include teamwork, negotiating and problem solving in the workplace. Students were able to take these elective subjects if they could not find work experience in their field of study.

Faculty-based career service programs have been developed for postgraduate students, which build skills for interviews and so on. Some local students attend but mostly international students. Alumni from the faculty who have successfully found work were also encouraged to present their experiences and offer examples of how to successfully transition from study to work.

A further example of including ELP development within the discipline was a nursing program, which had post-enrolment compulsory literacy and numeracy diagnostic assessment. The assessment included an oral ELP component. ALL staff developed a support package that addressed students' particular needs. They also taught within the nursing program, and supported all students in developing their communication skills. This was considered useful to local as well as international students and was part of the core course structure.

There was only one example of a certificate course that integrated ELP and the workplace from the data collected. This certificate was offered over two semesters, with two-hour long classes per week during each semester. It was available to international students from the Commerce, Engineering, Informatics, and Health & Behavioural Science faculties, and the Graduate School of Business, who were in the last year of their degrees. The certificate incorporated ELP, culture and job search skills in order to develop international students' awareness of the culture of the workplace and the communication skills that they were required to develop in order to achieve successful employment outcomes. While international students may already know how to apply for jobs and write résumés within their own culture, the course emphasised the cultural information that international students needed in order to successfully apply for jobs in Australia and the communications skills that they need for the workplace. At the end of the course the students competed for a work placement position, which required them to experience a similar process as that involved in applying for employment.

4.5.3 Resources

Many of the interviewees were concerned about the increasing difficulty of addressing ELP and workplace readiness for international students with the limited resources available. The programs offered through Career Services were available to all students, making it difficult to isolate the particular ELP issues that emerged for international students. They also indicated that it was difficult to adequately resource programs specifically focusing on ELP as they cater for all students, yet international students were the ones who seem more readily to seek out their services. The following comment was typical from the interviewees interviewed:

Where can we focus our limited resources? Demand for our services has gone way up, and on top of all the strategic directions we are suppose to be supporting and the diversity of our student population ... If we look at our budget we weep. (ALL Unit Leader)

ALL units also seem to be lacking the necessary resources to meet the growing demands placed on them by the needs of the diverse groups of students within universities and VET institutions.

4.6 Summary of findings

A number of key issues emerged from the analysis of the interviews with staff from universities and VET sector. In relation to the first research question, all of the interviewees indicated that ELP was a very important factor influencing workplace readiness and successful employment outcomes for international as well as local graduates. ELP and workplace readiness is important for both groups of graduates,

although it was acknowledged that international graduates face greater challenges than the local ones.

For international graduates, social English language skills were seen as critical for securing employment. The interviews highlighted the importance of ELP in job interviews, particularly in relation to pronunciation and use of correct register.

The validity of IELTS for employment purposes was questioned, especially in relation to its applicability in assessing ELP for the workplace when it was originally designed for university entry.

The interviewees indicated that work experience and cross-cultural understandings of the workplace were also very important in terms of international graduates' workplace readiness and employment outcomes.

Most institutions do not have data available about the employment outcomes of the international graduates.

Most of the institutions have programs that were aimed at assisting all students with job applications, résumés, 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 two-hour sessions. The more innovative programs which are emerging are those that are semester-long subjects offered within courses, focusing on developing international students' communication skills within the workplace.

These programs can offer insights into potential program design within institutions to enhance ELP in relation to workplace readiness.

Some universities have developed capstone subjects, however interviewees were not clear about the extent to which ELP in relation to workplace readiness was assessed in these subjects.

Characteristics of good practice models:

- Involves ELP, inter-cultural awareness and job search skills
- Makes connections with the relevant field of study
- Addresses particular ELP needs of international students, such as pronunciation
- Links ELP development to clinical practice or work placement.
- Involves both careers services and ALL unit in developing the program
- Semester long program which may be offered as part of a course

While institutions were attempting to address the issue of ELP and workplace readiness, they were generally under-resourced and find it difficult to meet the increasing demands placed on services.

5. Analysis of interviews with recent offshore migrants educated overseas

This section reports on the experiences of a group of recently-arrived migrants who have overseas qualifications and are seeking to find work in their field of study. The findings suggest that the single greatest obstacle identified by recent offshore¹⁹ migrants (no more than four years in Australia) in finding work within their field was relevant local work experience. This is considered to be more important than having high ELP, yet many interviewees recognised that ELP affected their overall job prospects. Restrictions in certain visa categories upon obtaining work (and therefore local work experience) were identified as a major problem. Some interviewees also believed that employers sometimes use low ELP as an excuse to mask other forms of discrimination. The data presented both here and in Chapter 6, analysing interviews with employers and regulatory bodies, indicate that there is an evident mismatch between how ELP is understood and defined by offshore migrants and employers. As a result of these factors, there appears to be a problem of chronic de-skilling and underemployment amongst this category of interviewee.

5.1 Data collection

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with recent migrants who were educated overseas. Two group interviews (of eight and seven interviewees, respectively) and three individual interviews were conducted. On average, group interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and individual interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. All interviews except two were tape-recorded and transcribed; the exceptions being telephone interviews conducted with individual interviewees who preferred to be summarised rather than taped.

The two group interviews took place at a private English language college, where interviewees were engaged in a Skilled Professional Migrant Program that aims to assist offshore migrants in applying for employment positions in Australia. The program focuses on curriculum resume preparation and employment interviewing skills. It is important to note that this group was seeking to find employment in their field of study, and therefore their stories offered insights into the obstacles that they had faced. In addition, individual interviews were conducted with three migrants who had experienced various levels of success in finding employment in their chosen field.

5.1.1 Interviewees

Interviewees ($n=18$) were migrants for whom English is a second or additional language, and who were educated abroad (see Table 5.1). Of the sample, migrants from China ($n=3$) and Sri Lanka ($n=3$) were best represented, closely followed by the Philippines ($n=2$). India, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Japan were the home countries of another one participant each, as were Serbia, Vietnam, Mexico, Iraq and Cambodia. Females ($n=12$) outnumbered males ($n=6$) by a ratio of 2:1. Education levels ranged from undergraduate to Master's degrees, predominantly in fields such as science, IT and business (see Table 5.2).

The demographic information for interviewees is shown in Table 5.1 below.

¹⁹ Offshore migrants have been defined in this study as migrants who have overseas qualifications and are seeking employment in Australia.

Table 5.1 Recent migrant interviewees. Total = 18:

Country of Origin	China	Sri Lanka	Philippines	India	Singapore	Indonesia	Malaysia	Japan	Other
Females	2	3	1	0	0	1	1	1	3
Males	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2
Total	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	5*

* F = Serbia, Mexico and Vietnam; M = Iraq and Cambodia

The educational qualifications for interviewees are shown in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2 Fields of qualification of recent migrant interviewees. Total = 18:

Qualification	Science	IT	Business/Marketing	Engineering	Nursing	Accounting	Unspecified
Females	3	0	3	0	1	1	4
Males	1	3	0	2	0	0	0
Total	4	3	3	2	1	1	4

5.2 Local work experience

Local work experience is an essential requirement for successful employment outcomes. All interviewees agreed lack of local work experience was a bigger obstacle to employment than low ELP. Practical work placements often are not the solution to the problem, as potential interviewees have to seek these out and apply for them much like any other job (sending out CVs, etc.), with similarly poor outcomes to regular job-hunting. However, in at least one case, a 2-week work placement in the chosen field of study — as well as part-time work experience in a separate field over 4 years — was not sufficient to attract full-time employment.

The interviewees therefore believed companies are only looking for local people with local work experience, and expressed exasperation about how to compete:

*Each time they said "You need a local experience". But if we are just migrants, how can we have the local experience?
(Chinese migrant, engineering)*

It should be noted that there appears to be a mismatch between what migrants understand by the term 'English-language proficiency', and how Australian employers may interpret it. In many instances among the latter, this is in fact shorthand for acculturation into Australian workplace values, cultural integration, and socialisation (see Ch.6). As this can only come (it is believed) through exposure to an Australian workplace, the terms 'proficiency' and 'local experience' become synonymous to employers. In many respects, the term 'well-roundedness' could be substituted.

For skilled migrants, the fact that they have satisfied the points test in the GSM program — and passed an IELTS test — is to them evidence of their workplace readiness. For employers, 'foreign' accent, intonation, pronunciation and — above all — lack of Australian workplace experience is evidence of the opposite. The fact that these judgments are seemingly made quickly — often over the telephone, if contact is indeed made at all — bolsters the migrants' notion that the process is perhaps discriminatory (see below).

Migrants without PR face difficulties in obtaining work. They cannot apply for certain jobs — especially when under certain temporary visa categories. Social and community networks of friends and colleagues were recognised to be of significance in any job-hunting effort, and migrants realised they were at a severe disadvantage in this regard.

The interviews indicated that migrants skilled in accounting and engineering, for example, have not been able to get jobs because of lack of local experience. Some

professions (such as accounting) also require accreditation with a local body or institute. To obtain this, qualified migrants have to fulfill extra qualifications. Most interviewees were considering changing their field of specialisation in order to find work. Some had already done this. Many had taken a step downward in terms of qualification, or were considering “something more technical”.

5.3 English language proficiency

ELP (as the interviewees understood it) is considered very important for obtaining employment. One participant felt it was not very important for low-level jobs requiring a limited number of terms, but conceded it was “really important” for any kind of professional role. Some interviewees believed that they would not be asked about local experience if they came from other English-speaking countries. Some therefore believe rejection on the grounds of possessing poor ELP may in fact mask racism or other forms of discrimination. As one migrant from Sri Lanka observed:

Some jobs, even it just the very low level but they still, like, “You are not able to work in this position”. And I’m wondering why, but they cannot give the answer. I believe, even the government say no discrimination... but in some environment I believe they do have discriminate... They are in favour of the local people rather than international migrants. (Sri Lankan migrant, bank teller)

In this regard, some migrants wondered how locals with poor customer service and interpersonal skills could be preferred over migrants, who were often skilled in such areas even if their English was not perfect. Again, there was a feeling that criticism of poor ELP was perhaps concealing some form of prejudice, and that migrants would always be at a disadvantage:

Even they don’t know that how we can contribute to the business, but they say no for the first instant. (Vietnamese migrant, business)

On the other hand, an Indonesian migrant with a qualification in nursing commented that there were many nurses working in Australia who lack the requisite English language skills:

After meeting with many overseas nurses working in Australia, it seems they have no English language skills as high as the requirement. (Indonesian migrant, nursing)

Interviewees were concerned that, as migrants and speakers of English as a second language (ESL), they did not know the job market well. This put them at a further disadvantage, as their lack of job market expertise inclined employers more towards preferring locals. They did not blame either the employers or the job market for this, but would appreciate more government assistance in this area.

Most interviewees felt they possessed the requisite English language skills to find the work they wanted. It did, however, depend on the level required. Only one answered that she did not feel she had the requisite proficiency, owing to her very recent arrival (2 months). Some others voiced the view that, while their ELP might be satisfactory in getting a job, it would have to improve in order for them to interact socially.

Certain interviewees identified the Australian accent as a barrier – both to their own learning, and to getting the right job. A Malaysian-qualified teacher of mathematics believed she was prevented from gaining employment in secondary schools because parents and staff feared their children’s learning would be adversely affected by her accent.

Others, however, felt they never even got a chance to have an interview, so do not therefore believe accent, intonation or pronunciation problems could be responsible. For these, local experience was once again considered key. Indeed, one Iraqi migrant qualified in IT believed employers made interview decisions entirely upon the basis of local experience, and were totally unconcerned with the grammar and pronunciation skills of potential employees:

He looking for your experience, you good for this job or not. If you have accent or something wrong words you pronounce he never judge on you or discriminate you. (Iraqi migrant, IT)

CV- and résumé-writing was also identified as a potential issue. Interviewees wondered if their CVs were adequate according to Australian standards, etc. Some colleges have specific courses (or elements of courses) dedicated to such practical, work-related skills. Business English courses at some private English language colleges also teach interview techniques, interview skills, etc. Despite this, many migrants still had not successfully obtained an interview.

5.4 The IELTS scale and improving ELP

In self-assessing, interviewees ranged from a low of 5 on the IELTS scale to a high of 8. Most noted an improvement since their graduation or arrival in Australia: some only a little, while others perceived a considerable improvement.

The methods employed to improve ELP included meeting local people, listening to the radio, reading newspapers and watching television. Current affairs shows were singled out, owing to the clear diction of the speakers and the large vocabulary range.

Most interviewees would prefer to have a local Australian person whose first language was English to interact with, and recognise that this was probably the most effective way to improve ELP. Those who know and spend time with such local people appreciated their ability to speak slowly and explain unfamiliar terms and expressions. Some interviewees recognise, however, that opportunities to interact with locals are rare and that doing so can be “very difficult”.

Interviewees were sometimes surprised by the informality of Australian speech and experienced some difficulty in applying different registers of language. Some commented that they prefer to speak with older Australians if necessary, as their usage is considered more formal and polite. Younger Australians are believed to speak rather too quickly and use many more slang and colloquial expressions. Understanding of Australian slang was considered both a significant barrier to developing ELP, and an indicator of how well the migrant has integrated and becoming more proficient.

The workplace is believed to be the best place to improve ELP. In domestic or day-to-day settings, some noted that it was perhaps too easy not to use English in areas in which a large concentration of a particular migrant group existed: one Vietnamese participant living in Melbourne felt it was incumbent upon her to move outside of the Vietnamese migrant areas of St. Albans and Footscray if she wanted to improve her ELP.

Some interviewees had volunteered in community organisations with a view to improving their ELP, or have done community or church-based English-language courses or conversation classes. One expressed an interest in participating in community theatre for that purpose. Remarkably, one participant was even teaching English to newer migrants with a view to improving her own ELP.

5.5 De-skilling and underemployment

All interviewees wanted more assistance from the government. The skilled migrants interviewed there expressed a view that the government had invited their applications and accepted them on the basis of their skills, but Australian employers would not actually accept them as valid and serious contenders for employment. Essentially they felt that Australia had encouraged them to come, then abandoned them to their own devices.

The government cannot get us into Australia, and leave it there. We don't know how to find our way, even though we try our best... On the one hand the governments say, "Oh, we welcome the skilled migrant, we want the skill that you have", but on the other hand the business, the employer doesn't really respect, appreciate us. (Vietnamese migrant, business)

It is perhaps significant that migrants from China and Vietnam were most vocal in this view, and its implicit expectation that the state should take a more active role in economic and labour market decisions. Interviewees from free market economies such as Mexico, Japan or Indonesia did not record similar objections, although they did not object to these views being raised.

It was a relatively common belief, however, that Centrelink had not assist skilled migrants. Several complained that upon arrival they are told to go to Centrelink, but once there they are told they cannot be helped. Some are told to go to private job agencies, but these are not helpful either. Many feel they are left to fend for themselves.

A number had opted to train or apply for jobs for which they were overqualified or in areas very different from their field of study. One participant was used to working at a senior managerial level in China, yet had applied for junior management positions in Australia. Even then he had not managed to progress even to interview stage. He therefore feared that he would slip behind in his skills and become less employable long-term:

If we can't enter the real level which match our previous experience, and 2 years later we... are later behind. We are not a material like a table you put here for 2 years and it's still a table. (Chinese migrant, engineering)

One Serbian migrant qualified in marketing and management was working two jobs: data entry and waiting tables in a café. While she accepted the need to work in such positions in the short term, it was seen very much as a temporary inconvenience on the way to working in her qualified field:

I communicate with customers. My employer is very happy with me. But I am not that happy... I want to improve and to do in field that I am educated. (Serbian migrant, management)

Concern that such a move might not prove temporary also played upon the minds of migrants working in (or considering retraining for) such positions:

I'm afraid if I start in this job I will stay for this job forever.

(Iraqi migrant, IT, speaking of his idea to retrain as an electrician)

5.6 Summary of findings

The findings indicate that local work experience is perceived to be of greater importance than high ELP in obtaining work in fields of qualification, and the inability of migrants with international qualifications to obtain this local experience can lead to long-term de-skilling and underemployment. Local work experience is also felt by migrants to be the best way to improve ELP, especially in important social and cultural areas (slang, accent, colloquialisms, etc.). Ironically, the improvement in ELP and general acculturation that can occur with local work experience is precisely what employers are seeking in applicants (see Chapter 6). Owing to the mismatch in understandings of what constitutes ELP, migrants often believe that rejection for reasons of low ELP in fact masks deeper-seated forms of discrimination, and that employers prefer locals even if they are less suited to the job — little realising that employers generally value socialised and acculturated employees more than technical accomplishment. Skilled migrants therefore feel the government is soliciting their immigration but then abandoning them to a volatile and at times unwelcoming job market.

Rajiv

Rajiv emigrated to Australia from India in 2004. A native Punjabi speaker, he had a Bachelor of IT from an Indian university and was a reasonably competent speaker of English as a second language. He scored a 6 on his IELTS test before emigrating.

Upon arrival in Australia Rajiv lived with fellow Indian migrants. He felt he was not improving his ELP as a consequence, and, upon applying for PR in 2006, he again scored a 6 on his IELTS test. However, he did not believe this was an entirely accurate assessment of his overall ELP. Determined to improve his employment prospects, Rajiv enrolled in a Masters of Accounting at a leading university. He completed this in May 2007. With these two separate qualifications – international and domestic – Rajiv applied for an IT position with the Australian Defence Force.

Applying for the army was a “long procedure”. Finally Rajiv was granted an interview, at which he was advised his ELP was considered below standard. Potential difficulties in communication “could be bad in an emergency situation”, he was told. In addition, the army interview panel believed he had not had “enough Aussie exposure”, and would find it difficult to adjust to the culture of the armed forces as a result. Immersing himself in the culture would be the best way to improve these perceived deficits, Rajiv was informed, as the army wanted someone able to communicate and act (as he puts it), “just like a normal Australian better than an Indian immigrant”.

Although “not a talkative person”, Rajiv is obviously someone used to taking on challenges. Moving out from his household of fellow Indians, he took the army’s advice and found an Australian housemate. “It has helped,” he says – especially with local slang, which he regards as “a big problem” for all people with ESL. He believes his ELP has improved as a consequence and he now considers himself to be at 7 or 7.5 on the IELTS scale – adequate for his current goal of gaining employment in accounting. To this end he has recently enrolled in a 2-month accounting accreditation course, and has, for the time, being given up on the idea of entering the defence force. While he awaits registration as a chartered accountant, Rajiv continues to work in the field that has supported him since his arrival in Melbourne: driving a taxi.

6. Analysis of interviews with employers and regulatory bodies

The following section presents the analysis and findings from interviews conducted with employers and regulatory bodies. The aim was to investigate perceptions of this group regarding the influence of ELP on former international students' workplace readiness and employment outcomes. The findings from the interviews suggest that there is substantial variability across the different professions as to the significance of English ability, and the type of skills sought (with requirements least in the trade sector). The most important issue for employers and regulatory bodies is new graduates' technical skills, with high level of labour market demand facilitating tolerance of any perceived workplace deficits. The analysis revealed however that English proficiency was also very important. Weak ELP impacts negatively on international students' recruitment, as well as their future career mobility within employment. Further, Australian employers seek 'well rounded employees' who have not merely sufficient English but good potential to adapt to the Australian workplace, a process facilitated by cross-cultural ability, personality and prior relevant work place experience.

6.1 Data collection

6.1.1 Data sources

The following analysis is derived from 30-90 minute interviews conducted with 36 employers and members of regulatory bodies, Australia-wide. With a couple of exceptions, all the interviews were conducted on an individual basis. The majority were completed by telephone to reduce travel, with plain English statements provided and formal permission gained. All but one were taped and fully transcribed prior to thematic analysis – the sole exception being an interview conducted with two employers who preferred to be summarised rather than taped. By agreement no individuals or organisations are identified below, with only generic organisational descriptions provided. Two written submissions were also received and analysed, following a request on behalf of the researchers to State Nursing Boards.

It is relevant to note here that professional employers and regulatory bodies were keen to participate in the study, and to have their human resource views in relation to international students sought. In response to an emailed request for participation by Engineers Australia (the national regulatory body), for example, an exceptionally generous response was received.

Despite persistent efforts, by contrast, it proved very difficult to find employers to interview in relation to former international students in the fast growing VET sector, in particular those trained by private registered training organisations (RTOs). This reflects the recency of this skilled migration pathway, as well as considerable current sensitivity in the light of media probes in relation to training institution bona fides.

In all, 10 trade sector people were interviewed in relation to former international students qualifying for work in the building, hairdressing and hospitality sectors, compared to 26 in relation to the professions of engineering, accounting, IT, medicine and nursing. All but two trade interviewees had to be sourced from the training sector – course coordinators and teachers with a capacity to comment on international students' paid work experience in the course of formal study, given a complete inability to access former students who had translated to full-time industry jobs. Indeed, it is important to note here that few interviewees considered this to have ever been students' intent. All but one trade informant saw this training as an immigration

device, revealing nothing about students' ultimate career intentions. As summarised by two different building industry representatives:

They are not seeking an employment outcome. The group I am talking about is seeking an immigration outcome!

Those people, and I have spoken to a number of them, may have been from office jobs or anything that they choose. Their motivation seems to be not to become a bricklayer but to enter the country.

Given sharp differences between professional and VET sector perspectives on international students' ELP requirements, their inputs are separately summarised below in each of the thematic sections.

Please also note that 7 additional interviews were conducted with senior people from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Australian Education International, and the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition, to support the statistical analysis which is presented in Section 2 of the report.

Table 6.1 Summary of Interviewees

Field	Interviewees
Health: Nursing Medicine	Number of interviewees: 12 National regulatory body: 3 State/ Territory regulatory bodies: 3 Hospitals/ Clinical University joint-appointments: 5 Universities (including clinical placement coordinator): 2 Interviewees' level of engagement with international students: Substantial numbers being registered and employed in each state, within and following Australia-based Locations: ACT (3), Victoria (7), Tasmania (1), South Australia (1)
Engineering	Number of interviewees: 8 National regulatory body: 2 Employers: 6 Interviewees' level of engagement with international students: Highly variable (annual recruitment ranging from a 'trickle' to around 70 per year) Proportion of engineering workforce: from around 5% to 60% for interviewees Organisations represented and locations (spanning both urban and regional sites) Small civil engineering company (Western Australia) Vast mining multinational company, 30,000 employees (Queensland) Large construction company, 6,000 employees (Victoria) Medium size manufacturing company, 150 employees (South Australia) Large multi-purpose engineering company, 3,500 employees (New South Wales) Large civil engineering state transport department (South Australia) Large electrical and manufacturing multinational, 1,000 employees (New South Wales) Civil engineering consulting firm, 90 employees (Victoria) Regulatory body (ACT)
Accounting	Number of interviewees: 4 National regulatory body: 1 Employers: 3 (private sector employers x2 and public sector department x1) Interviewees' level of engagement with international students: Substantial numbers being registered and employed in each state Locations: Victoria (3), Tasmania (1)
Information Technology	Number of interviewees: 2 IT multinational human resource company and small consultancy business Interviewees' level of engagement with international students: Substantial numbers being registered and employed in each state Locations: Victoria (2)
Trades: Building Hairdressing	Number of informants: 10 National employer body: 1
Hospitality	Registered Training Organisation peak body: 1 TAFE sector training colleges: 5 (Queensland) Registered Training Organisations/ Hairdressing Salons: 2 (Victoria) Registered Training Organisations/ Building: 1 (Western Australia), 1 (Victoria). Locations: Victoria (4), Queensland (5), ACT (1), Western Australia (1)

6.2 Diversity in ELP by purpose

Australian employer and regulatory body perspectives on ELP requirements for new international student recruits are very diverse, their expectations influenced by:

- The strength of labour market demand in select fields (e.g. the capacity to attract new graduate engineers to remote mining sites);
- Entry-level role requirements (e.g. whether these include front-line negotiation with clients, or back-room technical work); and
- Field-specific demands (e.g. whether a newly qualified bricklayer is employed within an ‘ethno-specific gang’ on a construction site, or directly liaising with mainstream workers).

To contextualise the analysis that follows, please note that students’ ELP is formally defined in Australia for three different purposes:

- International student enrolment: A process in the hands of educational institutions, which determine course entry scores ranging from as low as IELTS Band 4.5 for select VET sector courses to Band 6.5 or 7.0 for medicine or nursing;
- Skilled migration points: Mandated at IELTS Band 5 until September 2007 by DIAC, then raised to Band 6 in the light of findings from Australia’s 2006-07 skilled migration review, in a context where advanced ELP was found to be the key determinant of employment outcomes²⁰ (Birrell, Hawthorne & Richardson 2006); and
- *For professional/trade registration in select regulated fields*: Mandated at IELTS Band 7 for medicine and nursing graduates across Australia (with the exception of nurses in the Northern Territory), compared to around Band 5 for Engineers Australia membership, compared to no formal regulatory body requirements in the fields of accounting, IT, building, hospitality, or hairdressing (see Table 6.1).

Within this context Australian employers are certain to encounter former international students with highly variable levels of English, despite their personal preferences and workplace requirements by field.

²⁰ In line with the skilled migration review findings, significant skilled migration bonus points since September 2007 have been allocated for more advanced levels – now the key determinant of selection (Hawthorne 2007).

Table 6.2: IELTS Levels Required for International Student Enrolment by Field Compared to Migration

Field	Enrolment	Skilled Migration Points	Professional Registration
Engineering	Institution decision	Band 5 (until September 2007) Band 6 (current)	Around Band 5, with additional assessment measures also taken into account (eg. Interview)
Accounting	Institution decision	"	No formal requirement
IT	Institution decision	"	No formal requirement
Medicine	Band 6.5 (university training)	"	Band 7
Nursing	Band 6.5 (university training)	"	Band 7
Building	Institution decision (as low as Band 4.5)	"	No formal requirement
Hairdressing	Institution decision (as low as Band 4.5)	"	No formal requirement
Hospitality	Institution decision (as low as Band 4.5)	"	No formal requirement

6.3 The strength of Australian labour market demand and employer expectation

6.3.1 Professions

Australia has experienced sustained labour market demand in the past 15 years, with unemployment rates by 2006 just 1.3% for Australia-born bachelor degree-qualified professionals, compared to 1.1% for those with doctoral qualifications and 1.3% for those holding masters degrees (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). Reflecting this, the majority of former international students have readily secured work in the current decade, their level of employment reflecting supply-demand variations by field, as well as their perceived technical skills and ELP.

6.3.1.1 Medicine and Nursing

International students' employment rates in medicine and nursing are strong, sustained by workforce shortages resulting in direct hospital recruitment, and participation in state-administered internship schemes where they receive priority placement after domestic students. A recent study suggests 66% international student retention rates to be the norm,²¹ in a context where Australia is currently importing around 6,500 foreign nursing and 6,500 foreign medical graduates per year on a temporary as well as a permanent resident basis. By definition, former international students have achieved a high degree of acculturation – in the case of medicine having studied in Australia a minimum of 4 (graduate entry) to six (undergraduate entry) years. By 2007, 2,304 international students were enrolled in Australian entry to practice courses (Hawthorne, Au & Langley 2008). Advanced English language proficiency is mandatory for medical course selection, with students' skills further boosted by sustained exposure to patients and staff within clinical settings. In nurse training, patient exposure is similarly strong, despite the potential for Australian training to be far shorter – for example 2 years to undertake a diploma to degree conversion course (by 2007 attracting around 2,090 international

²¹ A recent Australia-wide survey by J Hamilton and L Hawthorne (University of Melbourne) suggests around 66% of current international students move directly into Australian internships on course completion, with the potential then to convert to permanent resident status.

students per year), or 3 years for completion of a full B. Nursing program (attracting 4,546 international students). Regulatory body requirements are similarly high (and as for medicine may reportedly go higher), with IELTS Band 7 set as the threshold level for postgraduate professional registration.

6.3.1.2 Engineering, IT and Accounting

In engineering, Australian employment demand has been similarly strong for a decade – a field, like medicine and nursing, characterised by the sustained importation of temporary as well as permanent resident workers. To assure workforce supply, in contrast to the health sector, a high degree of initial tolerance may be afforded to former international students with modest English (employers stating “we want IELTS 6 or 7 but we probably get 5”). Technical skills are seen as the first priority, one employer saying “They are limited by [English], the presentations and reports that they produce, but I don’t think their engineering skills are necessarily poor”. Indeed, across Australia in remote and/or hardship posts, international students are cited as more likely to stay in baseline positions – characterised by “gratefulness” compared to Australian graduates (“some of whom think they know it all”), and potentially willing to give 2-4 years, even if “cynically speaking the motivation is just the visa”. Entry-level positions in some industries can be tough, including isolation (e.g. in remote mining sites), the requirement to undertake taxing international travel (“we send them off after about 8 weeks”), and specific industrial terms and conditions (for example “we base all new graduates in the smelters for six months”).

Industry employers are in fact used to diverse workforces, many having worked internationally themselves. As early as 1994 10% of all advertised ‘Australian’ engineering positions were based overseas, a higher proportion than advertised for the total Australian public sector (Hawthorne 1994). By 2006, 52% of Australia’s engineering workforce was overseas-born, compared to 48% in 2001. (See Table 6.2.) Within this context former international students are part of “the regular mix”, with some employers intentionally building “a cross section of nationalities”. (“I don’t want to keep importing Brits all the time. I want to get Australians and we have Brits, Indians, Chinese... a couple of Eastern Europeans, Austrians.”.)

Within a buoyant economy, moreover, employers at times concede being “desperate” to secure young professionals – an issue favouring tolerance of any perceived deficits. (The coming recession seems certain to diminish this.) As one engineering interviewee described:

We try everything because we are struggling to get enough graduates at the moment. We traditionally advertised early in the year and had a selection process... in the middle of the year. That has been increasingly unsuccessful because a lot of graduates sign up earlier than that, so in the last couple of years we have introduced a couple of extra things. Firstly we have strengthened our undergraduate vocational employment opportunities and we are using that as a selection process for future graduates. We are offering jobs to students in 3rd year subject to passing final exams. We have also introduced extra scholarships.

Table 6.3: Australian professional workforce (2006) by qualification level and field, birthplace and period of arrival, percentages

Qualification level and field	Australia-born	Overseas-Born				Total (a)	Number		
		By year of arrival							
		All overseas-born	Pre-1996	1996-2000	2001-2006				
Degree/Higher degree	42.8	57.2	43.9	20.5	35.6	100.0	116,523		
Information Technology	48.4	51.6	57.6	14.1	28.3	100.0	159,940		
Engineering	54.6	45.4	62.6	12.8	24.6	100.0	72,068		
Medicine	75.0	25.0	72.6	9.2	18.2	100.0	162,372		
Nursing	58.8	41.2	52.3	16.2	31.6	100.1	456,062		
Accounting/Business/Commerce	75.3	24.7	69.5	11.0	19.4	99.9	443,321		
Teaching	74.4	26.6	68.6	11.0	20.4	100.0	84,515		
Law	67.0	33.0	61.1	13.6	25.4	100.1	820,210		
Other	64.9	35.1	59.1	14.2	26.7	100.00	2,314,921		
S/Total									
Diploma/Advanced Diploma/Certificate IV									
Information Technology	66.4	33.6	60.4	15.5	24.1	100.0	102,240		
Engineering	72.0	28.0	77.4	8.3	14.3	100.0	365,195		
Medicine	62.8	37.2	61.6	12.7	25.6	99.9	17,138		
Nursing	73.7	26.3	73.5	8.8	17.7	100.0	160,148		
Accounting/Business/Commerce	71.6	28.4	67.9	12.0	20.1	100.0	437,792		
Teaching	75.0	26.0	72.0	10.9	17.2	100.1	173,837		
Law	83.0	17.0	75.5	10.0	14.5	100.0	32,981		
Other	71.5	28.5	75	9.7	15.3	100.0	9,669,456		
S/Total	71.5	28.5	74.4	9.9	15.7	100.0	10,958,787		

Source: 2006 Census (Australia).

Notes:

Excludes those for whom birthplace or year of arrival is unknown

a= Due to missing data, imputation and aggregation, numbers may not add up to 100%

6.3.1.3 Global recruitment options for Australian employers

In the highly competitive recent recruitment context, Australian employers are aware of the extent to which globalisation can detract from worker availability. There is awareness for instance of a growing tendency for Chinese graduates to return home (reflecting the recent strength of the Chinese economy). Globalisation however can also slash domestic employment – a trend reportedly acute in relation to graduate-entry IT jobs. One IT interviewee described the hierarchy of functions required for entry compared to advanced positions, in a context where a growing proportion of Australian companies solely seek graduates ‘5 or 7 years out’ (entry-levels jobs having been exported offshore):

[At] one end of IT people build a piece of software. It's just a typical construction task, you have some rules, you write some codes, you test it, you join it together, you build something bigger and bigger until it's all done and you deliver it. The other end of IT, you're working with business to solve significant business problems and create a solution, putting a whole vision around it... I think it's important to understand that over the last 10 years most of western countries have bundled up a lot of that IT construction work and shipped it off to low cost countries like India, the Philippines, China, Uruguay and places like that where you can get IT work done for \$10/hour, whereas here it is going to cost you \$100/hour... So when an IT qualified person comes out of training, they are competing in Australia against [jobs] that can be shipped overseas and done for a fraction of the cost.

The interviews clarified the extent to which many companies operate within a global recruitment environment. As noted, securing appropriate technical skills is the first priority – an attribute invariably rated ahead of good English skills. In filtering prospective employees, however, organisations are driven by niche industry requirements, described here by a multinational IT recruiter:

When we boil it down there might be 200-300 people who would be employable in our [financial] industry globally, and there are 2 or 3 of our sort of companies competing for [them]... New Australian graduates aren't an option for us, because they can't do what we do... We have a development lab in KL, we have another one in Manila [to fill positions]... and we have a facility in India... I am preferring to use the ones in a closer time zone.

6.3.1.4 Use of 457 (Temporary Resident) visas

Within this context Australian employers increasingly recruit globally to source the technical skills they need (including at entry level), building in any specific requirements related to English. In relation to this it is important to note that the 457 temporary resident employer-nomination category may be the recruitment option of choice — according to one informant currently used to source up to 60% of his company's workers. This uncapped visa category, which admits workers for up to 4 years, has grown rapidly since 1996 from around 34,000 workers in 2004 to 112,000 in the recent year. (See Table 6.3.) In the field of accounting, for instance, up to 10% of Price Waterhouse Coopers employees were sourced this way by 2008, "mostly drawn from the UK, with a smattering from Asia, South Africa and the US" (Boyd 2008).

Table 6.4: Growth in employer demand for temporary workers (Visa 457) (2007-08 and 2006-07)

Industry Sector	Employer-Sponsored Arrivals June 2007-June 2008 (Visa 457)	Growth Trend Compared to Arrivals 2006-07
Health/ community services	9,090	21%
Property/ business services	6,020	33%
Construction	5,690	36%
Manufacturing	5,480	26%
Communication services	5,200	10%
Mining	4,890	36%
Accommodation/ hospitality	3,210	22%
Finance/ insurance	3,150	48%
Education	2,540	27%
Retail trade	1,940	58%

Source: Adapted from 'Skilled Migrant Visas Up by 24 %', P Maley, The Australian, 23 July 2008, p 5.

Given the option of global as well as local employee choice, companies recruiting locally can become highly prescriptive in terms of English as well as technical requirements. Deloitte for instance (a multinational organisation with 150,000 employees across 150 countries) has a policy of recruiting new graduates or current students in Australia through summer internship programs. The company however mandates IELTS scores of Band 8 for speaking and listening, and Band 7.5 for writing and reading in terms of selection. Views concerning English requirements are thus highly employer- and function-dependent. They may be higher or lower than formal regulatory body requirements.

6.3.2 VET sector

The VET sector is relatively new to attracting international students. Labour market demand in recent years however has become intense, with two year trained Certificate III international students supplementing domestic supply from the apprenticeship system. ("The qualification that they are doing is exactly the same as an Australian apprenticeship but because their infrastructure is different obviously due to the visa requirements, their [course] structure is different".) As described by one bricklayer training company:

It's very hard to attract the local kids into apprenticeships. From one point of view they see that there is good money in the trades and there is a lot of advertising at the moment pushing the trades and what they can do for you, the flash ute, the holidays, the girlfriends, those sorts of ads that they are running. But again I think... parents don't see the trades as a real career prospect, I guess it's always the university or nothing sort of attitude. The local market is drying up, everybody who is able is now up on the mines, which leaves us with the very young or the very long term unemployed who really aren't interested. So I think to have a new body of people coming in... is very viable.

Australian VET sector providers have responded with zest to the opportunity, through both TAFE colleges and private Registered Training Organisations. All described vigorous current student recruitment in Asian, UK, European and Middle Eastern markets, from highly diverse markets as follows:

(TAFE 1) First of all I should say that the biggest country that we draw from is Korea, and our biggest emerging market is Great Britain and Europe. We are just about to go into the Gulf countries etc so we believe that there are big markets there. How we access these is that we have an international sales team here based at the institute and we have international and domestic agents' agreements. So we have about 140 of the agreements throughout the world and we either use them as offshore agents that do the selling for us or we send our international sales crew overseas to link up with them to give them information onshore in their countries so that they can go out and market for us.

(TAFE 2) There seems to be quite a diversification in the source countries at the moment. We've got students from Ireland and the UK, Brazil, mainland China and Taiwan, we've got Japanese, Koreans, Indians, Malaysians, quite a broad spectrum really. I don't know that there is any one major country at the moment.

VET sector bodies describe being highly entrepreneurial – some having structured their courses to admit fresh international student intakes each month (a marked advantage over university competitors). Some employers stated in relation to this that students' goals are to "become an Australian, not to become a builder" (reflecting the Migration Occupations in Demand List). In developing student flows, VET sector providers are also highly advantaged by price – around \$28,000 charged for two years training, in a context where students routinely cross-subsidise their fees through 20 hours a week paid work (reportedly earning \$20-25 per hour in bricklaying, the model being '20 hours training and 20 hours work'). According to Brisbane's four TAFE metropolitan colleges, for example, 209 international students from 44 countries were enrolled in their Certificate III courses by mid 2008, with the following source countries dominant:

- Korea (75)
- UK (23)
- Columbia (17)
- India (9)
- Sri Lanka (8)
- Peru (6)
- Brazil (5)

In a context where migration rather than employment is the goal, trainers generally concede they "don't have a clue" as to whether field of study has any connection with

future work. In response to the MODL list, students are known to make study switches - exemplified by one cited Indian Bachelor of Music student who transferred within months to a Certificate III bricklaying course, and a university commerce student who “re-enrolled in bricklaying because he decided it was something he would rather do – and he brought one of his friends along”.

Motivation and attendance are reportedly high, regardless of students’ post-migration career intentions. While such employees are considered “green” and employer feedback is variable, many “are not expecting anything too special” with some feedback suggesting international students may compare favourably to Australian apprentices (better educational backgrounds supported by a stronger work ethic):

... [The] international students can only work 20 hours a week but they will turn up for each of those 20 hours. We actually had an employer ring up and say look does it matter if he stays with me for 4 weeks straight, then he can go back to you for 4 weeks straight... They are very well thought of because they have transport, they can get themselves around, they are very committed to what they are doing, they do want to learn, and they don't have those issues with drugs and taking days off and all of the things that everyone's sick of, I guess.

ELP requirements may in fact be highly variable, with expectations differing by field. In terms of bricklaying, for instance, the UK was reported to be a major student source. (“They see Australia as the place to go, and they have English too!”) Buying courses packaged into 10-week chunks, international students may secure “a discount price for a 20 week program”, with many also coming in with English “at the bottom rung”. Within this context TAFE colleges maintain IELTS 5.5 as their entry norm, considering this to be important given its alignment with subsequent skilled migration requirements. Rogue RTOs however may reportedly accommodate low IELTS scores. One RTO interviewee was advised international students could pay elsewhere to achieve a certain score, allowing them to “prove IELTS 5.5’ when in reality they would be ‘lucky to be a 3’. Interviewees suggested that IELTS scores were in fact a poor measure of capacity – facilitating the enrolment of some students “with very acceptable English” while others “just scrape in”.

In a range of trades ethno-specific work is also seen as the norm, rendering English minimally important. As summarised here for the building sector,

I think there are countries that tend to gravitate towards certain trades... The Chinese are very good at plastering and the painters come from Eastern Europe... It actually means that English is less important because they are working within cultures where they come from... You might have a gang [where] English is very good with some, but you go down to the lowest painter in the group and he might not have any English... Groups of people from like countries tend to overcome the deficiencies. I don't think it's a problem in a gang situation.

6.4 Entry-Level ELP – What is required by employers?

6.4.1 Professions

Within this complex labour market environment expectations in terms of former students’ English vary markedly by field, influenced also by regulatory body requirements where these exist. These were highest for medicine and nursing at IELTS Band 7, lower for engineering at around Band 5, but undefined for accounting and IT employment. It is clear however, that employers typically want superior

English to the levels they get – strong consensus evident on this even in the health sector²². Employers' willingness to accept international student graduates with relatively poor English is influenced by the strength of labour market demand, the scale of their organisations, and most importantly the nature of entry-level roles.

6.4.1.1 Health sector

In the health sector, unsurprisingly, interviewees expressed a near universal preference for IELTS 7.5 or 8, despite former international students having completed long periods of hospital-based training and linguistic adjustment. Clinical work involves interaction with patients, their family members, and peers across clinical sites, with the challenge of effective communication exacerbated by pain, confusion, and the need for appropriate response using terminology and/or jargon. In terms of nursing for instance, accurate listening and documentation skills are deemed critical, the stakes potentially including life, death, and greater patient discomfort. Within early employment, according to one interviewee,

[Non-native speakers] may miss information such as the patient maybe going to theatre in the morning to have something done. Once the patient leaves the [nurse] will still be wandering around and they won't have that information [though] it is actually their role and responsibility to make sure that all the documentation is ready, that vital signs are done prior to them going to theatre, that they need to be dressed appropriately etc... [They] may miss that someone has had a left-sided mastectomy, so there might be drainage tubes and everything. They will not really understand what that means and attempt to do blood pressures and stuff on the left arm.

Constant ward handovers and case documentation demanded sophisticated verbal and written skills – the following verbal process being typical:

I'm talking about a nursing handover of one shift to the next... They will start from Bed 1 and work to Bed 25... So in Bed 1 is Mrs X who has come in yesterday for investigation of nausea and vomiting, is currently in self-care management, is awaiting a gastroscopy. [Handover involves] going through patient by patient in terms of giving the person's name, their age, the day they were admitted, their current diagnosis, past history if it is relevant, what sorts of things have been happening to the person, any issues and any anticipated activities... Former students are involved in receiving handover right from day one. They have to unpack that language and a lot of terminology is used. For example "Mrs Bedford in Bed 3 is 2 days post-cags". 1st or 2nd day in a hospital - what the hell is that? [There's] a lot of abbreviations... and [the process] goes very quickly as you can imagine!

The stakes are often higher in medicine, despite former international students being advantaged over recently arrived foreign medical graduates, who may be working in hospital wards immediately on arrival. Patient history-taking remains a major communicative challenge, a process compounded by accent, patient state, speech speed, and medical crises, with dialogue conducted alongside physical examinations.

²² Regulatory bodies in both medicine and nursing were reported to be considering elevating mandatory IELTS levels for unconditional registration in the future (to IELTS Band 7.5 or even 8.) Such a decision would have marked impacts on student enrolment as well as 457 visa temporary worker importation.

Many ex-students reportedly struggled in their years of clinical training, “challenged by colloquial English in patients, and by prejudice”. According to one medical interviewee, some on graduation may not fully be prepared for internship roles (professional transition from group ‘bedside teaching’ under a senior clinician to more independent performance). Only partial skills are still required as “the intern will be presenting the patient but they won’t be interacting [to the level a consultant would]”. However effective performance can be problematic:

Observing them interacting with patients, it's clear from time to time that the patient hasn't understood the command, which [may be] phrased in unusual English... [Interns have to speak while conducting] the examination such as asking for deep breathing, move your middle finger, those sort of tasks. [History taking problems include] misinterpretation of the question, and sometimes misinterpretation of the patient's answer - perhaps an inaccurate history being taken [so] it is very difficult often to establish rapport with the patients...

Cross-cultural differences frequently compound communication effectiveness, including those surrounding gender roles. For example:

[Women from certain cultural backgrounds] dealing with culturally taboo subjects in their country and it's quite hard for them to overcome that. They're happy to take blood pressure, they're happy to examine the ankle and the knee... but actually undressing a patient they find quite intimidating. I don't think they even want to expose the patient... They don't want to examine... a patient's abdomen, or groin.... [Some] are more threatened than others.

While Australian interns may comfortably express empathy, this behaviour may not come naturally to those from other cultural backgrounds, even for graduates who have had years of Australian training:

[People from] Asian cultures are [often] not used to expressing their feelings and making them obvious, so the patient can get the feeling that the graduate is not sympathetic to their problem - whereas they may be but they are not able to express that. And that of course makes it very challenging to establish rapport - something that I observe in [Asian] graduates of sometimes many years standing. It's a very difficult cultural trait to shake off obviously, if they spent years in the mother country.

The overall communication ‘package’ is however viewed as critical to safe and effective medical practice:

When you are establishing all your own patients and your own practice, you do need to have excellent communication - you've got to make the patients feel that you understand them, that you empathise with them and that they need to understand you and that's not just from a linguistic point of view but also from the body language and the signs that are displayed and so this is to quite a large extent profession dependent as well... There is often a culture that you don't treat the patient as an equal... That of course doesn't tend to go down terribly well with a lot of the patients... who are not used to that type of attitude. It's not malicious, its probably not intentional, and just what they are used to and what they observed probably in their own country.

6.4.1.2 Engineering, Accounting, IT

Engineering, accounting and IT employers affirmed English to represent a fundamental workplace requirement, despite lesser or nil formal requirements across fields. Communicative competence was perceived to facilitate a capacity to operate within teams, while engaging at any level with customers. Appropriate small-talk and pleasantries are core to relationship establishment across work sites. Genre is also important - a capacity to readily tailor communicative style and content to manufacturing line workers or 'tradies', and to female compared to male white-collar workers. The following comments were typical, in terms of communication:

(Engineering) A lot of sites are fairly butch, to use that word. And they don't particularly like [foreign] engineers. They like them to have a very, very good grasp of English.

(Engineering) When you get a bit more experience you have to be able to go and talk to clients and you also have to go out on site and talk to contractors. So you have to know what you are talking about. You have to be quick on your feet. ... Poor English is nowhere near enough.

(Accounting) In our profession we tend to speak in a lot of acronyms and a lot of specific technical presentations of phrases and things like that so it can be difficult.

(IT) Partial command of the language would be alright [for new graduates]

but they would need to have an ability to deal with the problem with a whole lot of clarity... There is no point in a person trying to do work in IT if they don't articulate the problem clearly.

(IT) If we could we would create back-room jobs. We have to keep people [with poor English] in the background. Some people are very hard to understand, and we can't put them out in consultancies.

Cross-cultural skills, as for medicine and nursing, were deemed vital. One engineering employer, for example, found former international students to be reluctant to work in mining sites. ("He's not comfortable, because the guys talk loud and they are a bit rough. Asians still don't like that – they're a bit more softer I think".) Gender was often a compounding issue ("Women don't like going out on sites.... I think Australians are a bit more accepting of people".) Within this context pragmatic but career-limiting decisions may be made, for example to keep select recent graduates "in the office and just do design work". Even there they will be forced to adapt, in a context where "we tend to speak in a lot of acronyms and a lot of specific technical phrases". Fitting in with workforce norms is also required. As described by one engineering employer:

I think being able to fit at a graduate level is being able to fit within a meeting and to be able to fully comprehend what is going on around them. To be able to quickly understand any technical issue, [state] things they either agree or disagree with, or things that they don't understand and to be able to speak up and say, "I don't understand, can we talk about this in more detail?"

Employers describe being wary of hiring new graduates whose English skills seem poor, an issue clearly influenced by supply-demand issues. As described by one engineering employer,

During [the] first 12 months we have quarterly Performance Reviews which cover such things. If we are finding during that period that somebody is struggling with their communication skills we will sit down with them and I guess the key thing is to get to a point where they accept that that is an issue for them. We have had instances where they refused to accept that. If they don't accept that then there is not much you can do.

6.4.1.3 Reading and writing ability

Many of the employers interviewed across all professional fields raised the issue of writing – an area of obvious concern. Reports, whether one or 20 pages, are required – fundamental to engineering, for instance, where “you have to be at a level that a Senior Associate is not checking it all the time for grammatical errors”. Nurses and doctors must regularly maintain up to date accurate written reports on every case. In IT, writing ability was seen as having to be “of a good standard... easy to understand, logical and well structured”. Recent Australian graduates were also often viewed as deficient on this score. As one employer stated:

I get very critical of people around me when they don't have a good standard of delivering written stuff that is easy to understand, that is logical and well structured and so forth. In every industry it is important but I think in IT it's even more important than a lot of others.

Reading appears to be equally vital. For example in IT:

The body of knowledge changes extremely rapidly so in less than 12 months a lot of information turns over and if you are going to be effective you have got to be continually consuming information about where it's all going.

In nursing accurate reading of charts, medical instructions, medical orders, medication prescriptions, patient history notes (often handwritten) were essential. In making such comments employers were at pains not to stereotype former international students. Many had an appreciation of birthplace differences, garnered over years:

[English] does vary quite substantially depending on country of origin, so [former students] from Singapore and Hong Kong in particular tend to have very good English language skills, which is not surprising given the English in their country, and I think the Indian students also sound 'less like' overseas students if you like. Whereas students from China and surprisingly Malaysia often do have some difficulties with the language... The communication difficulties are more to do with accent and colloquialisms than with straightforward testable language skills.

6.4.2 VET sector

6.4.2.1 Building and Hospitality trade employment

Within the trade sector ELP requirements vary more markedly by industry, function, and sub-sector (e.g. the speech and listening functions required for tilers compared to concrete-pourers or brick-layers). Further, former students’ numeracy skills were often noted to be equally important (e.g. for building). Specific national competencies are thus defined for Certificate III trainees, with a strong focus placed on communicative ability. Reading in select fields may also be required, for example a capacity to skim OH&S manuals on workplace hazards of relevance to fields such as

concrete levelling. According to a Master Builders Australia informant (a body representing 31,200 large to small company members):

You can't become a carpenter unless one of the core units of your qualification addresses "effective workplace communication" ... There is a lot of English as well just in diagrams so ... another core competency is "read and interpret plans". [English] is critical for not only the technical and communication side but for the safety side of the industry.

Writing, by contrast to the professions, was viewed as minimally important for most entry-level trades – a sharp distinction being reported for higher-level para-professional work in building, for example:

Carpenters basically don't prepare any written documents. It is an incredibly verbal culture in our building industry and if they have a problem with something or they need to report that, they grab their mobile and call the person they need to report to. It is the para-professionals who will do the writing both in the preparation stage and for the reporting that is required to satisfy the regulatory requirements, do estimation, building survey work, inspection work. People sort of forget about them because they think about guys out there with drop saws and hammers and nail bags or direct supervision of trades people coming onto site and working together to get the job done.... Mobile phones have become the weapon of choice. The people on the job do bugger all writing.

ELP was similarly deemed important to higher level work in bricklaying, a field characterised by an ageing Australian workforce where a capacity to read and interpret plans is critical ("understanding the measurements and the scale and knowing that the plan requires a doorway or window to be in a certain position".) Training bodies affirmed international students in training to be needed for work, in a context where domestic apprenticeships take 3 to 4 years (characterised by low completion rates), with recruitment of 457 visa holders impractical in contexts where project-based work is typically intermittent ("you might not have another house for 3 weeks so there is inconsistency of employment").

Overall, it was clear from trade sector interviewees that conditions and formal requirements for employment varied markedly by field and across states: Queensland for instance includes 58 licensed trades, with different competencies, ensuring that the first hurdle for a former international student completing a Certificate III course will be "to find out if the area they are qualified in and want to work in a particular state is licensed or not". Should students seek trade work (an issue that is completely unknown), they were viewed as likely to source it in ethno-specific companies – with Vietnamese furniture-making graduates, for instance, clustered in "the coffin-making industry in Sydney that is pretty much dominated by the Vietnamese community... Asian people who manually sand coffins [and] are super super fine with sandpaper!".

If working in mixed language groups, the listening and speaking skills required were certain to be function-driven, so long as workers could cope with small-talk, as well as with specialist vocabulary required. Concrete-pouring, for example, requires:

[Talking about] digging trenches, and of course fitting reinforcement and actually then doing the concreting, making sure that it is poured in properly, trowelled off properly etc. And often you know you get that degree of specialisation – somebody else might be working with a framing crew who

would come in after the slabs are down in a house with pre-made trusses for the roofs and pre-made frames for the house would erect the frame of the house and then pack up and go and do that again on another site.

Similar comments applied to hospitality, in particular entry-level jobs related to ‘cheffing’. Within the industry it was reportedly unlikely for former international students to ever encounter customers, with most consigned to backroom jobs “washing dishes and peeling vegetables” (with reading or writing minimally required). English expectations were likely to be low, in an industry “that has always attracted a lot of migrants”. Communication skills however are formally taught in some courses, to ensure “a real progression across the whole of our program” and facilitate working with clients. Cultural awareness training is part of the process, as described by one hospitality TAFE informant:

One of the major issues is that when [international students start work experience], if they don't have a particularly good level of English... they struggle instantly in the kitchen. Even those that do have a reasonable command... tend to struggle with the names of the equipment, cooking terms, even the names of the ingredients. We hear many stories from teachers about when they send a student to the cold room to get parsley and they come out with a bunch of leeks or celery – [problems] along those lines. So I suppose even though they have learned English to a degree, it doesn't necessarily help them with names of specific things.

Reading and writing skills were reportedly less important in kitchen jobs, “as long as you can read a simple recipe and read a docket”. Accent however can be a serious problem, including for international students with excellent command of English, an example commonly cited concerning Indian students, in both the professions and trades. According to one hospitality trainer, for instance:

Even with Indian students who speak extremely good English it is sometimes confusing and [causes] misunderstanding, purely because the way the Indians speak English is a bit flowery if you like, and sometimes the accents are quite difficult to understand.

Should former international students commit to working in the industry, customer contact would typically occur 12-18 months out, in the context of training for hospitality management, or specialist food or beverage preparation.

Post-qualification trade work was viewed as very unlikely however – building, hospitality and hairdressing interviewees in TAFE colleges seeming convinced that students “don't want to work in the industry”, in a context where “every week we hear of students who are extremely well qualified doing cookery because of the ticket to permanent residency” UK students were cited as a rare known (e.g. two hairdressing trainees subsequently opening Gold Coast salons).

6.4.2.2 Hairdressing English language proficiency requirements

In contrast to the variable ELP required for building and hospitality, effective communication in hairdressing was deemed critical, and linguistically more complex. Employment demand is strong, with salon owners perceived to be “desperate because they can't find people to work”, to the extent that they “start calling all the schools to see if they've got someone they can bring out and help with the business”. Communicative competence is core, with rapport establishment and a capacity to elicit information fundamental to delivering the service. For example,

All that casual chit chat – it's being able to greet the client and make them feel welcome, being able to communicate to them and understand what it is that they want to achieve with their particular 'look for the day', and how they want to maintain it and all of those sorts of things. If you can't understand clearly and precisely exactly what your client's needs are then you're not able to produce the result and ultimately that affects the employer's business because that person's going to walk away thinking, gosh I asked for this and I got that instead and I still had to pay this much for it, I'm not going to go back there!

Listening comprehension however is hard in salon environments, where international students' difficulty understanding local accents is routinely intensified by the roar of blow-driers and the thump of background music. Establishment of customer rapport is vital:

... by being able to find out what their interests are, understanding a little bit about themselves and their personality, where they come from and what their family life is like, what their work life is like, that can help you ascertain what the type of style would be best for them. Especially if you are talking to a client who is obviously a very busy person that's got a high maintenance job, you are not going to give them a hairstyle that is going to take them approximately 45 minutes to do each morning. So the chit chat is just as important as being able to communicate what the client's after.

ELP is also important in a context where appointments need to be recorded and hair dyes carefully mixed, beyond the solid technical skills required for "colour work, blow waving, perms", and "solid" versus "layered" cuts. As stated by one employer, "students work through learning guides, and they have to obviously demonstrate an English written proficiency level". Salon owners find limited English ability to be highly problematic, including when they encounter this in work experience international students. Poor listening skills in particular are seen as intolerable ("they need to understand the client"). Interviewees reported widespread views that international students are inadequately prepared, an issue seriously impacting on future supply for the beauty industry:

There needs to be a lot more accountability on registered training organisations and colleges to be honest. I might be stepping out of line here but we believe that the government has got a lot to answer for thinking that this would be a solution to the skills shortage issue... The RTOs [need to] have more responsibilities for training the apprentice so that we keep them in the industry and we have [better] completion rates... I think that private RTOs and colleges are all thinking very short term and not long term [in terms of quality of training]. Eventually they are going to have to find a solution because the skills shortage is affecting everyone.

In an increasingly profit-driven training sector, there is a potential for inappropriate and even illegal International student recruitment:

You've got international students who want to come into the country and that's fair enough, everyone has got a right to come in, if they do it through the right channels that is fine. But what they have done is they've been so desperate that they have taken on organisations that are offering them so many promises, false promises. They hand over their

money... up front, [then they're told]... you don't come back until this particular time, that's when you will receive your certificate of that trade. [Then] when they go back... these organisations have either shut up shop or moved on or they are not contactable any more. They've lost their money, they don't have their certificate... and they end up getting stuck and they have to leave. There is a bit of a black market but it's opened up for a lot of bad traders, I guess you could say.

6.5 English skills in the recruitment process

Within the context of the analysis above, how are former international students assessed and filtered within Australian recruitment processes? The analysis below of necessity focuses wholly on professional graduates, given the impossibility (with the exception of one salon) of sourcing VET sector employers.

6.5.1 Assessment of written applications

In general, Australian employers described looking for a ‘whole package’ – not graduates with elite academic scores but “Bs, Cs, potential and personality”. One engineering employer, for instance, seeks “graduates that have quite high intelligence... are happy to go out on site, have a bit of common sense, and good checking skills”. Most cited the importance of people who “can get along in a small group”, given the team-based nature of work. As one employer put it,

In terms of fitting into our culture we have a very collaborative culture in our organisation. We would certainly want people who are willing and wanting to be involved in a team. We don't necessarily want people who are just going to squirrel themselves away and not talk to anyone. So there has to be an element of being able to communicate and interact with other people.

Within this context, former international students are carefully filtered through both application and interview performance – recruiters being well aware that formal resumes may be ghosted. Applicants with poor resumes (“grammar or spelling”) are immediately culled, unless they have other exceptional features, as are those who fail to address selection criteria. For new graduates deemed suitable to interview, additional tasks may be imposed, including psychometric tests lasting up to 3.5 hours, designed to assess cognitive skills and abstract thinking. One IT employer requires applicants to write a fresh CV on site, “because generally somebody else has written it for them”. Verbal skills can be checked in advance, with another employer stating “I interview them over the phone and quiz them about their education [because] unfortunately education doesn't seem to guarantee anything these days. The idea of even stringing a sentence together is quite novel for some”. The aim is to “ensure you can understand [applicants] verbally”, vetting accent, intonation and listening comprehension before allowing a full interview to proceed – employers being aware from past experience it is difficult for graduates to improve their poor ELP skills.

In medical disciplines, selection for internships is reportedly wholly paper-based, relying on the provision of data within a template, including course grades and Australian clinical references. English plays a minimal part, given students’ obligatory satisfaction four to six years back of medical course entry-level requirements. A greater emphasis is placed two years later, on graduates’ selection to specialist paths:

[For internships] there is a report, which includes [former students'] ability to interact with patients, but it's not

assessed at a terribly detailed level... How you are selected is based partly on academic merit, it varies a lot from training program to training program... Getting into [specialist] training programs, some of which of course have only got very small intakes, then requires personal references and often an interview - and there of course communication skills can be important and probably more so in the physicians than the surgeons exams. With surgeons, obviously communication with other colleagues is going to be very important and then technical prowess with the actual surgery and those are the sorts of things that they rely on.

Despite any remaining challenges, former international students were deemed to be markedly advantaged over recently arrived international medical graduates in terms of patient interaction, due to their:

... understanding of the health care system, understanding the local methodologies of thinking through clinical problems and therapy, and access to [resources]. The way the community and the hospital work together. I think that [former students] are much better for having been here and watched the system. Those from outside will learn - it just takes longer and if their language is a challenge as well, it can take a very long time.

Similarly new nurse graduates apply to hospitals on the basis of Australian grades supported by known clinical performance. As one informant stated, "If they were bad, they don't get work!", as in the following example:

For example [this particular nurse] was sent to pathology to take blood and the patient was actually trying to indicate that she was rather difficult to bleed and where nurses could access [veins]. But she just totally ignored all of that and had 3 or 4 goes unsuccessfully trying to get blood from the patient... She believed from her background that she knew better than patients and... would just go off and do things in a way that she believed they should be done. Her communication skills were certainly an issue because she... didn't feel that she needed to engage in a discussion as to what might the right approach or what might be the role in the Australian context as opposed to the context that she had come from. She was also the one who ended up getting a fairly negative report from the clinical area in terms of professional approach, poor communication skills, not following instructions and was deemed to be a student who would be putting people at risk.

6.5.2 The interview process

International students may face from one to three interviews, with recruitment processes often first filtered by company participation in university Graduate Fairs. Major judgments are made in the interview process, with technical skills reported to be paramount, but personality and English performance critically relevant too. One employer, for instance, described championing a Chinese applicant whom the rest of the panel opposed - a former student ultimately appointed on the basis of his exceptional technical skills despite poor English. Such generosity was reportedly unusual however. Employers described looking at interview for immediate 'cultural fit', as follows,

It is a judgement thing about whether they will fit in our workplace... I suppose a lot of it comes back to their

relationships skills and their communication skills. When we talk about these international students or those from an overseas culture there is chalk and cheese. There are some who have spent a reasonable amount of time in the country and have during that time probably got quite involved with our culture, and you know there is absolutely no issue with them fitting in... We get other graduates who may have come in just for a couple of years to finish off their degrees and have come from a non-English speaking background... They may have stayed in very much an enclave of their nationality while they were doing their tertiary studies so they haven't had the exposure to Australian culture. And struggle a bit to communicate and to build relationships because of that.

Unless demand favours former international students' employment, those with poor English, comprehensibility, or overall communication skills are often weeded out:

Once you get to interview obviously one of the selection criteria is communication skills and we would [also] have a written test [on site]. That is an area where things like grammar and punctuation are very important. Because even at graduate level the role of graduates in the work we do is often interfacing with other agencies to collect other government reporting. Even if it is done by e-mail you are wanting clarity of expression, well constructed, and no spelling errors in any written correspondence. That is an area where some international students do struggle.

The interview process is often designed to be taxing:

I suppose understanding the level of information is what the panel are looking for, and being able to listen and understand the questions and then answer those questions and [use] their experience if you are looking for a case study example. I would ask a [key] question "Can you give us an example of where you have worked successfully in a team on a project" and often some of the international students have difficulty distilling that question down into its key elements and appropriate matter as in the level of information I am looking for. The interview panel wants to do minimal prompting... But you get to the stage [where] you have to keep on prompting the person to get the answer you want... If the communication skills aren't at the right level you have to do more and more of that prompting.

Another defined the importance of 'process' questions:

They will ask you questions like think of a time when you had a problem, how did you deal with the problem? What were some of the issues? How did you solve the issues and what did you learn for it? And [then maybe focus] in terms of safety, in terms of problem solving, in terms of team work. [So] unless they have got experience in that type of question and answer ...[it is a big challenge].

Listening comprehension may also be poor, heightening the risk of providing irrelevant answers, as follows:

We have... a couple of recent examples with some of the Indian students. They have a very good command of spoken language as in they sound like they know what they are talking about. But when asked questions that are slightly

differently worded [they may have problems]. They may answer the wrong questions, when they don't seem to understand [what] is being asked... We were asking one of the guys did he know where Mt Isa was or something along the lines of that, and he continued to answer that he knew where Australia was ... I think I asked the question three different ways and he still didn't seem to comprehend that I was asking about Mt Isa!

The risk of applicants being weeded out can be influenced by personality, and what is termed the ‘overall package’. Employers described being willing to “give a go to people with a bit of oomph”, including a perceived capacity to “put effort into taking some responsibility for their own career development”. By definition this disadvantages students presenting as inhibited or reticent (people in line with Asian cultural norms who may be expressing deference as well as respect). Poor listening comprehension could also have very negative affects. (“We had one candidate... and they struggled to understand the questions that we were asking. Very smart person, their marks were incredibly good but you had to repeat the questions a few times.”.)

On balance however, if labour market demand favoured employment, and technical skills were deemed strong, the judgment could be made that students had “a high level of value and were able to do the work”. Within such contexts ELP could be deemed ‘an area for development but not an inhibiting factor to employing them’. The key issue then became the extent to which concurrent support training would be provided.

6.6 Access to further English training within employment: Induction and beyond

6.6.1 Induction to Australian professional employment

Once again the emphasis in the analysis below is on professional graduates in work, given the impossibility of sourcing relevant VET sector employers. In brief, access to additional English training is ‘hit or miss’ once former international students gain employment. Induction periods vary greatly by company, reportedly ranging from 2 days to 3 months, or even up to a year. The process can be skills focused, or highly pragmatic, as in the following multinational engineering example.

Giving them an understanding of what to expect on the day like where they are going to live, how they are going to get to the place, what is accommodation going to be like, how do you get from Darrussalam Airport out to site?... These sorts of fundamental things - pretty basic looking after yourself kind of you stuff.

6.6.2 Provision of concurrent English language support

Following the period of induction new recruits’ performance is carefully monitored, with ‘alerts’ given in contexts where ability (including English) seems poor. In small companies, no specialist assistance is the norm. In large companies (including public sector departments) advice and specialist training are typically provided, with tolerance reported for periods of up to a year. In one large company, for instance:

If it is a real issue we would go through some external training in sort of basic language skills. We also do some internal training on communication and presentation skills. Presentation skills is about not just delivering a presentation but getting up in front of people and getting your message across, and we have a number of people who are going

through that process at the moment. And that actually is a program that goes out to all our graduates, not just people with areas for improvement in language. It runs over two months and it is probably about 10 hours worth of actual course time. But there is a lot of practice involved where they get up in front of people, and they are videoed, and they look at their [areas for] improvement and areas that they can further develop over time.

Access to any assistance in small companies, by contrast, could be very uncertain:

Well we do that on an incredibly ad hoc basis. It is essentially the responsibility of the manager. If the manager feels that there is a need for further development then they would actually come to me and we have a couple of people that we might use to help that individual through or develop in that area.

If concurrent ELP support was provided, this reportedly came from highly variable sources, and was associated with very limited results. Former international students could be funded to work with individual tutors, with in-company trainers (e.g. through completion of 10 hour report-writing and oral presentation courses), or through local TAFE colleges (English language courses offered in both regional and urban sites, e.g. at Mt Isa). Accent modification training could be provided 1:1 (a critical issue “if people can’t understand him”). Such decisions were reportedly mediated by organisation size, location (with no supports available if sites were remote), the perceived scale of the problem, and the inadequacy of graduates’ English to core employment tasks. The stakes could be high for new graduates, in the context of monitoring across the first year, with steadily escalating warnings followed by dismissal.

Such risks existed by definition for all new appointees. (As one employer stated, “probably we are losing more of the locals than the international students but it depends on the person. Some of those are not necessarily people we are unhappy to lose”.) At the same time heightened risk existed for international students, including expectations of workplace cross-cultural adaptation as follows, including related to hierarchy:

In [terms of] professional work they know the theory and that is good. [But] it is more [an issue of] applying that in the workplace. Like for example you could get an Australian from the university and you can give him a job, and you know he starts asking a few questions from different people and finding where things are at. Whereas with the Indians they try and get you to guide them for the first months and say, “Just do this, do that”. But you need them to feel free enough to go and talk to anybody. You also have the other cultural thing that in India a boss knows everything and knows the right thing, and you don’t argue with the boss, whereas in Australia you can discuss things with the boss.

A key factor in relation to English language performance was reportedly the ‘self-awareness’ of former international students – their willingness to own a language problem once alerted, including their determination to improve. The stakes were typically high – dismissal or non-reappointment given a lack of ‘back room’ positions. Overall, employers viewed adequate ELP development to be progressive – commenced pre-enrolment (in training), continued in situ, then properly expanded through field-specific exposure in employment. Few expected full ‘work readiness’ in terms of students’ English up front. Concern was expressed however that some international students would plateau, with no certainty of the required ELP

progression. This could be a highly sensitive issue for employees, as described here by a sympathetic accounting employer:

In the early stages because we had staff shortages or heads to employ, we just put them on and hoped that we could train them through, but that put a big burden onto the managers or the trainers. I know from a personal point of view there was one terrific guy who was excellent with everything - his work skills, his written language was good, but English diction was very, very difficult to understand. Suffice to say that in the review that I had, he was very ambitious which was great and he said he would like to make client contact so I put him onto a client and the client actually complained. He said [to me] "I really can't understand him, he is a lovely guy I think but I can't understand what he is asking me". I left [the former student] on the job [and] I then put the pressure onto the manager to see if we could manage [getting him to change]. But nothing happened because the staff member left very quickly, within a week, because I was open with him about the client's concern on the communication issue, how could we help him to resolve that, we were contemplating maybe a speech therapist or something. He found that down putting and he gave notice and he actually went to work for a Malaysian accountant.

The stakes in terms of medicine and nursing were particularly high, including the adequacy of listening comprehension, where “frequently communication happens under stress, in a hurried environment, in an emergency, and people have to be able to have rapid two-way communication skills, and I think that’s where there’s a [public safety] issue”.

6.7 ELP by stage of career development

The interviews made clear that ELP requirements are also strongly mediated by the stage of former students’ career development. Many employers across fields made a distinction between the relatively modest levels required for first ‘technical’ jobs (“We want IELTS 7 but I think we get 6”) and the complexity/ subtlety of use required for full career progression (“around IELTS 8”). Indeed, virtually every informant defined IELTS 8 as the level required, whatever companies’ or organisations’ entry-level tolerance. The quotes below reveal a range of views concerning the nature of ELP required for the workplace. Comments included:

Medicine: The adaptation process to the clinical environment is facilitated by high-level English skills. So therefore I’m sure that someone with an IELTS of 8 arriving at [names hospital] would have an easier and less stressful time on both [patient and doctor] sides than someone with IELTS 7.

Accounting: The rules are [in terms of a named multinational company recruiting] they will only consider former students with IELTS Band 8, which is not a requirement they put on domestic students.

Accounting: [Higher levels are needed to progress because] accounting has moved on from an older style of [career in] which you were a backroom bean counter, when you would spend your time on grids and spreadsheets and so forth, dealing with numbers. Now it is very much based around communication. It is talking to clients and colleagues about the meaning of those numbers. We are talking about accountants [a few years out] helping to determine strategy.

They are in leadership roles and the expectation from employers is that they should get a grasp on those elements of their job very quickly. There is no longer a sense of an old style clerkship or so forth... Accountants in every spectrum of the job are required to have high level communication skills.

Engineering: I am concerned about the second phase of education, and that is education on the job [and that will probably take five or six years to get them through to being a Professional Engineer]. So they will work with Senior Engineers, Principal Engineers. They will learn to be able to do complex design processes. Understand the methodology of construction techniques that are used on site. A lot more about materials... Their vocabulary and ability to communicate will increase in those five or six years because at the end of it they have to go for their professional interview and they have to report to them and talk to eminent members of the Institution. So I am saying ... as an aspiration by the time they get there they will be an 8... [There is a problem of cultural enclosure that can inhibit further development.] Let us stick with the Chinese for time being. [If they are] predominantly Chinese background they then are only talking in Chinese [at home], watching the Chinese channels on the TV, they are not getting the spread and I think what we need to do is probably encourage them to go out socially and talk about footy and the Olympics and... build their vocabulary that way.

In IT the issues were as follows (reinforced by the growing unavailability of entry-level positions within Australia):

To a certain extent IT is still a black art and the consumer of IT - a business or whatever - has often gone looking for an IT solution. They've been shown something and they've been talked to about it and it looks like it's going to be good for their business. They sign up and they start paying money and then they find that there are lots of things that [don't work] the way they should - the system doesn't deliver what they expect, what they need, and they are disappointed. And so the outcome of that is a satisfactory arrangement occurs when the organisation is capable of delivering the result [number 1] but also being able to deliver comfort to the customer that they are going to get what they [number 2]... There is developing the relationship that the IT person is somebody who can be trusted not just in terms of honesty but in terms of the ability to understand the size of the task and all the unsaid things in the customer's organisation or whatever, and to work around political issues and all those sorts of things... When you get down to specifics, to have a successful outcome the first thing is to get a very clear idea of what the [customer] requirements are. And they have to be able [to talk about it] in every little detail.

As previously noted, though IELTS 7 was viewed as 'adequate' for nursing and medical students in training, sophisticated English and cross-cultural skills were seen as vital for competent postgraduate work, where clinicians are required to communicate more "on their own" rather than in highly protected groups. Such distinctions were far less evident in the trade fields (building and bricklaying), where ELP requirements at point of entry and in the first few years were reportedly basic.

In general employers and regulatory bodies had mixed views on the relevance of IELTS as a language assessment measure. Former International students could

score 6.5 or 7 yet be deemed communicatively ‘poor’. Factors such as personality, context adaptability, and cross-cultural ability were deemed as critically important.

6.8 Summary of findings

In conclusion, the following points emerge as critical to employers in terms of former international students’ work readiness and career progression.

First, technical skills are the top priority - determining which graduates are recruited for work, and whether onshore or offshore markets are sourced to support this process. Second, ELP is critically important, in a context where employer tolerance might be exercised where demand is strong, but candidates will be systematically sifted through written application and interview processes. Third, in all the professions reading, writing, speaking and listening are deemed vital, in marked contrast to trade sector work, where expectations of ELP skills are highly variable. Fourth, demand for field-specific vocabulary, terminology and jargon is routinely high, as are employer expectations of effective cross-cultural adjustment, comprehensible accent, small-talk capacity, and select personality traits in work (most notably ‘self-starting’, outgoing, and appropriately communicative workers). While advanced English training is provided in select sites, provision is likely to be uncertain, deemed marginally effective, and unlikely to deliver the level of ELP competence sought in professionals six to eight years ‘out’ (near universally stated to be IELTS Band 8 by employers). Few additional ELP options exist, however, in the contemporary Australian workforce. Poor English thus heightened risk of former international students’ career stagnation and ultimate dismissal.

It is important to note that ‘professional year’ courses have been developed for recent international student graduates 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.

In conclusion, as established by the statistical analysis (chapter 2) English represents a high-stakes issue for graduate job access, and for mobility within work. The difficulty in interviewing trade sector employers should be noted here, along with the perception that international students do not actually seek trade employment.

Glossary

Academic Language and Learning Units	Academic language and learning units support all students in their language and learning needs within universities and VET courses
Commonwealth-Asian Migrants	Migrants from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh
English as a Foreign Language	This usually refers to the use of English by non-native speakers of English in a country where English is not one of the main languages of communication.
English as a Second Language	This refers to the use of English by non-native speakers in a country where English is the main language of communication. This therefore describes the use of English by international students/graduates living in Australia who are not native speakers of the language
English Language Proficiency	English language proficiency is defined in the study as the ability of students to communicate in the English language in spoken and written form.
IELTS	The International English language Testing System measures ability to communicate in English across all four language skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking – for people who intend to study or work where English is the language of communication. There are two modules of the test, General Training and Academic. The General Training module is used in Australia for those wishing to apply for permanent residency. The Academic module is used mainly for entry into tertiary studies and by majority of professional accreditation bodies.
Non English Speaking Background	This term refers to people whose first language is not English.
Offshore migrants	Offshore migrants have been defined in this study as migrants who have overseas qualifications and are seeking employment in Australia.
Onshore migrants	Onshore migrants refer to former international students who have graduated with an Australian qualification and are seeking employment in Australia.
TAFE	A Technical and Further Education institution that provide publicly funded vocational education and training.
University	An Australian university is an institution which meets nationally agreed criteria and is established as a university under state, territory or Commonwealth legislation (<i>National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes</i> , Section 1.13)
Vocational Education and Training	Vocational Education and training provides skills and knowledge for work through a national system of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), which deliver certificates I-IV, VET diplomas and advanced diplomas and VET graduate certificates.

Acronyms

AEI	Australian Education International
ALL advisors	Academic language and learning advisors
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
ELP	English Language Proficiency
ESL	English as a Second Language
GSM	General Skilled Migration
MODL	Migration Occupation in Demand List
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
OET	Occupational English Test
PR	Permanent Residency
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SMP	Skilled Migration Program
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UA	Universities Australia

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Appendices

Appendix A: Methodology of quantitative analysis

This report is designed to be accessed by a wide range of readers. With this in mind, the following list of technical terms is provided.

CROSS-SECTIONAL: A survey taken across a community at a given point in time.

VARIABLE: A name for describing data, e.g. Gender describes the sex of participants and may have the values of Male/Female.

LOGISTIC REGRESSION: Statistical procedure for examining probability associations among variables where the variable of interest is categorical (e.g. Employment: (Employed/Unemployed). The results of logistic regression analyses are expressed in odds ratios (OR) and 95 percent confidence intervals (95%CIs).

LISTWISE DELETION: If a case has a missing value (a datum) on a variable, the case is not included in the data analysis.

About the 2006 Census

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006 Census was conducted on the night of 8 August 2006. Carried out under the auspices of the Census and Statistics Act (1905), censuses are aimed at providing accurate estimates of the Australian population and obtaining key demographic characteristics of the Australian population.

The data used in this study were ordered from the ABS and specifically tailored to the study requirements. Following examination of the 2006 census data dictionary (ABS 2006) and extensive discussions between the research team and the ABS, a dataset covering the following variables was purchased:

- Gender
- Age
- Country of birth
- Non-school qualification
- Non-school qualification field of study
- Year of arrival in Australia
- Labour force status
- Occupation
- Location

A key issue germane to the analyses presented in this report relates to privacy of personal information. To protect this personal information the ABS will not release data exceeding either 13 million cells in the data matrix or where there are fewer than 3 cases per cell. These twin constraints mean that the estimates in the census tables (Tables 2.1 through 2.10) are subject to issues of missing data, imputation and aggregation. Where data are missing from census forms, the ABS may either leave these data as missing or impute the value from other variables. For example, where gender is missing, if the person reports having given birth the ABS will impute the gender to be female. Regarding aggregation, where there are fewer than 3 cases per cell the ABS will aggregate these cases. Finally, to protect the release of personal information, all the data have been randomised. Where there are small numbers (<10 cases) in table cells the results will be heavily affected by this

randomisation. The data in the census tables, therefore, should be regarded as estimates rather than exact figures.

In addition to these data issues, there are also issues within the census relating to the classification of some variables. These primarily affect the present study in relation to country of birth, qualifications and occupation.

- For country of birth, for the 2006 census the ABS used the Standard Australian Classification of Countries (SACC), second edition, whereas previous censuses used the first edition. Although the differences are slight at the aggregation level (used in this study), there may be some inconsistencies where a person reports birth in a country that has since ceased to exist (e.g. Yugoslavia or the USSR).
- For qualification the ABS used the Australian Classification of Education, Level of Education Classification system. Cases with qualifications falling out of the scope of this system were classified with either no qualification or still studying for his/her first qualification. This coding may lead to slight underestimates of post-school qualifications.
- Occupations were classified to the new Australian New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO), whereas previous censuses (e.g. the 2001 Census) were classified to the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) Second Edition. The implication is that the results of this study are not directly comparable with those of other studies based on earlier censuses. There are also implications for comparability of the Census tables with those from the LSIA-3 where the ASCO definitions are used (see below).

About the AEI database

Australian Education International (AEI; the international arm of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) makes publicly available the International Student Data database used in this report. This is a monthly analysis of international students enrolled and commencing Australian courses, for all education sectors. The data are available at three levels:

- As tables posted on the AEI website (e.g. E.g. http://aei.gov.au/AEI/MIP/Statistics/StudentEnrolmentAndVisaStatistics/2008/2008June_0712_pdf.pdf);
- As a downloadable basic pivot table (E.g. <http://aei.gov.au/AEI/MIP/Statistics/StudentEnrolmentAndVisaStatistics/2008/Default.htm#pivot>); and
- As a standard or detailed pivot table available upon subscription to the Market Information Package.

The data in this chapter are from this detailed pivot table, which at the time of commencing the study covered the period 2002 to June 2008. (The AEI data are updated monthly, so more recent versions of the tables will contain additional information).

There are two important issues regarding the classification of students that have materially affected the results of this study:

- The AEI tables report the number of enrolments in courses, not the actual number of students. The reason for this is that students may

have multiple enrolments. The implication is that the tables may slightly overstate the total number of actual international students, but will be accurate for the number of enrolled students in courses.

- Students who are enrolled in double-degrees are classified into the ‘Other’ or ‘Dual qualification’ categories. The implication is that some cells in the tables may understate enrolments.

Since it is not possible to disentangle these two issues from each other, the data in the AEI tables should be interpreted with caution.

About the LSIA-3

The LSIA 3 is a survey of approximately 10 000 Primary Applicants from the Family and Skilled stream and comprises two survey waves.

- Wave 1 of the survey was run in August 2005 among migrants who arrived in Australia between December 2004 and March 2005, or who were granted their visa onshore between December 2004 and March 2005.
- Wave 2 of the survey was conducted 12 months later (Wave 2), approximately at 18-months post-arrival.

There are several important design issues that may have materially affected the results of this study.

The two waves used different methods of data collection. Wave 1 data were collected through a mail-out self-completion survey. In contrast, Wave 2 data were collected through telephone interview. Since there is considerable evidence in the literature that mail and telephone administrations produce different results (Dillman et al 1996), all analyses reporting data from both Wave 1 and Wave 2 data should be interpreted cautiously.

A further important consideration relates to the decision that the Wave 2 survey would collect data from approximately half the Family stream who had participated in Wave 1; thus most of the missing data from Wave participants in Wave 2 is planned missing data. In addition, a proportion of participants were lost to the study between Wave 1 and Wave 2; these missing data may be regarded as random missing data. The precise proportions are not reported in the documentation describing the LSIA-3.

The general observation can be made, however, that Wave 2 participants are a biased sample of Wave 1 participants (in the sense that Wave 2 participants are not representative of Wave 1 participants). In this study Table 2.14 makes the differences between the two waves explicitly clear. The implication is that tables reporting results from Wave 1 and Wave 2 are not directly comparable. This can be seen in Tables 2.21 and 2.22 which report employment for the Wave 1 and Wave 2 participants, respectively. Given the methodological caveats above, it would be erroneous to draw any conclusions regarding increases/decreases in employment between Waves 1 and 2 on the basis of these tables.

The third design issue to materially affect the data analyses relates to the questionnaires used in the Wave 1 and Wave 2 surveys: the surveys elicited different information on some key issues. For example, the field of study of qualifications was only asked of Wave 2 participants. Similarly, IELTS scores are only available for a sub-set of Wave 2 participants. The effect of this design issue was to limit the analyses that could be undertaken for this study. For example, it was not possible to examine Wave 1 participants by employment within their field of qualification.

Additionally, the LSIA-3 uses different classification systems than the 2006 ABS Census, making direct comparisons between the Census findings and the LSIA-3 findings problematic. Of particular interest for this study were:

- Field of qualification. The LSIA-3 study uses its own internal coding system.
- Occupation is coded according to ASCO Version 2 and is thus not directly comparable with the ANZSCO classifications reported above for the 2006 Census data.²³

Logistic regression and odds ratios

The logistic regression results in Tables 2.21 and 2.22 are reported as adjusted odds ratios (ORs) with 95% confidence intervals (95%CIs); in these multivariable models the logistic regression ORs are adjusted for the other variables within the model.

- An OR is the ratio of odds of an event (for example being employed) occurring in the group of interest when compared with the odds of the event occurring in the comparator group. This is represented by:

		Event	
		Observed	Not observed
Group of interest	Observed	a	b
	Not observed	c	d

The formula for calculating the odds ratio is:

$$OR = \frac{a/c}{b/d} = \frac{a \cdot d}{b \cdot c}$$

An OR > 1.00 (for example OR = 1.5) indicates that the event is more common among the interest group when compared with the comparator group, whereas an OR < 1.00 (for example OR = 0.7) indicates the event is less common among the interest group. Where OR = 1.00 the event is observed the same relative number of times among both groups.

The critical question about ORs relates to how precisely the OR measures the difference between groups. The calculation of the confidence interval (CI) studies this. CIs represent the upper and lower bounds of the event that would occur in a specified proportion of repeated studies. We set the CIs at the conventional proportion of 95%; this means that we are confident the true OR lies between the calculated 95%CI upper and lower boundaries. The width of these boundaries determines the precision of the estimate; the narrower the width the more precise the estimate. If the 95%CIs are both greater than 1.00, then we are confident the event is truly more common among the interest group. If the 95%CIs are both less than 1.00, then we are confident the event is less common among the interest group. If the

²³ The ABS produces a table matching between the ANZSCO and ASCO V2 classification systems. The 2006 Census and LSIA-3 databases were not harmonised due to the very tight study deadlines.

95%CIs cross 1.00 then it can be concluded there is no significant difference between the two groups.²⁴

For example, if the $OR_{employment} = 1.2$, and the 95%CI = 0.9-1.3, the CI estimates indicate that the true OR could be anywhere between 0.9 and 1.3, including 1.0. That is, the estimate of OR could mean that the exposed could have a higher but also a lower rate of employment probability. This means that it is not certain there is a real difference between the exposed and non-exposed groups.

²⁴ If the lower or upper boundary is 1.00 then the result is statistically significant; expressed as a *p*-value a boundary of 1.00 is the equivalent of *p* = 0.05.

Appendix B: Interview schedule for students and recent graduates

Background information:

Years of study in Australia:

Discipline/professional field:

First language background:

Country of origin:

A. Questions for final year students:

1. What kind of work are you hoping to do after you graduate?
2. How important do you think English language skills will be for getting a job in your chosen area?
3. Here is the basic IELTS scale. We're interested in getting your perceptions based on your experience. Where do you think you are now on the scale?
4. What kind of communication/English language skills do you think are important for the workplace? (And/Or) What kinds of communication skills do you think employers in your field are looking for?
5. Looking at the scale again, what level do you think you need to be to perform well at work?
=> [If yes] how have you developed those skills? –i.e. what did you do to develop those skills? (e.g. useful extra-curricular programs at Uni/TAFE?, clubs?, etc.)
=> [If no] – how can you gain those skills? – i.e. what are you doing to develop the skills necessary for employment?
6. Once you're in the workplace, do you think you will have to continue working on your English language skills to perform well?
=> [If yes] - How do you think you'll do this?

B. Questions for recent graduates working in Australia:

1. What kind of work are you doing at the moment?
=> Is this the kind of work you were hoping to do when you were studying at Uni/TAFE? (If no) - are you hoping to find a job in your chosen field?
2. Can you tell us about your experience in finding work?
=> How important were English language skills in finding work in your chosen field?
=> Do you think you had the necessary English language skills at the time? –i.e. Do you think you were ready to work?

- => [If yes] – how did you develop those skills while you were a student?
- => [If no] – what did you do (have you done) to develop your language skills?

3. Generally, what kind of English language or communication skills do you think employers in your field are looking for when they recruit graduates?
4. Here is the basic IELTS scale. We're interested in getting your perceptions based on your experience. Looking at the scale, where do you think you were when you graduated? And where do you think you are now?
5. From your experience, what kind of language skills are important in doing your work?
6. Do you feel that your current language skills are good enough to perform well at work?
 - ⇒ [If no] – How does it affect your performance? What are you doing to develop your language skills?

IELTS BAND SCORES

9	Expert user	Fully operational command of the language Appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding
8	Very good user	Fully operational command of the language Only occasional inaccuracies Misunderstandings in unfamiliar situations Handles complex detailed argumentation
7	Good user	Operational command of the language Occasional inaccuracies and misunderstandings in some situations Handles complex language well Understands detailed reasoning
6	Competent user	Generally effective command of the language Can use and understand fairly complex language Understands detailed reasoning
5	Modest user mistakes	Partial command of the language Copes with overall meaning though with many mistakes Should handle basic communication in own field
4	Limited user	Basic competence with frequent problems Not able to use complex language

Appendix C: Interview schedule for recent migrants with overseas qualifications

Background information:

Country of origin:

First language background:

Tertiary studies in previous country:

Work experience before coming to Australia:

Questions for recent migrants:

1. What kind of work are you doing at the moment?
=> Is this the kind of work you were hoping to do when you decided to migrate to Australia?
(If no) - Are you hoping to find a job in your chosen field?
2. Can you tell us about your experience in finding work?
=> How important are English language skills in finding work in your chosen field?
=> Do you think you have the necessary English language skills to work in Australia? –i.e. Do you think you are ready to work?
=> [If yes] – how did you develop those skills?
=> [If no] – what did you do (have you done) to develop your language skills?
3. Why are you doing the program at AMES? What skills do you hope to develop?
4. Generally, what kind of English language or communication skills do you think employers in your field are looking for when they recruit graduates?
5. Here is the basic IELTS scale. We're interested in getting your perceptions based on your experience. Looking at the scale, where do you think you were when you graduated? And where do you think you are now?
6. From your experience, what kind of language skills are important in doing your work?
7. Do you feel that your current language skills are good enough to perform well at work?
 - a. [If no] – How does it affect your performance? What are you doing to develop your language skills?

IELTS BAND SCORES

9 Expert user	Fully operational command of the language Appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding
8 Very good user	Fully operational command of the language Only occasional inaccuracies Misunderstandings in unfamiliar situations Handles complex detailed argumentation
7 Good user	Operational command of the language Occasional inaccuracies and misunderstandings in some situations Handles complex language well Understands detailed reasoning
6 Competent user	Generally effective command of the language Can use and understand fairly complex language Understands detailed reasoning
5 Modest user mistakes	Partial command of the language Copes with overall meaning though with many mistakes Should handle basic communication in own field
4 Limited user	Basic competence with frequent problems Not able to use complex language

Appendix D: Interview schedule with university and VET staff

The IELTS is a form of evidence used by international students to satisfy tertiary sector English requirements. Here is the basic IELTS scale. The study is concerned about English language and workplace proficiency; we're interested in getting your perceptions based on your experience.

1. Where do you think most local students whose first language is English are on the scale when they start their course?
2. Where do you think most international students whose first language is not English are on the scale when they start their course?
3. What do you believe are the important issues concerning international students' language proficiency and workplace readiness? To what extent are these similar or difference to local students? Any input from professional bodies?
4. How are students within your faculty/university made aware of the language requirements for workplace readiness?
5. What types of international students, from your experience, are most at risk in terms of language proficiency and workplace readiness? Are there local students who are at risk? How same/different?
6. What support both within and outside of the faculty is available for international students to assist them in preparing for employment?
7. Can you offer examples of how the issue of language support and workplace readiness is addressed within your university?
8. How are these initiatives resourced?
9. Have these initiatives been evaluated? If so, what have been the results? If not, how is the effectiveness of these initiatives measured?
10. Do you know what proportion of students from your university find employment in their study area? If so, could you provide us with data on that?
11. Can you give us examples of communication skills that graduates will need in the workplace?
12. Looking at the IELTS scale, where do you think most local students, whose first language is English are on the scale when they finish their course?
13. Where do you think most international students, whose first language is not English, are on the scale when they finish their courses?
14. Is there much variation within each of these groups?
15. Further comments?

IELTS BAND SCORES

9	Expert user	Fully operational command of the language Appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding
8	Very good user	Fully operational command of the language Only occasional inaccuracies Misunderstandings in unfamiliar situations Handles complex detailed argumentation
7	Good user	Operational command of the language Occasional inaccuracies and misunderstandings in some situations Handles complex language well Understands detailed reasoning
6	Competent user	Generally effective command of the language Can use and understand fairly complex language Understands detailed reasoning
5	Modest user	Partial command of the language Copes with overall meaning though with many mistakes Should handle basic communication in own field
4	Limited user	Basic competence with frequent problems Not able to use complex language

Appendix E: Interview schedule for employers and regulatory bodies

A. Employers

1. Can you please give me an overview of the graduate recruitment patterns employed by your company, including the extent to which you recruit former international students?
2. What would be the typical background for former students, in terms of birthplace, qualification levels, and disciplines (or anything else you would like to add)?
3. What skills do/should international students bring to your workplace? (Note: 'Background' is already covered as above)
4. What type of positions would former international students be recruited to in your organisation?
5. In general, how do you feel former international students compare to other new graduates in terms of employment performance and contribution? (probe for any examples)
6. How would you define 'workplace readiness' for your particular workplace?
7. Can you give us examples of communication skills that graduates will need in the workplace?
8. In your experience, how employment-ready have these students generally been, in terms of:
 9. Professional (or vocational) training?
 10. Communication skills?
 11. Any other issues you would like to comment on?
 12. Do you feel there are any advantages and/or disadvantages related to employing former students? (separate probes)
 13. Are you aware of any specific English language levels required for professional (or vocational) registration in the fields you employ?
 14. The IELTS is one form of evidence used by international students to satisfy the uni's English requirements?

Here is the basic IELTS scale. We are interested in your perceptions based on your experience here, rather than any accuracy or familiarity with the IELTS scales. Looking at the scales and the brief descriptions:

- a) Where do you think most local students whose first language is English are on the scale when they finish their courses?
- b) Where do you think most international students whose first language is not English are on the scale when they finish their courses?

Is there much variation within each of these groups?

15. Looking at the scale, where do you think the graduates should be to be workplace ready?

16. How satisfied do you generally feel about the English standards of former international students who apply to you for work?
17. Can you give me any examples of this in relation to:
 - Interview performance?
 - Work performance, for those you employ?
 - Any other social or professional (vocational) contexts?
18. If you do notice problems related to English language ability, are these in the area of the applicant's (or worker's):
 - General English ability (e.g. grammar)?
 - Fluency?
 - Vocation-specific language skills (e.g. professional jargon)?
 - Writing ability for reports?
19. Are there any groups you consider more likely to have these types of problems? (any examples of this?)
20. What tests or screening measures, if any, are used to identify the English proficiency levels of applicants for professional (vocational) work in your organisation?
21. Are any particular strategies implemented to assess this at interview?
22. Can you give some estimation of the proportion of applicants likely to be rejected on the basis of language and/or communication-related issues?
23. If problems are evident when people are employed, what strategies are used (if any) to address the issues?
24. What kind of English language skills in your experience are typically required to work as an (INSERT key fields in succession, as they may have separate requirements)?
25. Do new graduates with poor English skills tend to recognise there is a problem?
26. Are you aware of any strategies they use to cope with them?
27. Overall, what are your perceptions of the English language skills that international students require for workplace readiness in Australia? Are there other skills that influence positively or negatively on their employment?
28. What links, if any, have been established between your professional body and educational institutions? (Can you think of any that might be useful?)
29. What kind of English language ability is required for mobility in your organisation?
30. How would you describe the typical English ability of Australian recent recruits?
31. The government is very keen to gain employer perspectives. Do you have any further comments on the issues at all?

IELTS BAND SCORES

9	Expert user	Fully operational command of the language
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		Appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding
8	Very good user	Fully operational command of the language Only occasional inaccuracies Misunderstandings in unfamiliar situations Handles complex detailed argumentation
7	Good user	Operational command of the language Occasional inaccuracies and misunderstandings in some situations Handles complex language well Understands detailed reasoning
6	Competent user	Generally effective command of the language Can use and understand fairly complex language Understands detailed reasoning
5	Modest user mistakes	Partial command of the language Copes with overall meaning though with many mistakes Should handle basic communication in own field
4	Limited user	Basic competence with frequent problems Not able to use complex language

B Regulatory bodies

1. How would you define ‘workplace readiness’ for new entrants in your particular field of regulation?
2. The IELTS is one form of evidence used by international students to satisfy the uni’s English requirements?

Here is the basic IELTS scale. We are interested in your perceptions based on your experience here, rather than any accuracy or familiarity with the IELTS scales. Looking at the scales and the brief descriptions:

- a) Where do you think most local students whose first language is English are on the scale when they finish their courses?
- b) Where do you think most international students whose first language is not English are on the scale when they finish their courses?

Is there much variation within each of these groups?

3. Looking at the scale, where do you think the graduates should be to be workplace ready?
4. Can you please give me an overview of the proportion of former international students currently seeking professional (or vocational) registration in your field?
5. What are the trends in relation to this (i.e. stable or dynamic)?

6. Where do former students typically come from, in terms of birthplace?
7. What level of registration do they generally seek?
8. Do they generally secure full registration?
9. Is professional experience required? (if so, how much?)
10. Is there any difference to registration if former students qualified in an Australian university based overseas (e.g. Malaysia)?
11. What are the specific English language levels required for professional (or vocational) registration in your field?
12. What different tests are accepted for applicants?
13. Do people get automatic exemption from English testing if they qualified in Australia?
14. And what about if they qualified in Australian universities overseas?
15. What other exemptions from English language testing are you aware of?
16. How satisfied is your organisation about the English standards of applicants for full registration? Probe (dependent on field) in relation to communication skills, listening, client interaction etc
17. Is there any discussion about standards being made higher? (if so, probe why)
18. If yes, what kinds of issues are raised about English ability and professional (or vocational) employment?
19. Can you give any examples of this?
20. Do you get any employer feedback on these issues?
21. What about feedback on the quality of former international students' training? (probe, for example, in relation to students who lack on underlying cognate degree – e.g. accounting, IT)
22. Are there any other issues you would like to raise about English ability for work performance?
23. Does your organisation publish annual statistics on graduates' application and assessment outcomes in terms of registration?
24. If yes, do any relate to English language ability?
25. Can you give some estimation of the proportion of applicants likely to be rejected on the basis of language and/or communication-related issues?
26. Can you give us examples of communication skills that graduates will need in the workplace?
27. In general, how do you feel former international students compare to other new entrants in your field terms of likely employment performance and contribution? (probe for any comments on this)
28. The government is very keen to gain regulatory body perspectives. Do you have any further comments on these issues at all?

IELTS BAND SCORES

9	Expert user	Fully operational command of the language Appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding
8	Very good user	Fully operational command of the language Only occasional inaccuracies Misunderstandings in unfamiliar situations Handles complex detailed argumentation
7	Good user	Operational command of the language Occasional inaccuracies and misunderstandings in some situations Handles complex language well Understands detailed reasoning
6	Competent user	Generally effective command of the language Can use and understand fairly complex language Understands detailed reasoning
5	Modest user	Partial command of the language Copes with overall meaning though with many mistakes Should handle basic communication in own field
4	Limited user	Basic competence with frequent problems Not able to use complex language