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**THE SKILLMAX PROGRAM  
AN EVALUATION**

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# ABSTRACT

The Skillmax Program was launched by the New South Wales State Government at the end of 1988 as a result of concern about the underutilisation of the skills of overseas qualified and experienced immigrants in the labour force. The program is administered by the NSW Adult Migrant English Service.

The aim of this study is to evaluate how well the Skillmax Program is achieving its aim of assisting non-English speaking background immigrants to maximise the use of their overseas experience and skills within the NSW labour market.

The main source of data for the evaluation was a questionnaire distributed to all students who had studied in the program from July, 1993 to June, 1994. Those in the final program intake surveyed had just completed courses, those in the first intake surveyed had completed courses nine months previously. The questionnaire was sent to 458 ex-students in August, 1994 and 217 questionnaires were returned. Additional data was obtained from a literature search, a survey distributed to Skillmax program staff and a focus group meeting of the Skillmax Program's teachers, educational and vocational counsellor and program manager.

Key research findings are:

- 71.9% of all respondents had found employment since enrolling in the Skillmax Program and 67.7% were still employed when the study was conducted;
- 84.9% of those respondents who had completed or partially completed courses ending from six to nine months before the study was conducted had found employment and 78.5% were still employed when the study was conducted;
- 66.7% of those respondents in employment had found employment at the same occupational level as in their countries of birth;
- 52% of all respondents were either unemployed (28.1%) or underemployed (23.9%);
- 85.9% of those respondents in employment considered that the Skillmax Program had contributed significantly to their success in finding employment.

The study compares the findings of the current study to those from a previous Skillmax Program evaluation concluded in 1992 (Mograby & Eddie, **The Skillmax Program Evaluation Report**, 1992). Employment outcomes of participants in the current study are significantly better than those in the previous study. The study argues that improvements in employment outcomes can primarily be attributed to program improvements made since the 1992 evaluation.

The study concludes that the Skillmax Program is achieving its aims. Recommendations for program improvement and future directions for the program are made.

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## ACRONYMS

<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>ACSWE</b>	Advanced Certificate in Spoken and Written English
<b>AMES</b>	Adult Migrant English Service
<b>AMIS</b>	Adult Migrant Information System
<b>APEC</b>	Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation
<b>ASCO</b>	Australian Standard Classification of Occupations
<b>ASLPR</b>	Australian Scale for Language Proficiency Rating
<b>CES</b>	Commonwealth Employment Service
<b>CULT</b>	Combined Universities Language Test
<b>DEET</b>	Department of Employment Education and Training
<b>DIEA</b>	Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs
<b>DILGEA</b>	Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs
<b>DIRETFE</b>	Department of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training and Further Education
<b>EWP</b>	English in the Workplace
<b>MEQB</b>	Migrant Employment and Qualifications Board
<b>NESB</b>	Non-English Speaking Background
<b>NSW AMES</b>	New South Wales Adult Migrant English Service
<b>OMA</b>	Office of Multicultural Affairs
<b>PES</b>	Professional Employment Service
<b>SMPO</b>	Specialist Migrant Placement Officer
<b>UNSWIL</b>	University of NSW, Institute of Languages



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose of the Study

The Skillmax Program was launched by the New South Wales (NSW) State Government at the end of 1988 as a result of concern about the underutilisation of the skills of overseas qualified and experienced immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) in the labour force. The program is funded by the NSW State Government and administered by the NSW Adult Migrant English Service (AMES).

The Skillmax Program funding is directed towards two distinct groups: first, people who are unemployed and looking for work in their field; second, those people in employment, mainly in the public sector, who are underemployed. This study focusses on the first group, those who were unemployed when they joined the program.

The Skillmax Program consists of three core courses: Skillmax 20 which is a 20 week course with an additional eight weeks of work experience; Skillmax 10 which is a 10 week course with an additional eight weeks of work experience; and Worksearch which is a seven week course with an additional eight weeks of work experience. Placement in each program varies depending on English language level, understanding of, and experience in, job seeking in an Australian context and familiarity with Australian workplace culture and labour market conditions. Approximately 500 people each year participate in the Skillmax Program.

The curriculum framework for all three programs is the NSW AMES, **Advanced Certificate in Spoken and Written English - Employment Focus (ACSWE)**. The Certificate has been accredited by the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board and is nationally recognised.

The main aim of this study is to evaluate how well the Skillmax Program is achieving its aim of assisting non-English speaking immigrants to maximise the use of their overseas experience and skills within the NSW labour market.

A major evaluation of the Skillmax Program was completed by the Planning and Review Unit of the NSW Department of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training and Further Education (DIRETFE) in 1992. A comprehensive report was prepared detailing evaluation results and making recommendations related to program improvement and future directions.

The report, **The Skillmax Program Evaluation Report** (Mograbby & Eddie, 1992), included an action plan to assist in the implementation of its recommendations. The findings and recommendations of this evaluation, actions taken since to improve the program and the data compiled for the current study provide the framework for drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of the program in 1993/1994.

## 1.2 Context for the Study

The Skillmax Program was established at the end of the 1980s. The 1980s were characterised by a push to restructure the Australian economy to be more competitive in the global marketplace. Skilled migration had increased as a percentage of total migration to Australia during the late 1970s and early 1980s. With the deepening of the recession in 1983, unemployment for the year averaged 9.9% compared to 6.7% in 1982 and, as a result, overall migration was cut by 25%. Skilled migration was cut by 47%.

Economic conditions improved from 1984 to 1989 with unemployment dropping to 5.7%. Moves to restructure the economy meant an enormous reduction in vacancies for unskilled workers and a need to increase the skills base of the labour force. This, combined with an improvement in economic conditions, contributed to a decision to increase the number of skilled immigrants as a proportion of Australia's migrant intake from about one third of the intake in 1983 to almost 60% of the total intake in 1990/1991.

During this time a number of research studies into the experiences of immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds in the labour force were also conducted. A key study **Migrants in the Australian Labour Market** was conducted by the Bureau of Labour Market Research in 1986. This report highlighted the higher unemployment rates experienced by immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds compared to Australian born jobseekers and immigrants from English speaking backgrounds. The report emphasised, especially, the high unemployment levels of recent arrivals. Skilled immigrants were at risk of being unemployed for up to two years after arrival, even though they had been accepted to come to Australia on the basis that their skills were needed.

The report cited the "transferability gap" as a barrier to employment for overseas born skilled immigrants. The transferability gap was described as employers not viewing "the skills that migrants have acquired overseas in the same light as similar skills acquired in Australia". The gap consists of a range of "skills-based, linguistic and cross-cultural factors" (BLMR 1986, quoted in Hawthorne, p.2).

During the 1980s, there was also increasing concern about the lack of recognition of overseas skills. Over this period approximately 50% of people from non-English speaking backgrounds with qualifications gained overseas had their qualifications recognised compared to over 90% for English speaking background immigrants (Fry 1982, Iredale 1987).

Skills wastage was highlighted. Labour market policies and programs were put in place in an attempt to alleviate the problem. The 1989 **National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia** stated that the labour market disadvantage experienced by immigrants could be removed by the provision of government services such as “English as a Second Language, refresher and bridging courses, local work experience, counselling and accreditation, actual skills assessment and labour market advice.” (OMA 1989, quoted in Hawthorne, p.2).

The Skillmax Program was funded in 1988 as one strategy for addressing the transferability gap and reducing skills wastage. The program sought to assist students to gain an understanding of Australian workplace culture and job seeking skills appropriate to the Australian context.

Hawthorne (1994), in her study **Labour Market Barriers for Immigrant Engineers in Australia**, argues that an additional barrier to employment for overseas skilled people is the attitude of employers. Her study explores the “critical issue of Australian employer perspectives on skilled immigrants” (Hawthorne, p.xvii) as a key determinant of the success or otherwise of skilled immigrants in the labour market. She finds in her study that “the sole significant predictor of employability proved to be racial origin. Possession of advanced English language levels was advantageous only if engineers were European.” (Hawthorne, p.xviii). She concluded that “Australian settlement services...have typically operated on a deficit basis. Designed to transform NESB engineers to the requirements of Australian employers, they have largely ignored the equally important reverse side of the equation: local employer attitudes to NESB.” (Hawthorne, p.xix).

Throughout the 1980s and, increasingly in the 1990s, Australian federal and state governments have implemented a range of strategies to promote an awareness in business and industry of the economic benefits, both domestically and internationally, of cultural diversity. A key plank in Sydney’s successful bid to host the Year 2000 Olympics was a promotion of Australia’s cultural diversity.

Throughout the 1994 Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) conference in Bogor, Indonesia, media reports of Paul Keating's statements linked economic prosperity with strengthening relationships with the Asia Pacific Region. The value of Australia's cultural diversity in creating positive relationships conducive to improved economic outcomes for Australia in this region was emphasised.

Senator Peter Cooke, the Federal Minister for Industry, Science and Technology launched an Australian Manufacturers' Council report, **Wealth of Ideas**, at a National Press Club Luncheon in November, 1994. The report looks at the performance of Australian companies in creating innovative cultures, cultures where research and development are fostered in recognition of the contribution such activities make to economic growth. The report notes that 35% of companies are not ready for the international market place. In launching the report, Senator Cooke commented on "the tremendous unrealised potential for innovation in Australia". He stated that the Australian government's spending on research and development was ranked 7th of all OECD countries. Business sector funding, however, was ranked 19th overall. Part of this unrealised potential is the underutilisation of the skills of immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. This underutilisation of skills is conservatively estimated to cost Australia \$250 million annually.

The examples above illustrate government recognition of the value, most often couched in economic terms, of the technical skills and cultural knowledge of immigrants in Australia.

The success of the initiatives taken by governments to convince employers of the connection between the utilisation of these skills and knowledge and economic success may well be the key determinant in removing the labour market disadvantage suffered by skilled immigrants in the Australian labour market.

### **1.3 Description of the Skillmax Program 1993/1994**

The Skillmax Program received \$1.7 million dollars in funding from the NSW Government in 1993/1994. Two thirds of this sum, \$1.1 million, fund those programs directed towards unemployed immigrants, ie, that part of the program which is the subject of this study. These funds cover the costs of program staff, accommodation related expenses, program promotion and equipment and software needs.

The Skillmax Program consists of three core courses: Skillmax 20, Skillmax 10 and Worksearch. (See Appendix 1: Skillmax Program Profiles). In addition, students who need to improve their pronunciation can access classes of two hours per week outside of their main class time. Over 500 people participated in the Skillmax Program in the 1993/1994 financial year.

The curriculum framework for the three core programs is **the Advanced Certificate in Spoken and Written English - Employment Focus (ACSWE)**. (See Appendix 2: NSW AMES Learner Pathways Curriculum Framework & Appendix 3: ACSWE - Competencies).

The level of funding provided makes it possible for the program to offer participants a high level of individual support. It also makes it possible for program participants to have access to a range of physical resources to support their job search activities. Physical resources include access to a Job Search Centre equipped with computers, a telephone and a fax machine.

In 1993/1994 the program was supported by: a principal responsible for the overall management of the program; an assistant principal responsible for the day to day management of the program; a network officer responsible for the co-ordination of work experience placements, the collation and dissemination of labour market information to other program staff and promotion of the program to employers and referring agencies; an educational and vocational counsellor primarily responsible for providing vocational advice and counselling to students on an individual or class basis; educational placement and referral teachers who interview, assess and place students in programs and refer students to other programs or agencies, where appropriate; fourteen teaching staff responsible for the provision of programs and the operation of the Job Search Centre; and, two full time clerical staff (with a temporary word processor employed for two weeks each quarter to assist with the preparation of students' resumes). All program staff have a role in marketing and promoting the program to students, employers and the personnel of other organisations and agencies.

The Skillmax Program makes a range of resources and facilities available to participants to assist them in the job search process. In addition to classroom based study, students have access to a Job Search Centre which is staffed by one or two teachers five days a week and two evenings a week. The Job Search Centre has IBM and Macintosh computers, photocopying facilities, telephones and a fax machine as well as an extensive library of materials needed to support skilled immigrants in finding work appropriate to their skills and experience.

## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Nature of the Evaluation

The program evaluation was undertaken in order to assess the effectiveness of the Skillmax Program in achieving its stated aim of assisting non-English speaking background immigrants to maximise the use of their overseas experience and skills within the NSW labour market.

A range of material on program evaluation informed the planning of the evaluation (see References). The two publications which were most influential in determining the approach taken were **A Guide to Program Evaluation** (Lambert & Owen, 1990) and **Program Logic - An Introduction for Public Sector Managers** (ARTD Management and Training Consultants, 1992).

**A Guide to Program Evaluation** identifies five basic purposes for evaluations. These are program development, program clarification, program improvement, program monitoring and program justification. It also identifies the questions typically associated with each of these forms of evaluation. Program evaluation is defined as "...the collection and analysis of information in order to facilitate informed decision making." (Owen & Lambert, p.1). The purpose of the current study relates to program monitoring and justification (monitoring program delivery and outcomes and determining the worth of the program being studied) and program improvement (improving the implementation of the program).

**Program Logic - An Introduction for Public Sector Managers** provided a framework for understanding the design of an evaluation. The program environment can be described broadly as consisting of inputs, processes, intermediate results and long term results. Program logic plays a key role in the design of an evaluation. A program is described as a set of activities each of which has an impact on some element of the program. These elements might include program goals, planning, strategies, delivery and outcomes. The links between such elements constitute the 'logic' of the program. By drawing out the program logic, a clear idea of how the program works emerges. This process involves "...identifying the resources, activities and intended outcomes ... and the causal assumptions that connect them" (Joseph Wholey, 1987, quoted in **Program Logic**). The evaluation questions can then be set when this process is completed.

One method for describing a program's logic and developing questions for an evaluation is the development of an outcomes hierarchy, a hierarchy of outcomes linked by cause and effect. Outcomes become broader at higher levels of the hierarchy. The top three levels of an outcomes hierarchy for the Skillmax Program are stated below.

1. Skilled immigrants work in positions which fully utilise their overseas gained skills and experience and hence adding value to the Australian economy.
2. Program participants successfully apply culturally appropriate job seeking skills and strategies to find employment where their skills are fully utilised.
3. Program participants acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to compete successfully for jobs in their fields in Australia.

The questions posed in this evaluation are designed to find out if these outcomes are being achieved. The kinds of questions being asked depend on the level of the outcomes hierarchy to which they relate.

## **2.2 Questions Guiding the Evaluation**

Questions were formulated to guide the evaluation process in determining how successfully the Skillmax Program was achieving its aim. These questions related to the first three levels of the outcomes hierarchy described above.

Questions related to Level 1 reflected the overall purpose of the evaluation, ie, determining how successful skilled immigrants were in finding employment which fully utilised their overseas gained skills and experience.

How many people are in employment? How many people are in employment at the same level as in their country of birth? Are people's skills being fully utilised? What contribution has Skillmax made to participants' success in finding employment?

If people are not in employment, why not?

How many people have access to work experience placements? How appropriate are the methods employed for gaining work experience? How relevant are the placements to the student's work background?

What are the key external factors impacting on employment outcomes?

Questions were formulated to determine how well the Level 2 outcome was achieved. These focussed on determining whether program participants were able to successfully apply culturally appropriate job seeking skills and strategies to find employment where their skills were fully utilised.

Are people getting interviews for jobs? Are they being offered jobs as a result of the interview?

Questions were formulated to determine how well the Level 3 outcome was achieved. These were focussed on ascertaining whether program participants had acquired the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to successfully compete for jobs in their fields in Australia.

Are clients clear about how their skills relate to the needs of the Australian labour market? Have clients made decisions relating to actions they can take to improve their chances of employment, eg, study choices?

What are the key internal factors which are contributing to the program's success? What are the most highly valued aspects of the program? What program elements need to be changed to maximise its potential to achieve the intended outcomes?

What are the ongoing training needs of clients in finding work or maintaining work?

Are members of the target group hearing about the program?

The need to answer these questions informed the formulation of the questionnaire that was distributed to ex-students. (See Appendix 4, Covering Letter & Questionnaire). This questionnaire was the primary source of data for the evaluation.



## **2.3 Findings of the Skillmax Program Evaluation (1992)**

The findings and recommendations of the 1992 Skillmax program evaluation, published in **The Skillmax Program Evaluation Report** (Mograbby & Eddie, 1992), provide a benchmark for assessing how well the program was achieving its aim in 1993/1994. This report set the direction for development of the program from 1992 onwards. Many of the actions taken to improve the program since 1992 were in response to recommendations in the report of this earlier evaluation.

Differences in outcomes between the 1992 program evaluation and the 1994 program evaluation can be attributed to three key factors. The first of these relates to differences in the profile of those participating in the program in 1991 and 1993/1994. The second factor relates to actions that have been taken which have impacted on program delivery. The third factor relates to the prevailing economic conditions over the periods of the studies. All three factors are taken into consideration in this report.

In this section of the chapter and the next, the second factor, actions taken since 1992, will be explored by considering the findings and recommendations of the 1992 evaluation along with the actions taken in response to those recommendations.

Information presented in these two sections provides the rationale for the hypotheses on which this study is based. These hypotheses will be presented in section 2.5.

The 1992 Skillmax program evaluation found that the program had “evolved over the years in both structure and content to meet the changing needs of clients”, that the program had “developed an integrated delivery model with a complementary relationship existing between language teaching and work experience”, and that the program was “relatively effective in enhancing the employment prospects of the unemployed” (p.5).

Findings in relation to specific aspects of the program were summarised. In relation to program effectiveness, the report stated, “The unemployed component has performed particularly well in terms of meeting its placement targets with its employment targets appearing to be reasonably positive” (p.7).

In relation to program objectives and outcomes, the report stated, "it is unclear whether employment and training or vocational goal clarification are considered the program's primary outcomes" (p.7).

In relation to planning, the report stated, "planning in Skillmax is not systematic or outcome-oriented. Nor is the program specifically geared to address the issue of skill shortage in the labour market. The provision of labour market information is lacking...There is clearly a need for ... the establishment of formal consultation and advisory links with DILGEA, DEET and other relevant agencies" (p.8). The report also recommended the implementation of a performance monitoring system.

The report stated that the program lacked overall co-ordination. It recommended that a steering committee be established to "provide advice, policy direction and feedback for the program" (p.7).

The "tremendous dedication and commitment to client needs" of staff were commended. However, the report also acknowledged the gaps in labour market skills of program staff, stating that these gaps could affect staff achievements.

The report stated that existing promotional activities were not sufficient to ensure community awareness of the program. It recommended the development of specific promotional strategies and increasing resources directed towards promotion and networking.

In relation to eligibility criterion for the program, particular concern was expressed that "the reliance on 'recognised' paper qualifications may give rise to the possibility of clients who are otherwise highly employable being excluded from the program" (p.9).

## **2.4 Recommendations of the 1992 Evaluation and Actions Taken**

**The Skillmax Program Evaluation Report** contained 33 recommendations and an action plan (see Appendix 8: Skillmax Program Evaluation 1992 - Recommendations and Action Plan). A second review was commissioned by the NSW AMES in 1993 to assist in the implementation of some of the recommendations in the report associated with clarifying the aims, objectives and eligibility criteria for the program, information management and program management structures. (Zimmerman & Wynhausen, **Review of Certain Aspects of the Skillmax Program**, 1993). The contents of both of these reports have set the direction for the development of the program from the last quarter of 1992 to the present.

In this section the recommendations from the 1992 report and actions taken in response will be presented as the framework for assessment of the effectiveness of the program from July, 1993 to June, 1994. This section draws on information contained in the Skillmax Calendar Year Report for 1993, NSW AMES Women's Access and Training Strategy, NSW AMES Quarterly Reports, NSW AMES Parramatta Region Quarterly Reports and from discussions with staff members who were involved in the program at the time of the 1992 review and who are still working in the program. These staff members supplemented information regarding key changes that have occurred in various aspects of the program since that time.

A number of recommendations related to clarifying program directions (Recommendations 1, 2, 10, 14, 15, and 21). These recommendations focussed on the need to: clarify program structure, aims, objectives and outcomes; review eligibility criteria; and, subsequently, publish program guidelines.

Actions were taken in response to these recommendations.

- Consultants were employed to revise the aims, objectives and intended outcomes of the program and to review eligibility criteria in consultation with managers, teachers and clients. The Labour market focus of the program was strengthened. Eligibility criteria were revised to ensure that potential clients were not excluded because their qualifications were not formally recognised. Eligibility was extended to include those who had arrived in Australia from three to five years previously.
- Guidelines were published in a new referral kit and in a student brochure. Guidelines were promoted to staff.

Other recommendations related to program planning, monitoring and evaluations (Recommendations 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 16, and 17). These recommendations focussed on: the refinement of the business plan for the program; the systematic collection of information on labour market and immigration trends and the use of this information to inform planning; the development and implementation of a post-program monitoring system; and, a review of program data collection.

Actions were taken in response to these recommendations.

- An annual business plan is prepared incorporating performance indicators, establishing targets for employment outcomes, participation in work experience and for women's participation in programs.
- A quarterly and annual reporting cycle was prepared. Information needed and sources for gathering information were identified. A process for gathering information was developed and implemented.
- Key publications providing labour market information were identified. Arrangements were made for regular receipt of labour market related publications and their distribution to staff.

Recommendations 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, and 27 related to program delivery. These recommendations focussed on: the need for additional computer and fax facilities; the development of a marketing strategy; the allocation of additional hours to the network officer position for promotional purposes; the reduction of waiting time between enquiry and interview and commencement of course; the documentation of referral processes; the formalisation of links with other agencies; consideration of the appropriateness of interviewing teachers providing vocational advice to clients; and, the implementation of measures to increase women's participation in the program.

A number of actions have been taken in this area to improve program outcomes which are not mentioned in the recommendations. These will be included in addition to those directly relating to the recommendations.

Actions were taken in response to these recommendations.

- Additional fax and computer equipment was purchased for the program. The Job Search Centre is now equipped with additional computers, laser printing facilities and fax machine. IBM, in addition to Macintosh computers were made available for student use.

The Job Search Centre hours were extended from part time to full time operation, ie, from nine to five each week day. The Job Search Centre was opened two evenings per week so that ex-students could access the facilities. The range of materials needed to research companies was expanded. The Job Search Centre had been used mainly by Worksearch students. Access was extended to all students in the Skillmax Program.

- Orientation sessions on the Job Search Centre facilities were provided to all students. Sessions included computer training.
- The work experience component of the course was significantly changed in order to provide a more structured placement and maximise the numbers of students having access to work experience.

Procedures for placing students were changed. Previously, teachers organised placements with minimal input from students. Students now research to find companies who offer work which matches their skills and experience. Information on possible companies for placement is passed on to the class teacher who approaches the company to negotiate the placement. Arranging placements in this way has resulted in the development of an extensive and varied network of employer contacts.

Work experience placements were generally negotiated by phone. This was changed so that, in most cases, in addition to the telephone contact made by the teacher, an interview is arranged between the student and the contact person in the workplace. The interview allows the student and the employer to assess the appropriateness of the placement and to negotiate the work that will be carried out over the period of the placement.

Employers are now encouraged to offer placements which enable students to complete a project or unit of work. This kind of placement has provided the opportunity for students to apply their skills in an Australian context and has often resulted in employers providing a written statement detailing what work was performed and how well it was performed.

Feedback from employers and students regarding different aspects of the placement is now formally collected through written questionnaires.

- An accredited curriculum, **The Advanced Certificate in Spoken and Written English - Employment Focus (ACSWE)**, was piloted. It is now offered to all students. The curriculum offered has become more standardised, focussed and outcome oriented. Formal student graduations are held each term.
- The Worksearch program was restructured. The course length was increased from five to seven weeks. Seven weeks of classroom based work is followed by a block work experience or, for those students who have not yet arranged placements, visits to workplaces are organised.
- The Skillmax 20 course was introduced in 1992. The need for this course arose from concern that many people exiting AMES programs at ASLPR 2, or, more recently, with **The Certificate in Spoken and Written English**, could not develop their English language skills to the level required for entry into their occupation in ten weeks. The twenty week course provides time to focus on the development of higher level English language skills in a vocational context.
- A strategy to promote the program to employers and potential students was developed. The student brochure was revised to emphasise the benefits of studying in the program rather than the eligibility criteria which had to be met for entry. A brochure directed at employers was produced highlighting the contribution skilled immigrants can make to the workplace. (See Appendices 6 & 7: Student and Employer Brochures). The student brochure was distributed to key referring organisations.
- A Skillmax Referral Kit for AMES Regions was produced and distributed to regional personnel responsible for the referral of students to the program. Skillmax staff visited all AMES regions to promote the program to regional staff.
- Relationships were strengthened with organisations coming contact with skilled immigrants such as the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES), the Migrant Education and Qualifications Board (MEQB), the Specialist Migrant Placement Officers' Program and various professional organisations such as the Institution of Engineers.

- The Skilling Australia Reception, a reception held to recognise the contribution of employers to the program through the presentation of awards, was established as an annual event. The reception is held at Parliament House where awards are presented to employers by the Minister for Industrial Relations. The reception provides an opportunity to enhance the profile of the program.
- Information about the program has been published on a quarterly basis in the Employment Opportunities page of **The Sydney Morning Herald** since the middle of 1993. Advertisements are also placed in community language newspapers.
- The enrolment process was streamlined. Students no longer wait until their interview to receive comprehensive information about the program. Information sessions are held weekly. Sessions provide information about what the program has to offer and the profile of person best suited to it. They enable clients to make informed choices about participation. Interviews are booked after the information session. The introduction of information sessions has enabled interviewing teachers to focus on the assessment of clients for placement or referral to other providers.
- Targeted women's information sessions have been held on a quarterly basis since the middle of 1993 as one strategy for increasing the participation of women in the program. Sessions are advertised in the Employment Opportunities page in **The Sydney Morning Herald** and through various community language newspapers. Information specifies that people with clerical and administrative backgrounds are eligible to apply. Promotion of the program and the information sessions through AMES Regions form part of the strategy to increase women's participation. Options for providing childcare for Skillmax clients has been explored by NSW AMES and DIEA, without success to date. Information on community childcare provision is made available to students.

- A full time educational and vocational counsellor began work with Skillmax in the last quarter of 1991. The counsellor is available to provide individual counselling to students. The counsellor also works with class groups on skills identification and goal clarification. The counsellor also liaises with other agencies to identify professional skills needed for particular occupations, assist in finding work experience placements, facilitate referral of students to other courses, facilitate the establishment of additional courses in response to training needs identified, promote the program and gather labour market information. The counsellor has also developed her expertise in the areas of career planning and vocational testing.
- The network officer position was extended from a part time position to a full time one. The network officer co-ordinates work experience placements, promotes the program to employers and referring organisation and provides information to staff on various employment opportunities for clients and labour market trends. Activities of the network officer are reviewed on a quarterly basis to ensure that changing client needs are met.

Recommendations 26, 28, 29, 30, and 31 related to staff development needs.

Actions were taken in response to these recommendations.

- Staff development activities focussed on the development of an in depth knowledge of labour market related issues. Staff development over 1993/1994 has included: the attendance of approximately ten staff members at a three day Communication in the Workplace conference; two one day workshops on recruitment procedures in the public sector provided to all program staff; the presentation of information on private sector and public sector employer perceptions of what makes a good resume and, employer perceptions of some difficulties people from non-English speaking backgrounds may experience in an interview situation; a session on the benefits of monitoring and evaluating programs presented by an officer from DIRETFE; and, participation by a staff member in a course to become accredited as a workplace assessor.

On going input on labour market issues is provided by various staff members reporting back on other activities undertaken.



- Staff have met on a fortnightly basis for the past two years to work on various aspects of the curriculum. Meetings in 1993 focussed on the piloting of **The Advanced Certificate in Spoken and Written English (ACSWE)**. Information was shared on the teaching of the various competencies, assessment tasks were jointly developed and feedback provided to those responsible for finalising the curriculum framework. 1994 meetings focussed on the clarification of the profile for each of the three core programs offered and the development of syllabus documents for these programs.
- An induction kit for teachers new to the program was prepared. The kit was supplemented by syllabus documents and folders of materials developed to support the implementation of courses.
- A professional development and appraisal scheme for teachers and a performance management scheme for program managers were implemented. The schemes provide the opportunity for individual professional development plans to be developed in consultation with colleagues.

Recommendations 4, 7, 9, 13, 32, and 33 focussed on the need to extend networks with key external organisations, agencies and personnel.

Actions were taken in response to these recommendations.

- The Skillmax Steering Committee was established in 1993. The committee provides advice on policy directions and gives feedback on the program. Membership includes representatives of employer groups, students, the Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET), the policy section of the Department of Industrial Relations Employment Training and Further Education (DIRETFE), the MEQB, equal employment opportunity personnel from public sector organisations, and various AMES managers.
- Program staff have established regular contact with various DEET and DIRETFE personnel who provide current information about labour market trends. Information is communicated to other staff members via program management, educational placement and referral, networking and staff meetings. Information informs planning. Various DEET publications such as the Skills Vacancy Survey and the Job Report are received regularly and made available to staff for information.

- Regular contact is maintained with the local CES. Regular contact was also maintained with the Professional Employment Service (PES) before it ceased operation in 1994. Program information is distributed to the network of CES offices. Program staff contact CES officers to facilitate the resolution of problems that arise for clients. Information about the skills based training needs of groups of Skillmax students is also communicated to the CES so that additional training courses can be proposed, if needed.

At the time of the 1994 study, it was evident that the Skillmax Program had developed since the 1992 study: the program facilitated access of skilled immigrants to the program through flexible eligibility criteria; enrolment procedures had been streamlined and promotion of the program had increased; the program was providing relevant work experience and a curriculum which was responsive to individual needs and was outcomes focussed; the program was staffed by a team of highly experienced, professional and dedicated staff; participants were supported in their search for employment through access to the Job Search Centre facilities and staff, and through access to the skills of an educational and vocational counsellor; a range of support strategies were in place to ensure that staff had access to up to date information on labour market conditions; networks with employers were extensive and links with key stakeholders in the program had been established. The culture of the program had shifted to one which was clearly focussed on assisting participants to find employment which maximised the use of their skills and experience.

## **2.5 Research Hypotheses**

Based on the rationale presented in the previous section, the three hypotheses which guided this study were formulated.

First, Skillmax program participants in 1993/1994 were more likely to have found employment than Skillmax program participants in 1991.

Second, Skillmax program participants in 1993/1994 were more likely to have found employment in an occupation which fully utilised their skills and experience than Skillmax program participants in 1991.

Third, actions taken to improve the Skillmax Program after the 1992 evaluation were primarily responsible for any increases in employment outcomes.

## 2.6 Description of the Population

Skillmax students are immigrants from non-English speaking background who: have arrived in Australia over the past 5 years; are skilled and have worked in their occupation before arriving in Australia; are now seeking work which fully utilises their skills and experience; and, have a minimum English language level of ASLPR 2 in all four macro skills.

Surveys were sent to the 458 students who completed or withdrew from courses in the 4 terms from July, 1993 to the end of June, 1994. Surveys were sent in August, 1994 with a due date of early September. At this time all courses except the final one beginning in April, 1994 had concluded at least 3 months previously. Students in the final intake in April had just completed the work experience component of their courses when the survey was due to be returned.

Of the 458 surveys posted to participants 217 were returned, a 47.5% response rate. 43 additional surveys were "return to senders".

The target group surveyed is a highly mobile one. Previous attempts by the Skillmax Program to follow up program outcomes by phone three to six months after courses have concluded have found that approximately 50% of people have not been contactable. A 1993 survey of learners of a similar profile in programs at the Institute of Languages, University of NSW (Finnegan, 1993), which is reviewed in chapter four of this report, had a response rate of 50%. This survey was conducted by phone. The researcher also notes, "it appears that the major reason for non-response was the high mobility of the migrant population rather than a refusal to participate in the survey" (p.11).

Given the prior follow up contact experience of both the Skillmax staff and other researchers, it is estimated that approximately half of the total population was not contactable, ie, did not receive the surveys. It is hypothesised that the 47.5% response rate represents almost all of those participants who received a questionnaire. The survey sample should, therefore, be representative of the whole population. This prediction is verified in the following description of the data collected by comparing, where possible, respondent information with the profile of the whole population.

The following tables present information on the characteristics of the survey respondents and, where possible, compare the survey respondents and the total population of Skillmax students completing or withdrawing from classes during the period studied. The following characteristics are considered: the kind of Skillmax program students participated in; length of time in Australia on joining the program; gender; age; region of birth; occupation; period of work experience gained overseas; and, period of unemployment before joining the program.

### 2.6.1 Program Type

The population consists of people who have studied in one of three Skillmax programs: Skillmax 20, Skillmax 10 or Worksearch.

**Table 2.6.1: Participants by Program Type**

PROGRAM TYPE	TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION	SURVEY RESPONDENTS
Skillmax 20	26.6% (122)	23% (50)
Skillmax 10	42.8% (196)	42% (91)
Worksearch	30.6% (140)	35% (76)
Total	100% (458)	100% (217)

Source: Skillmax Data Base, October 1994

- a) Skillmax 20 students were under-represented in the survey respondents (-3.6%)
- b) Worksearch students were over-represented (+4.4%).

### 2.6.2 Period of Residence

**Table 2.6.2: Period of Residence at Beginning of Skillmax Course**

<b>PERIOD OF RESIDENCE</b>	<b>% SURVEY RESPONDENTS</b>
<b>&lt;1 year</b>	<b>51.6% (112)</b>
<b>1 year - &lt;2 years</b>	<b>32.7% (71)</b>
<b>2 years - &lt; 3 years</b>	<b>11.5% (25)</b>
<b>3 years - &lt; 4 years</b>	<b>3.7% (8)</b>
<b>4 years - &lt; 5 years</b>	<b>0.5% (1)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0% (217)</b>

Source: AMIS, October 1994

(a) 84.3% of respondents have been in Australia less than 2 years.

### 2.6.3 Gender

**Table 2.6.3: Gender**

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION</b>	<b>SURVEY RESPONDENTS</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>26.2% (120)</b>	<b>25.3% (55)</b>
<b>Male</b>	<b>73.8% (438)</b>	<b>74.7% (162)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0% (438)</b>	<b>100.0% (217)</b>

**Source: Skillmax Data Base, October 1994**

#### 2.6.4 Age

**Table 2.6.4: Age**

AGE	% TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION	% SURVEY RESPONDENTS
16 - 24 years old	1.0% (5)	0.5% (1)
25 - 34 years old	50.5% (231)	48.8% (106)
35 - 44 years old	41.5% (190)	42.9% (93)
45 - 54 years old	4.9% (22)	6.4% (14)
55 - 64 years old	2.1% (10)	1.4% (3)
Total	100.0% (458)	100.0 (217)

Source: AMIS and Skillmax Data Base, October 1994

- a) Students in the 25 - 34 age group are slightly under-represented in the survey respondents (-1.7%).
- b) Students in the 35 - 44 age group are slightly over-represented (+2.3%).

### 2.6.5 Region of Birth

**Table 2.6.5: Region of Birth**

REGION	TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION	SURVEY RESPONDENTS
Sth East & Nth East Asia -Hong Kong (45) -Philippines (9) -Other (16)	28.2% (129)	32.3% (74)
Southern Asia -India (28) -Sri Lanka (20) -Other (11)	24.3% (111)	27.2% (59)
Southern Europe -Yugoslavia (Former) (19) -Rumania (6)	12.6% (58)	11.5% (25)
Northern Europe -USSR (Former) (11) -Poland (10) -Other (4)	11.9% (55)	11.5% (25)
Middle East -Iraq (10) -Other (11)	13.0% (60)	9.8% (21)
Sth & Central America -Peru (7) -Other (9)	9.4% (43)	7.4% (16)
Fiji (1)	0.5% (2)	0.5% (1)
Total	100.0% (458)	100.5% (217)

Source: Skillmax Data Base, October 1994



- a) Participants from South East and North East Asia (+4.1%), Northern Asia (+2.9%) and South and Central America (+2.0%) are over-represented in the survey respondents.
- b) Participants from the Middle East (-3.2%) are under-represented in the survey respondents.

## 2.6.6 Occupational Group - Australian Standard Classification of Occupation (ASCO) Definitions

**Table 2.6.6: Occupation**

CATEGORY	SURVEY RESPONDENTS
Manager/ Administrator	9.2% (20)
Professionals	70.5% (153)
Para-Professionals	7.8% (17)
Tradespeople	3.2% (7)
Clerks	9.2% (20)
Total	100.0% (217)

Most respondents were represented by the category of professionals (70.5%).

### 2.6.7 Work Experience Overseas

**Table 2.6.7: Work Experience Overseas**

<b>WORK EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>% SURVEY RESPONDENTS</b>
<b>&lt; 1 year</b>	<b>0.9% (2)</b>
<b>1 to 5 years</b>	<b>25.3% (55)</b>
<b>6 to 10 years</b>	<b>37.8% (82)</b>
<b>11 years or more</b>	<b>36.0% (78)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0% (217)</b>

73.8% of respondents had six years or more work experience overseas.

## **2.6.8 Period of Unemployment**

**Table 2.6.8 Period of Unemployment on Enrolment in Skillmax**

<b>PERIOD</b>	<b>% SURVEY RESPONDENTS</b>
<b>Less than 3 months</b>	<b>8.3% (18)</b>
<b>3 - &lt; 6 months</b>	<b>30.4% (66)</b>
<b>6 - &lt; 12 months</b>	<b>30.9% (67)</b>
<b>12 - &lt; 18 months</b>	<b>18.0% (39)</b>
<b>18 months or more</b>	<b>12.4% (27)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0% (217)</b>

30.4% of respondents were could be classified as long term unemployed on enrolment in Skillmax.

## 2.7 Research Tools

The instruments used to collect the data were a literature search, a student questionnaire, a staff survey and a focus group. The information collected was both quantitative and qualitative.

### 2.7.1 Literature Search

The major studies and documents reviewed were: **Learners in the Adult Migrant English Program**, Institute of Languages, University of New South Wales (Finnegan, 1993). **Professional Interlink Program Annual Report 1992-1993** (Jackman, 1993). and, **The Skillmax Program Evaluation Report** (Mograbby & Eddie, 1992).

### 2.7.2 Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire was the core data collection instrument (See Appendix 4: Covering Letter and Questionnaire). A questionnaire was chosen as the means for collecting data in preference to interview because it is an efficient, inexpensive and time saving method of collecting information from a large group of subjects (458).

A covering letter accompanied the questionnaires that were posted (see Appendix 4: Covering Letter and Questionnaire). The covering letter was carefully constructed to maximise the likelihood that it would be returned by individuals. It was polite ("I would very much appreciate it if ..."), emphasised the purpose of the research, indicated how much time respondents would need to commit to complete it (15 minutes) and that information supplied would be treated confidentially, and gave a deadline for return of two weeks after it was sent. Finally, a postage paid, addressed envelope was included.

In preparing the questionnaire itself, attempts were made to keep each question clear, precise and focussed on a single concept. Questions were organised into three clearly labelled sections entitled **Employment Experience**, **Study/Training Since Leaving the Skillmax Program** and **Feedback on the Skillmax Program**.

The questionnaire contained twenty-three questions with respondents needing to complete fewer questions than this as some sections did not require completion by all students.

Most questions used were closed questions requiring respondents to tick boxes, answer 'Yes' or 'No', or select a number on a rating scale. Questions of this type were chosen to ensure that the questionnaire was quick and easy to complete and to facilitate the collation of data from the large number of returns expected. Two open ended questions were also included so that qualitative data could also be collected.

The questionnaire sought a variety of information from subjects, including demographic information and attitudinal information.

Feedback on the draft questionnaire was sought from three Skillmax staff members. A number of changes were made to the questionnaire as a result of the feedback. These included simplifying the method of completing a question, using Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) categories, where possible, so that comparisons of study data and ABS data could be made directly. Several layout changes were also made so that the questionnaire could be more easily read.

The redrafted questionnaire was then piloted by distributing it to 10 students who were using the Centre's Job Search Centre in the evening. They were asked to complete the questionnaire and provide comments on the questions and structure.

Further changes were made as a result of the piloting. The key change was to include additional options in two questions as other likely responses were revealed by responses made by the students.

Although care was taken in constructing the questionnaire and a pilot was conducted, problems did emerge when the data was collated and analysed. Fortunately, the problems that did arise either could be corrected or did not significantly affect the analysis.

The most significant problem which arose was in response to Question 4, "Have you been employed since enrolling in the Skillmax Program?". This apparently straight forward question caused the most difficulty. When comparing employment outcome data from the questionnaire with that recorded on the Skillmax Data Base, the researcher noticed that some students on the Skillmax Data Base, who were recorded as employed, had indicated in the survey that they had not been employed since enrolling in Skillmax. In addition, many people who had initially answered 'no' to this question, changed their answer to 'yes'.

These two observations indicated that there had been confusion for many people over the meaning of the question. One of the main reasons for conducting the survey was to establish how well the program was meeting its aim of assisting students to find employment in their field. This question was, therefore, a key one. Initially, 82 of the 217 respondents had answered 'no' to this question.

The researcher decided to contact all of those who had answered 'no' and check their understanding of this question. Twenty additional people were found to be in employment. The process resulted in significant changes to the results. The percentage of people who had been employed since enrolling in the Skillmax Program rose from 61.5% to 71.9%.

Comments from some of those people rung indicated that people had probably understood the question to mean, "Have you had a job at any time between arriving in Australia and joining the Skillmax Program?", that is, "since" was understood as "before".

Although a very time consuming process, the personal telephone contact with approximately one third of all respondents provided the opportunity to enter into discussion with respondents. This enabled the researcher to convey a personal thank you to people for returning questionnaires, explore issues, clarify responses and generally "get a feel for" the situations of a range of people.

A number of other questions contained words that could be interpreted in different ways, for example, the word 'field'. The word 'field' is rather general. It can be interpreted as doing the same thing at the same level, or, as doing something where the content was related to what the respondent had been doing before coming to Australia.

It would have been better, perhaps, to ask an additional question to establish if the job was at a comparable level of employment in terms of salary and/or degree of responsibility. The relationship between level of employment before and after coming to Australia was established through a comparison of occupations according to ASCO definitions.

### 2.7.3 Staff Survey

Skillmax Program staff were asked to complete a three question survey. The questions were open ended, focussing on staff perceptions of the strengths or the program, suggestions for improving the program and possible future directions for the program. The information was collected to inform the sections of the report relating to future directions and program improvement.

### 2.7.4 Focus Group

Research findings were presented to a meeting of Skillmax professional staff (teachers, educational and vocational counsellor and program manager). Staff members were asked to comment on the findings, noting anything unexpected and offering theories to explain results. Notes were taken during the discussion and the information used to assist in interpreting research findings. This proved to be a very effective way of tapping into the experience of people who were dealing directly with students and the implementation of programs.

## 2.8 Procedure

Surveys were sent to the 458 students who completed or withdrew from courses in the four terms from July, 1993 to the end of June, 1994. Surveys were sent in August, 1994 with a due date of early September. At this time all courses except the final one, beginning in April 1994, had concluded at least 3 months previously. Students in the final intake in April had just completed the work experience component of their courses when the survey was due to be returned.

Survey data from each question answered was coded and entered into a spreadsheet program, **Microsoft Excel Version 5.0**. Additional data for each respondent was collected from two other sources, **The Adult Migrant Information System (AMIS)**, which is the DIEA National Data Base of Student information, and **The Skillmax Data Base**, a locally based data base. The additional data entered covered dates of arrival in Australia, age, country of birth, program assigned to, course dates and status (withdrawn or completed course).

These two additional sources were also used, where possible, to gather data on the whole population being studied. This enabled the researcher to establish if the survey sample were representative of the whole population.

After data had been entered into Excel, it was analysed using the sort and filter functions. Relationships between different variables were explored. The information was then transferred onto a series of report formats, again using Excel. More sophisticated statistical tests were not conducted as the results gained from the tests used were sufficient for the purpose of the study.

Qualitative data from the questionnaire and staff survey was collected and categorised. (See Appendices 8 & 9: Student Comments and Staff Comments).



### 3. DATA DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION

Survey findings are described and explained in this section. The survey questions from which data in each subsection was compiled are noted in parentheses after the title of the subsection.

#### 3.1 Employment Related Results

##### 3.1.1 Level of Employment Overall (Q 4, Q 9)

71.9% of respondents had found employment since enrolling in a Skillmax course. 67.7% were still employed.

**Table 3.1.1: Period Elapsed Since Completing Skillmax By Employment Status**

COURSE INTAKE	WHEN COURSE COMPLETED	% EMPLOYED SINCE ENROLLING IN SKILLMAX PROGRAM	% EMPLOYED NOW
July, 1993	9 months ago	83.8% (31)	73.0% (27)
Oct., 1993	6 months ago	85.7% (48)	82.1% (46)
Jan., 1994	3 months ago	76.7% (46)	73.3% (44)
April, 1994	0 months ago	48.4% (31)	46.9% (30)

The difference between those who had been employed in each term and those who were employed now was most marked for the July intake (-10.8% difference or four fewer people employed). The October and January intakes registered a -3.6% and -3.4% difference respectively and, the most recent intake, the April intake, registered a difference of -1.5%. The level of employment for respondents in each intake appears to drop slightly with time.

The -10.8% difference registered for the first intake is significantly greater than the two intakes closest in time to it. There is no obvious explanation for this increase. The figure may not be reliable due to the small numbers in the sample.

Nine people who found employment are no longer employed. Almost 50% (four) of the nine had studied in the July intake. The reasons for the loss of jobs might provide insight into the kinds of problems skilled migrants from non-English speaking background face in the workplace.

There was no question on the survey that related specifically to why people were no longer in paid work. Information available from the survey was considered in speculating on why people had lost employment. The variables considered included sex, age, country of birth, occupation, full time study, period of time since enrolling, period of unemployment before joining Skillmax and whether employed by private or public sector employers.

The variables where differences between the survey sample and those who had lost jobs emerged were age, country of birth and course intake. Those losing jobs tended to be: in the 35 to 44 years age group (55.7% compared to sample representation of 41.9%); from the Southern Asia Region (just over 55% compared to 27.2% in the total sample); in the July 1993 course intake (44.4% of those who had lost jobs were in the July 1993 intake whereas 17% of all survey respondents were in the July 1993 intake).

### 3.1.2 Program Type and Employment Success (Q 4)

Students in the Worksearch program (76.3%) are more likely to find employment than those in the Skillmax 10 (70.3%) or Skillmax 20 (68%) programs.

**Table 3.1.2: Period of Unemployment on Enrolment in Skillmax Program by Employment Success**

PERIOD	% SAMPLE	% SAMPLE EMPLOYED
Less than 3 months	8.3% (18)	8.3% (13)
3 - < 6 months	30.4% (66)	30.8% (48)
6 - < 12 months	30.9% (67)	32.1% (50)
12 - < 18 months	18.0% (39)	16.7% (26)
18 months or more	12.4% (27)	12.2% (19)
Total	100.0% (217)	100.0% (156)

Approximately one third of participants (30.4%) could be categorised as long term unemployed when joining the program.

The majority (61.3%) had been unemployed from three to eleven months when joining the program.

Those unemployed between six and twelve months appear more likely to find employment (+1.2%) while those unemployed between twelve and eighteen months appear less likely to find employment (-1.3%). These differences, however, are not marked.

The likelihood of finding employment does not appear to be significantly affected by the length of unemployment for people in the sample. This finding contradicts the well documented difficulties experienced by people who are long term unemployed in obtaining employment. These difficulties can result from “a loss of skills and on the job training, a reduced intensity of job search, and a reluctance of employers to employ long term unemployed” (Castles, **Australia’s Long Term Unemployed - A Statistical Profile**, 1994, p.1). Skillmax students do not fit this profile. Many have chosen to focus on developing their English language skills in order to find work in their fields. Their skills are generally current and they are highly motivated job seekers.

### 3.1.3 Period of Unemployment and Program Type (Q 3)

**Table 3.1.3: Period of Unemployment by Program Type**

PROGRAM TYPE	% UNEMPLOYED < 6 MONTHS	% UNEMPLOYED 6 - < 11 MONTHS	% UNEMPLOYED 12 - 18+ MONTHS
Skillmax 20	28% (14)	34% (17)	38% (19)
Skillmax 10	39.5% (36)	31.9% (29)	28.6% (26)
Worksearch	44.8% (34)	27.6% (21)	27.6% (21)

Those respondents who participated in the Skillmax 20 program tended to be unemployed for longer periods before enrolling in Skillmax than participants in other programs. Those respondents who participated in the Worksearch program tended to be unemployed for shorter periods before enrolling in Skillmax.

A key difference between the three program types is the level of English language possessed by students on entering the program. Skillmax 20 clients have lower levels of English and Worksearch higher. Worksearch clients tended to have had high levels of English before arriving in Australia. Skillmax 20 client are more likely to have arrived in Australia with lower levels of English and to have been studying English in other programs before joining Skillmax.

A plausible explanation for this trend appearing in the figures is that the Skillmax 20 students have been unemployed for longer periods of time because they have needed to learn more English before attempting to find employment in their fields.

### 3.1.4 When Employment Found (Q 4, Q 5)

**Table 3.1.4: When Employment Found**

WHEN EMPLOYMENT FOUND	% EMPLOYED
During course	26.9% (42)
During work experience	29.5% (46)
Less than 3 months after course	18.6% (29)
3 to 5 months after course	10.9% (17)
6 to 12 months after course	14.1% (22)
Total	100.0% (156)

The figures above will, in fact, change with time, as employment levels for the third and fourth intakes are likely to increase significantly over the next three to six months.

A comparison of the first two intakes reveals a significant difference. Both groups have an overall employment rate of approximately 85%. However, 54.8% of those employed in the July, 1993 intake had found employment within three months of the course end date, whereas 70.8% of those in the October intake had found employment within three months of the end date of their course. This could be explained by the increasing growth in job vacancies over this period.

### 3.1.5 Occupation and Employment Success (Q 1, Q 4, Q 10)

Respondents were categorised by occupational group using the Australian Standard Classification of Occupation (ASCO) definitions.

The total survey sample consists of 9.2% managers/administrators (20), 70.5% professionals (153), 7.8% para-professionals (17), 3.2% tradespeople (7) and 9.2% clerks (20).

The percentage of each category who had, firstly, found employment and, secondly, found employment at **the same level** as in their country of birth at the time the survey was conducted is presented in the table below.

**Table 3.1.5a: Occupational Group By Employment Success**

CATEGORY	% TOTAL	% EMPLOYED	% EMPLOYED AT SAME LEVEL
Manager/ Administrator	9.2% (20)	60.0% (12)	16.7% (2)
Professionals	70.5% (153)	69.9% (107)	65.4% (70)
Para-Professionals	7.8% (17)	76.5% (13)	84.6% (11)
Tradespeople	3.2% (7)	85.7% (6)	50.0% (3)
Clerks	9.2% (20)	90.0% (18)	100% (18)
Total	100.0% (217)	71.9% (156)	47.5% (104)

Of the total number employed, **66.7%** had found employment at **the same level of employment** as in their country of birth.

Eight of the ten managers employed did not find work at a managerial level. Of these eight, six found work in their professions, one found work at a clerical level and one did not specify the kind of employment found.

Thirty seven of those in the professional category did not find work at their level. Twenty of these people are working at a para-professional level, one has established a business, two are working at a trades level, nine are doing clerical work of various kinds, one is working in a sales area, one is working as a machine operator, one as a cleaner, one as a trades assistant and one is doing process work.

Two of the thirteen para-professionals did not find work at that level. One is self employed but did not state what kind of work they are doing. The second is employed as a quality controller (classified under the ASCO definitions as "Labourers and Related Workers").

Three tradespeople did not find work at their level. Two are employed as trades assistants and one as a storeperson.

Professionals are the predominant occupational group in the Skillmax Program. The numbers of people gaining employment in each of the main professions represented in the Program varies significantly.



**Table 3.1.5b: Occupation and Employment Success**

<b>OCCUPATION</b>	<b>% TOTAL</b>	<b>% EMPLOYED</b>	<b>% EMPLOYED AT SAME LEVEL</b>
<b>Engineers</b>			
- Chemical	4	25.0 % (1)	0.0 %
- Civil	23	52.2 % (12)	83.3 % (10)
- Electrical	12	66.7 % (8)	50.0 % (4)
- Electronic	12	58.3 % (7)	57.1 % (4)
- Mechanical	24	79.2 % (19)	52.6 % (10)
- Other	5	60.0 % (3)	33.3 % (1)
<b>Scientists</b>	10	60.0 % (6)	33.3 % (2)
<b>Accountants</b>	12	58.3 % (7)	42.9 % (3)
<b>Computer Professionals</b>	29	93.1 % (27)	96.3 % (26)
<b>Economists</b>	5	40 % (2)	0.0 %

The overall rate of employment for engineers is 62.5%.

Overall employment rates for scientists, accountants and economists are relatively low. The numbers of people in these groups employed at the same level as they had worked at before coming to Australia is also relatively low. These figures contradict employment trends for these groups in the publication, **DEET Job Futures 2** (June, 1994). Interestingly, economists were among those professional groups which registered the lowest unemployment rates in February, 1994. Economists and accountants were listed amongst the top fifteen occupations where the strongest employment growth is projected from 1991 to 2001. Natural scientists are listed in this publication as having a below average unemployment rate, as being above average on skills vacancy trends and as having sound prospects for employment in the short term.

The underemployment of scientists in the study may be accounted for by confusion in the description of their level of employment. Some people may have indicated that they had been employed as scientists before coming to Australia, when, in fact, they were employed in what would be classified in Australia as para-professional areas, for example, as research assistants.

Accountancy covers a range of occupations from bookkeepers to management accountants. There are three different accrediting bodies for accountancy related occupations in Australia. In addition, overseas experienced accountants often need to upgrade their skills in relation to computerised accountancy packages. They also need to be familiar with Australian taxation law. People with accountancy related occupations are, therefore, likely to need some additional training before entering their field of work in Australia.

The difficulties encountered by accountants in entering their profession in Australia have been recognised by the MEQB who, in 1994, appointed a project officer to identify the problems encountered and develop strategies to assist accountants to re-enter their field. The barriers identified above probably account for the relatively low number of accountants in the study finding employment in their field.

The number of economists (five) returning surveys is quite low. It is, therefore, difficult to draw conclusions based on the figures presented in the table above. Economists may find the transfer of skills to an Australian context difficult in similar ways to accountants, ie, a limited knowledge of Australian taxation law and relevant computer software.

### 3.1.6 Gender, Occupation and Employment Success (Q 4)

The survey sample consisted of 74.6% men (162) and 25.4% women (55). Of those who have found employment since enrolling in the Skillmax, 71.8% (112) were men and 28.2% (44) are women. All of the women were still employed. Nine of the men were not. Overall, women in this survey were more successful in applying for and maintaining employment than men.

**Table 3.1.6a: Men and Employment Success By Occupational Group**

<b>OCCUPATION</b>	<b>% TOTAL MALE RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>% MALE RESPONDENTS EMPLOYED</b>	<b>% MALE RESPONDENTS EMPLOYED + AT SAME LEVEL AS COB</b>
<b>Managers</b>	<b>10.5% (17)</b>	<b>9.8% (11)</b>	<b>9.1% (1)</b>
<b>Professionals</b>	<b>72.8% (118)</b>	<b>71.4% (80)</b>	<b>63.75% (51)</b>
<b>Para-Professionals</b>	<b>8.6% (14)</b>	<b>8.9% (10)</b>	<b>100.0% (10)</b>
<b>Tradespeople</b>	<b>4.3% (7)</b>	<b>5.4% (6)</b>	<b>50.0% (3)</b>
<b>Clerks</b>	<b>3.7% (6)</b>	<b>4.5% (5)</b>	<b>100.0% (5)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0% (162)</b>	<b>100.0% (112)</b>	<b>62.5% (70)</b>

**Table 3.1.6b: Women and Employment Success By Occupational Group**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>% Total Female Respondents</b>	<b>% Female Respondents Employed</b>	<b>% Female Respondents Employed + at Same Level As COB</b>
<b>Managers</b>	<b>5.5% (3)</b>	<b>2.3% (1)</b>	<b>100.0% (1)</b>
<b>Professionals</b>	<b>63.6% (35)</b>	<b>61.4% (27)</b>	<b>70.37% (19)</b>
<b>Para-Professionals</b>	<b>5.5% (3)</b>	<b>6.8% (3)</b>	<b>33.33% (1)</b>
<b>Tradespeople</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>
<b>Clerks</b>	<b>25.5% (14)</b>	<b>29.5% (13)</b>	<b>100.0% (13)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0% (55)</b>	<b>100.0% (44)</b>	<b>77.3% (34)</b>

When considering the kinds of occupations people were in before coming to Australia, certain gender differences emerge. Those in clerical positions tend to be women (25.5% of women, 3.7% of men), those in trades are men and those in managerial positions tend to be men (10.5% of men, 5.5% of women).

### 3.1.7 Country of Birth and Employment Success (Q 4)

**Table 3.1.7: Country of Birth by Employment Success**

REGION	SURVEY RESPONDENTS	% EMPLOYED SINCE	% EMPLOYED NOW
Sth East & Nth East Asia -Hong Kong (45) -Philippines (9) -Other (16)	32.3% (70)	31.4% (49)	32.0% (47)
Southern Asia -India (28) -Sri Lanka (20) -Other (11)	27.2% (59)	28.8% (45)	27.2% (40)
Southern Europe -Yugoslavia (Former) (19) -Rumania (6)	11.5% (25)	12.2% (19)	12.2% (18)
Northern Europe -USSR (Former) (11) -Poland (10) -Other (4)	11.5% (25)	12.8% (20)	12.9% (19)
Middle East -Iraq (10) -Other (11)	9.8% (21)	7.0% (11)	7.5% (11)
Sth & Central America -Peru (7) -Other (9)	7.4% (16)	7.8% (12)	8.2% (12)
Fiji (1)	0.5% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
Total	100.0% (217)	100.0% (156)	100.0% (147)

People from Northern (+1.4%), South and Central America (+0.8%) and Southern Europe (+0.7%) are more likely to be employed than people from other regions. People from the Middle East (-2.3%) are less likely to be employed than people from other regions.

### 3.1.8 Age and Employment Success (Q 4)

**Table 3.1.8: Age and Employment Success**

AGE	% SURVEY RESPONDENTS	% EMPLOYED
16 - 24 years old	0.5% (1)	0.6% (1)
25 - 34 years old	49.0% (106)	53.9% (84)
35 - 44 years old	42.5% (93)	40.4% (63)
45 - 54 years old	6.5% (14)	5.1% (8)
55 - 64 years old	1.5% (3)	0.0% (0)
Total	100.0% (217)	100.0% (156)

People in the 25 to 34 years old age group are more likely to be employed than those in older age groups.

A comparison with the results from the 1992 survey indicates that students now tend to be younger than in 1992. 53.3% of respondents then were in the age group 35 to 44 compared to 40.4% in the current study.

### 3.1.9 Work Experience Overseas and Employment Success (Q2, Q4)

**Table 3.1.9: Work Experience Overseas and Employment Success**

<b>WORK EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>% TOTAL SAMPLE</b>	<b>% EMPLOYED</b>
<b>&lt; 1 year</b>	<b>1 % (2)</b>	<b>0.6 % (1)</b>
<b>1 to 5 years</b>	<b>25.3 % (55)</b>	<b>26.3 % (41)</b>
<b>6 to 10 years</b>	<b>37.8 % (82)</b>	<b>40.4 % (63)</b>
<b>11 years or more</b>	<b>35.9 % (78)</b>	<b>32.7 % (51)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0 % (217)</b>	<b>100.0 % (156)</b>

Those with six to ten years work experience were more likely to be employed than those with eleven years or more work experience. This may reflect a desire on the part of employers for people with experience but it may also demonstrate a reluctance to employ older people (who would be in the group with eleven years or more of work experience).

### 3.1.10 How People Found Work

**Table 3.1.10: How People Found Work**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>42.6% (78)</b>
<b>CES</b>	<b>7.7% (14)</b>
<b>PES</b>	<b>1.1% (2)</b>
<b>Skillmax Work Experience</b>	<b>21.3% (39)</b>
<b>Approaching the Employer Directly</b>	<b>6.6% (12)</b>
<b>Contacts</b>	<b>9.3% (17)</b>
<b>Employment Agency</b>	<b>7.6% (14)</b>
<b>Set Up Own Business</b>	<b>2.2% (4)</b>
<b>Other/Not Stated</b>	<b>1.6% (3)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0% (183)</b>

Newspaper advertisements were the most common way in which people found employment (42.6%), followed by work experience placement providers (21.3%). In answer to the question, “Were you employed by your work experience employer or as a result of contacts established during work experience?”, 33% of respondents answered ‘yes’. This difference can be accounted for by two factors. Firstly, a number of respondents who answered ‘yes’ to this question also indicated that they had found their job by means other than their work experience provider, for example, through the newspaper. Secondly, 12.45% of respondents had held two jobs since enrolling in Skillmax. It is more likely a respondent’s first job would be with their work experience provider rather than any subsequent jobs.



### **3.1.11 Work Experience Providers as Employers (Q 6)**

Work experience providers frequently employed clients placed with them.

Twenty-eight percent (28%) of those in employment were employed by their work experience provider.

A further 5% were employed as a result of contacts made through their work experience placement.

These figures varied depending on the kind of program in which the student enrolled. Skillmax 20 students (38.2%) and Skillmax 10 students (39.1%) were more likely to be employed by their work experience placement provider or as a result of contacts made through their work experience placement than Worksearch students (22.4%).

However, Worksearch students (76.3%) were more likely to be employed overall than either Skillmax 20 (68%) or Skillmax 10 students (70.3%).

This difference may be explained by the fact that Worksearch students have negotiated their own placements with assistance from program staff whereas staff have arranged placements for the other program types.

Worksearch students are also less likely to have access to work experience placements (57.9%) than Skillmax 10 students (87.9%) and Skillmax 20 students (74%) in the sample.

This difference may be accounted for partly by the fact that Worksearch students tend to find work more quickly and may do so before the work experience placement begins. Almost 27% of Worksearch respondents in jobs found their jobs before the work experience placements began, compared to 23.4% of Skillmax 10 students. The difference probably also reflects the difficulties experienced by Worksearch students in finding their own placements. Comments made by Worksearch students in the survey responses indicate that they are very concerned about procedures for organising work experience placements.

### 3.1.12 Employers (Q 10)

The private sector provided more work experience placements and more jobs than did the public sector.

Sixty-three percent (63%) of the work experience placements and 71% of the jobs were provided by the private sector.

The public sector provided 37% of the work experience placements and 27% of the jobs.

Two percent of employed students indicated that they were self-employed.

### 3.1.13 Jobs Applied For and Employment Success(Q 7, Q 13)

**Table 3.1.13 Jobs Applied For and Employment Success**

<b>APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED</b>	<b>EMPLOYED SINCE ENROLLING IN SKILLMAX</b>	<b>NOT EMPLOYED SINCE ENROLLING IN SKILLMAX</b>
<b>1 to 10</b>	<b>16.0 % (25)</b>	<b>16.39 % (10)</b>
<b>11 to 20</b>	<b>12.2 % (19)</b>	<b>16.39 % (10)</b>
<b>21 to 50</b>	<b>27.6 % (43)</b>	<b>27.87 % (17)</b>
<b>51 to 100</b>	<b>23.7 % (37)</b>	<b>31.15 % (19)</b>
<b>More than 100</b>	<b>20.5 % (32)</b>	<b>8.20 % (5)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0 % (156)</b>	<b>100.00 % (61)</b>

Of those in employment, 44.2% had applied for more than 50 jobs with almost half of these people having applied for over 100 jobs.

Of those not in employment, 39.4% had applied for more than 50 jobs with approximately 20% of these people having applied for over 100 jobs.

### 3.1.14 Job Interviews Attended and Employment Success (Q8, Q14)

**Table 3.1.14: Jobs Interviews Attended and Employment Success**

<b>INTERVIEWS ATTENDED</b>	<b>EMPLOYED SINCE ENROLLING IN SKILLMAX</b>	<b>NOT EMPLOYED SINCE ENROLLING IN SKILLMAX</b>
<b>0 to 3</b>	<b>44.9% (70)</b>	<b>68.85% (42)</b>
<b>4 to 10</b>	<b>39.7% (62)</b>	<b>29.51% (18)</b>
<b>11 to 20</b>	<b>9.6% (15)</b>	<b>1.64% (1)</b>
<b>More than 20</b>	<b>5.8% (9)</b>	<b>0.00% (0)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0% (156)</b>	<b>100.00% (61)</b>

Of those in employment, 44.9% had attended three or fewer interview and 15.4% had attended more than 10 interviews.

Of those not in employment, 68.8% had attended three or fewer interviews and 1.6% had attended more than 10 interviews.

### 3.1.15 Number of Jobs Held Since Enrolling in Skillmax (Q 10)

**Table 3.1.15: Number of Jobs Held Since Enrolling in Skillmax**

<b>JOBS</b>	<b>% RESPONDENTS</b>
<b>No Jobs</b>	<b>28.10 % (61)</b>
<b>1 Job</b>	<b>59.45 % (129)</b>
<b>2 Jobs</b>	<b>12.45 % (27)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00 % (217)</b>

### 3.1.16 Barriers to Employment as Perceived by Unemployed(Q 15)

**Table 3.1.16: Barriers to Employment as Perceived by Unemployed**

<b>BARRIER</b>	<b>% RESPONDENTS PERCEIVING AS BARRIER</b>
No Vacancies	19.2% (20)
Age	5.8% (6)
Skills/Education Gap	3.9% (4)
No/Insufficient Work Experience	43.3% (45)
Too Far to Travel/Transport	1.9% (2)
English	16.3% (17)
Childcare/Family Responsibilities	1.9% (2)
Other	7.7% (8)
Total	100.0% (104)

Insufficient or no work experience were the barriers to employment most commonly stated by unemployed respondents, followed by limited or no vacancies in their field (19.2%) and English language (16.3%).

### **3.1.17 Importance of Skillmax Program in Gaining of Employment (Q 11)**

**Table 3.1.17: Importance of Skillmax Program in Gaining of Employment**

<b>HOW IMPORTANT</b>	<b>% RESPONDENTS</b>
<b>Most Important</b>	<b>30.1 % (47)</b>
<b>Very Important</b>	<b>31.4 % (49)</b>
<b>Important</b>	<b>24.4 % (38)</b>
<b>Not Very Important</b>	<b>12.2 % (19)</b>
<b>Not Stated</b>	<b>1.9 % (3)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0 % (156)</b>

Of those in employment, 85.9% considered that Skillmax had been important in assisting them to find a job in their field.

## **3.2 Study Related Results (Q 16, Q 17, Q 18)**

40% (87) of respondents had enrolled in other courses since enrolling in Skillmax. 37% (58) of those in employment had enrolled in courses and 47.5% (29) of those unemployed had enrolled in courses.

### **3.2.1 Study - Unemployed Respondents**

Eight people are doing post graduate courses. One person is enrolled in a PhD course as a result of successfully applying for a scholarship, two are studying for Bachelors degrees, four are enrolled in Graduate Diploma courses and one is doing an Associate Diploma course.

Thirteen others are studying in courses which are likely to be full time. These are four bridging or refresher courses, four occupation related TAFE courses, one small business management course, two ESP courses and two English for Further Studies courses.

Eight have enrolled in more than one course since completing Skillmax.

### **3.2.2 Study - Employed Respondents**

Those in employment were enrolled in or had completed a similar range of courses to those not in employment.

Two had enrolled in Masters programs, twelve were studying in Bachelor's, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate or Associate Diploma courses in TAFE colleges or universities.

Twenty-three had enrolled in technical courses, thirty in computer related courses, sixteen in CAD or Advanced CAD courses, and two in English language courses.

### 3.2.3 Reasons for Study by Employment Status

**Table 3.2.3: Reasons for Study**

REASON FOR STUDY	% EMPLOYED	% NOT EMPLOYED
Improve Skills Related to Current Occupation	42.3 (30)	39.5% (17)
Improve English	16.9% (12)	14.0 (6)
Career Advancement	19.7% (14)	18.6% (8)
Retrain	8.4% (6)	18.6% (8)
Other	12.7% (9)	9.3% (4)
Total	100.0% (71)	100.0% (43)

Other reasons for undertaking courses for those in employment related to getting to know the Australian work context better (4) and gaining Australian qualifications (4), ie qualifications more readily accepted by employers.

Other reasons for undertaking courses given by those not in employment related to improving job prospects.

More of those in employment (16.9%) see improving English as a reason for study than do those not in employment (14%). This difference is also reflected in the next section which describes future training needs of employed and unemployed respondents.

More of those not in employment (18.6%) give “retraining” as a reason for study than do those in employment (8.4%).



### 3.2.4 Training Needs

**Table 3.2.4: Skills Needed by Employment Status**

<b>SKILL/NEED</b>	<b>EMPLOYED RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>UNEMPLOYED RESPONDENTS</b>
<b>Upgrade Qualifications</b>	<b>2.4% (4)</b>	<b>1.4% (1)</b>
<b>Occupation Related Technical Skills</b>	<b>9.5% (16)</b>	<b>11.3% (8)</b>
<b>Occupation Related Generic Skills, eg -Project Management -Car Driving</b>	<b>5.4% (9)</b>	<b>5.6% (4)</b>
<b>On the Job Training</b>	<b>1.2% (2)</b>	<b>7.0% (5)</b>
<b>Computer Related Skills</b>	<b>19.0% (32)</b>	<b>19.7% (14)</b>
<b>Networking</b>	<b>13.7% (23)</b>	<b>25.4% (18)</b>
<b>Job Seeking Skills</b>	<b>2.4% (4)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>
<b>Language Related Skills, eg -Negotiation Skills -Report Writing</b>	<b>46.4% (78)</b>	<b>29.6% (21)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0% (168)</b>	<b>100.0% (71)</b>

The development of English language related skills was most frequently recorded as a current training need by both employed and unemployed respondents. However, a significantly higher percentage of employed respondents saw this as a need. Employed respondents may be more aware of the language skills they need to better accomplish specific work tasks.

Unemployed respondents are more likely to see a greater knowledge of the Australian environment and the development of more extensive networks as a need. This complements the finding that unemployed respondents perceive insufficient local work experience to be their major barrier to finding employment.

### **3.3 Feedback on the Skillmax Program**

#### **3.3.1 Source of Information on Skillmax**

**Table 3.3.1: Source of Information on Skillmax**

<b>Family/Friends</b>	<b>45.4%</b>
<b>AMES Centre</b>	<b>24.8%</b>
<b>AMES Brochure</b>	<b>6.6%</b>
<b>CES</b>	<b>7.8%</b>
<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>6.6%</b>
<b>MEQB</b>	<b>2.1%</b>
<b>Professional Organisation</b>	<b>2.1%</b>
<b>Community Organisation</b>	<b>1.6%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>3.0%</b>

The majority of respondents had found out about the Skillmax Program through friends and family (45.4%) or AMES Centres and brochures (31.4%).

### 3.3.2 Access to Work Experience

**Table 3.3.2: Access to Work Experience**

	<b>WORK EXPERIENCE - YES</b>	<b>WORK EXPERIENCE - NO</b>	<b>% WORK EXPERIENCE - YES</b>
<b>Employed</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>71.1%</b>
<b>Not Employed</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>82.0%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>74.2%</b>

More of those not in employment had access to work experience than those in employment. This reflects the fact that 26.9% of those in employment found work before the work experience component of the course had begun.

### 3.3.3 Program Usefulness - Overall (Q 21)

For question 21, respondents indicated on a scale from one to five (number one = most useful, number 5 = not at all useful) the usefulness of each course component in improving their chances of gaining employment.

Based on those who marked a one or a two for a component, the most useful course components were considered to be resume preparation (80.6%), covering letter preparation (78.8%), work experience (77.3%) and job interview practice (67.1%).

All programs considered the four course components noted here as the four most useful, with the exception of Worksearch students who considered interpretation of job advertisements as a more valuable activity than job interview practice. However, the degree of usefulness of each component and the ranking of the four varied between programs. (See below).

Other variations in perceptions of students in each program type emerged. These variations are noted under each program below. The reasons for these variations probably relate to the different levels of skills and knowledge of students in each group (and hence needs) on entering programs and the different emphasis and level of complexity with which each component was dealt with within the syllabus.

Overall, Worksearch students were not as enthusiastic about the value of course components as Skillmax 10 and Skillmax 20 students.

### **3.3.4 Program Usefulness - Skillmax 20**

Skillmax 20 students found job interview practice the most useful (82.2%), followed by resume preparation (80.8%), covering letter preparation (78.3%) and work experience (77.3%).

There is a marked difference in perception of the value of job interview practice between Skillmax 20 students and other program types (Skillmax 20 - 82.2%, Skillmax 10 - 65.8%, Worksearch - 58.2%)

Predictably, as their English language skills were not as highly developed as students in the other two programs, they valued the workplace language components of the course more than Skillmax 10 and Worksearch students: reading and writing (Skillmax 20 - 69.6%, Skillmax 10 - 58.1%, Worksearch - 46.9%), speaking and listening (Skillmax 20 - 67.6%, Skillmax 10 - 59%, Worksearch - 42.4%).

Goal setting was more highly valued by Skillmax 20 students than other programs' students (Skillmax 20 - 48.9%, Skillmax 10 - 43.7%, Worksearch - 33.8%).

Goal setting generally scored lowest for usefulness of all course components for all program types. A possible explanation for this finding is that many students are clear about their goals on entering the course. For those who are not, however, this process is vital to their future employment prospects.

### **3.3.5 Program Usefulness - Skillmax 10**

Skillmax 10 students found work experience placements the most useful course component (79.5%), followed by resume preparation (79.3%), covering letter preparation (78.8%) and job interview practice (65.8%).

Overall, Skillmax 10 students tended to score the usefulness of each component in between the scores of the other two programs.

### **3.3.6 Program Usefulness - Worksearch**

Worksearch students found resume preparation the most useful course component (80.5%), followed by covering letter preparation (79.2%), work experience (74.6%) and reading job ads (64.3%).

Worksearch students found the Job Search Centre and reading job ads of more value than did students in other programs.

As stated above, when scoring the usefulness of other course components Worksearch students were less enthusiastic than other students.

## **3.4 Student Comments (Q 22, Q 23)**

Questions 22 and 23 were open ended, requesting suggestions for program improvement and any other comments respondents wished to make. The majority of respondents made comments (approximately 75%). Over 5,000 words were recorded. (See Appendix 8: Student Comments)

Many people (over one third) took the opportunity to say thank you, affirming the value of the programs and the work of staff. Most also took the opportunity to comment on aspects of the course of particular value to them or to make suggestions for improvement.

Comments included, "It is an excellent opportunity to find a job, excellent combination of work experience plus workplace culture" and "I consider the program ... offers very good essential information about job searching skills. Although I am looking for a position that is hard to find on the current employment market, having the knowledge acquired during this program enhances my chances a lot. Thank you."

Comments were categorised and compiled under three main kinds of headings: those relating to course components, for example, "telephone enquiries and job interview preparation", "work experience"; those relating to the organisation and staffing of programs, for example, "selection of students", "course length", and those relating to positive or negative general comments, ie, "brickbats" or "bouquets".

The most commonly commented upon areas were work experience, networking with employers and interaction with workplaces and workplace personnel.

Many of the positive comments in the "bouquet" category related to the value of work experience, for example, "Skillmax Program is most important and effective in providing qualified and skilled professionals access to local work experience required by a large number of employers as a prerequisite to obtain a job interview...".

In addition, the separate category, "Work Experience", contained more comments than any other from students in each of the three programs. Some themes emerged from the comments.

Students from all three programs commented on the need to have increased support during the work experience. Comments included "...have more contact with the employer to analyse the problems for migrants and to have feedback from the work experience" and "There should be more frequent contact between the Centre and students on work experience to monitor the progress of the students and the problems they encounter".

From Worksearch students a very strong recommendation for program staff to arrange placements emerged, with nine individuals specifically making this recommendation which is best expressed in the following comment: "...access to finding local work experience was insufficient because the teachers are not taking very much interest in helping the students to find local work experience. Teachers should help students to find local work experience. Every student joining the Skillmax Program should get work experience."

The Worksearch course is structured around students developing skills needed to research companies and network with employers in order to arrange their own work experience placements. Student comments indicate that, from their point of view, this part of the course is not working. Reasons given for changing the arrangement included that the quality of the placements may not be as good, "the students do jobs like filing or typing" and that students do not have the same credibility with employers as the "institution" of Skillmax does, "the company will be more trusted (sic) of our skills base ... if the introduction and arrangement will be done by Skillmax."

Four Skillmax 20 students were concerned about the appropriateness of their work experience placements, with suggestions recorded including "To have working experience in a suitable company" and "Placement for work experience in appropriate structured job."

Another area that was frequently commented on by students in all three programs concerned networking with employers (12 people directly suggested extending networks and many other people's comments implied the same). Students wanted contacts, especially with private sector employers, to be extended because extended networking with employers was likely to increase employment outcomes, "This program can generate more places for work experience in the private sectors, that would definitely help new migrants to get access in private sector jobs".

Students also suggested an increased emphasis on contact with workplaces through workplace visits, talks given by professionals in the students' particular fields, human resource personnel and (especially) employers, and inviting ex-students to address current students on their job seeking experiences. Comments included "Emphasis would be better placed on understanding prospective employers' expectations on candidates, particularly on limitation they would think on candidates from overseas" and "Have experienced person employed in a relevant field to give advice to students about job seeking".

### **3.5 Staff Comments**

A survey of Skillmax staff (teachers, program manager, educational and vocational counsellor, educational placement and referral teachers) was conducted. (See Appendix 9: Staff Comments). Three questions were asked: "What do you see as the strengths of the Program?"; "What suggestions do you have for improving the Program"; and, "What do you see as the future directions of the Program?". Eleven of the thirteen surveys distributed were returned.

#### **3.5.1 Strengths of the Program**

Staff cited a number of program strengths. They nominated the teaching staff (6) and the curriculum (6) as being particularly important. Comments on teaching staff included their "openness to change and commitment to quality", "the team spirit", "commitment to excellence", "skilled, enthusiastic, dedicated teachers" and "skilled, supportive/encouraging team of teachers".

The curriculum was considered equally important. Particular components commented on included "interview and document preparation", "opportunity to practise job seeking skills" and "non-language gains, eg, building of self esteem, giving students a belief in their skills as applicable to the Australian workplace". Work experience and employer networks (6) were also seen as strengths by staff.

Another main program strength was seen as program support resources such as the Job Search Centre (4), the networking officer (3) and counsellor's (2) positions.

Other strengths were seen as "participative management" (1), "good balance of class and individual attention given to students" (1), "promotional strategies teachers/clients" (1), "student/client input and contributions" (2) and "control over the program...". (1)



### **3.5.2 Suggestions for Improving the Program**

The two most frequent areas of comment related to the need for improved accommodation (6) and other facilities/equipment (5) and the need to promote the program more effectively (5).

Staff were also concerned that links with business, industry, employers be extended.(3)

Staff development for teachers in the areas of computer training (1), and industry and the labour market (2) was also suggested.

Other suggestions made were to make “better use of technology”, “re-introduce pronunciation classes”, maintain the length of the Worksearch course at seven to ten weeks rather than revert to a five week course and that class numbers in Worksearch courses should not exceed 28 students for two teachers, “staffing of specialist programs need specialist teachers”, “the need for an Assistant Principal ... there have been eight changes in Skillmax Assistant Principal since 1990”, “more industry speakers...more industry visits”, “more work experience visits” and “improved monitoring of work experience”.

### **3.5.3 Future Directions for the Program**

The most frequently cited direction was providing additional support to existing clients and offering support to new target groups in finding work. Suggestions for doing this were using job subsidies programs more (1), through case management (3), “the development of a mentor scheme linking current and post course clients” (1), closer contacts with the CES and by exploring employment consultancy work (2).

Staff also suggested some changes to course provision. Suggestions included responding more to student needs (1), placing students in classes according to profession (1), providing Skillmax courses in a distance learning mode (1) and continuing to update course content (1).

Others directions included increased promotion of the program through allocating an additional networking position (1) and through increased liaison with the MEQB (1) and employers (2).

Some staff suggested offering a range of courses on a cost recovery basis. Examples given were the Worksearch course (1), courses for students in employment (1) and computer skills courses (1).

### **3.6 Additional Data Collected Via Telephone Conversations**

Information was collected from the telephone conversations with over 80 ex-students who were contacted when the need to clarify answers to a key question was identified.

A number of people who had not yet found employment were obviously concerned. They were keen to know how they were doing in relation to their fellow students. Women also tended to sound less confident about their prospects and situation than men. This lack of confidence is not reflected in the employment outcomes for women which, in this sample, has proved better for women than men.

Both employed and unemployed people spoken to appeared to be very actively working on improving their situations, with many people enrolled or enrolling in courses and some people attempting to circumvent their unemployment by setting up their own business.

Two brief case studies provide insights in issues surrounding finding appropriate employment for people from non-English speaking background who have gained their occupational skills overseas.

The first case study is of a mechanical engineer specialising in a narrow field in which job vacancies were limited. She had been unemployed for more than 12 months on joining Skillmax at the beginning of 1994. As part of the Skillmax Program, she was placed in an organisation for a two month work experience placement doing work in her professional area. She had, in fact, unsuccessfully applied for work with this organisation previously. After being on work experience for two weeks, she was offered three months of casual work. She stated that she had been told by other that vacancies did not arise often in the organisation. A vacancy for a two year contract position came up shortly after her offer of casual work as a result of someone going on leave. She applied for the job, was interviewed and was successful.

This short case study illustrates the value of relevant work experience placements in enabling people to prove their skills to employers, to become known and to use this as a springboard to employment.

The second person had been unemployed for more than six months and less than a year on joining the Skillmax Program in the last term of 1993. She was an economist with more than six years of experience in her field. She did not undertake the work experience component of the course because a placement in her field could not be found.

She tried hard to find work in her field but remained unemployed at the end of the course. She decided that she needed to change her field in order to find work. The CES recommended her for a six month Jobskills placement as a library assistant. After this placement, which gave her local experience in the field, she successfully applied for a clerical position in a library where she is doing data entry and handling customer enquiries.

She has also enrolled in a two year part time university course, a Graduate Certificate in Management and Administration, in order to better position herself to advance in her newly chosen field.

This example, perhaps also illustrates the value of relevant work experience placements. Information from **DEET Job Futures 2** (June, 1994) indicates that employment prospects for economists are relatively good. This person may have taken a very different path if an appropriate work experience placement had been found.

This example also demonstrates the efforts individuals with overseas skills often need to make (and are prepared to make) to secure employment and to advance in employment. The cost to individuals and the country of additional training and the underutilisation of skills already obtained is also substantial.

### **3.7 Summary of Research Findings**

The final section of this chapter provides a summary of the findings of the study. The findings are organised under four headings: student profile; employment outcomes; further study and skills development needs; and, feedback on the Skillmax Program. These categories reflect the types of information collected via the student questionnaire.

#### **3.7.1 Student Profile**

- The majority of respondents were from Asia (60.2%). Major source countries were Hong Kong (20.7%), India (12.9%), Sri Lanka (9.2%) and the Former Yugoslavia (8.6%).
- 49.5% of respondents were 34 years old or younger.
- 30.4% of respondents were long term unemployed on joining the Skillmax Program.
- 85.3% of respondents had been in Australia less than two years on enrolment.
- 76.7% of respondents were men and 25.3% women.
- 79.7% of respondents worked in professional or managerial occupations before arriving in Australia, 9.2% of respondents worked in clerical occupations, 7.8% were para-professionals and 3.2% tradespeople.
- 73.8% of respondents had more than six years of overseas work experience.

### **3.7.2 Employment Outcomes**

- 71.9% of respondents had been employed since enrolling in Skillmax.
- 67.7% were employed when the survey was conducted.
- 66.7% of employed respondents were employed at the same occupational level (using the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations definitions) as they had worked in before coming to Australia.
- 52% of respondents were either not employed (28.1%) or underemployed (23.9%), ie, employed at a lower occupational level than they had been employed in before coming to Australia.
- 17.3% of employed respondents had had two jobs since enrolling in Skillmax.
- 76.3% of Worksearch students, 70.3% of Skillmax 10 students and 68% of Skillmax 20 students had been employed since enrolling.
- 84.9% of those respondents who had completed their course from six to nine months before the study was conducted had been employed since enrolling in Skillmax. 78.5% were still employed at the time the survey was conducted.
- 54.5% of respondents who began courses in July, 1993 found work within three months of completing their courses. 70.8% of respondents who began courses in October, 1993 found work within three months of completing their courses.
- Those respondents who were long term unemployed when joining Skillmax were not significantly disadvantaged in finding jobs. 30.4% of respondents were long term unemployed. 28.85% of those finding work were long term unemployed.

- Employment levels varied for different occupational groups. 90% of clerks found work, 85.7% of tradespeople, 76.5% of para-professionals 69.9% of professionals and 60% of managers.
- 66.7% of those employed found jobs at same occupational level (ASCO groups) as they had worked in before coming to Australia. Clerks were most likely to find work at the same level (100%), followed by para-professionals (84.6%), professionals (65.4%), tradespeople (50%) and managers (16.7%).
- Computer professionals were most likely to find work (93.1%) and to find work at the same level (96.3%).
- Women respondents were more likely to be employed than men. (25.3% of the sample, 28.2% of those employed). Women in professional occupations were more likely to be employed at the same level than men. (70.4% women, 63.75% men).
- Respondents from Northern and Southern Europe were more likely to be employed than other groups (+2.1%). Respondents from the Middle East were less likely to be employed than other groups (-2.3%).
- Respondents in the 25 to 34 year age groups were more likely to find employment (+3.9%). Respondents 35 years or older were less likely to find employment (-5%).
- 41.5% of jobs were found through newspapers.
- 28% of those employed were employed by their work experience provider. A further 5% were employed as a result of contacts made through their work experience placement.
- Skillmax 10 students (39.1%) and Skillmax 20 students (38.2%) were more likely to be employed by their work experience provider than Worksearch students (22.4%).

- The private sector provided 63% of work experience placements and 71% of jobs. The public sector provided 37% of work experience placements and 27% of jobs. 2% of respondents were self employed.
- 42.9% of respondents had applied for more than 50 jobs. 48.4% had attended four or more job interviews.
- Employed respondents had applied for more jobs and attended more interviews than unemployed respondents. 20.5% of employed respondents had applied for more than 100 jobs compared to 8.2% of unemployed respondents. 15.4% of employed respondents had attended 11 or more interviews compared to 1.6% of unemployed respondents.
- 85.9% of employed respondents believed Skillmax had significantly improved their chances of finding work in their field.
- 43.3% of unemployed respondents considered no or insufficient work experience as a barrier to finding employment.

### **3.7.3 Further Study and Skills Development Needs**

- 40% of respondents had enrolled in other courses since enrolling in Skillmax.
- 40.9% of the reasons given for undertaking study were related to improving skills related to respondents' current occupations.
- 46.4% of employed respondents and 29.6% of unemployed respondents believed they needed to further develop English language related skills.

### **3.7.4 Feedback on the Skillmax Program**

- 45.4% of respondents found out about Skillmax from friends or family, 31.4% through an AMES centre or brochure, 7.8% through the CES, 6.6% through the media, 5.8% through the MEQB, a community organisation or a professional organisation.
- The course components considered to be most useful were resume preparation (80.6%), covering letter preparation (78.8%), work experience (77.3%) and job interview practice (67.1%).



## 4. LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

In this section, two related studies will be reviewed, **Learners in the Adult Migrant English Program, Institute of Languages, University of NSW** (Finnegan, 1993) and **The Skillmax Program Evaluation Report** (Mograbby & Eddie, 1992). In addition, information on program outcomes for the Professional Interlink program will be presented. This information was compiled from the **Professional Interlink - Annual Report 1993/1993** (Jackman, 1993) and from discussions with its author in December, 1994.

The studies will be described and the data compared to that from the current study. In addition, the effect of relevant economic conditions on outcomes of each study will be considered.

### 4.1 Learners in the Adult Migrant English Program, Institute of Languages, University of NSW (UNSWIL)

At the time the study was undertaken, UNSWIL had been providing “advanced English language training to migrants of non-English speaking background ... wishing to enter professional employment or tertiary study” (p.v) for many years.

The (then) Department of Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (DILGEA), which funded the courses, commissioned two client surveys at the beginning of 1992 to contribute to a program evaluation. The first was an outcomes survey and the second focussed on ‘non-starters’. The research was undertaken by Wendy Finnegan and reported in the document cited above. The outcomes survey which looked at employment and tertiary study destinations of course participants will be reviewed below.

The researcher surveyed all students who had completed courses between July, 1991 and July, 1992 (306). The survey was carried out through structured telephone interviews in January 1993, six to twelve months after completion of courses. In all, 152 people were contacted (50% response rate). Finnegan notes that the major reason for non-response was “the high mobility of the migrant population rather than a refusal to participate in the survey”, (p.11), observing that other surveys (Tait et al. 1990, MSJ Keys, 1990) report similar response rates. Difficulty in tracing clients was noted as the single major factor affecting response rates.

Respondents had studied in five different kinds of program at UNSWIL: English for Further Study/Test Preparation (58); Health Professionals (27); Employment Programs for Overseas Qualified Engineers (27); Employment for Overseas Qualified Professionals (25); and, Self Directed Learning for Employment Skills (15).

The first four of these courses constituted two different pathways of study that participants could undertake. Each pathway began with participation in the English for Study course. One pathway then led to tertiary study via the Combined Universities Language Test (CULT); and the other, to employment via the Health Professionals course, the Engineers course or the Professionals course. The vocationally oriented programs involved the arrangement of a ten week professional attachment for participants.

The minimum English language level required to study in these courses was ASLPR 2.5, with a higher level being required for participating in the Self Directed Learning for Employment Skills course.

#### **4.1.1 Gender**

UNSWIL respondents were 64% men and 36% women.

Skillmax respondents were 74.7% men and 25.3% women.

#### **4.1.2 Age**

The average age of UNSWIL respondents was 36.6 years, with ages ranging from 22 to 54 years old. Finnegan notes that the average age was three years more than that of the whole student population and attributes this to the fact that younger people were harder to trace.

The average age of Skillmax respondents was 36, with ages ranging from 24 to 57.

#### **4.1.3 Region of Birth**

UNSWIL respondents came from 39 countries. The main region represented was Asia (42.1%), followed by Europe (25%), Central/South America (17.1%) and the Middle East (15.7%). Europeans were slightly more likely to respond than other groups and people from the Middle East were slightly less likely to respond.

The main region represented in the Skillmax Program respondents was also Asia (59.5%), followed by Europe (23%), the Middle East (9.8%), Central/South America (7.4%) and Oceania (0.5%).

#### **4.1.4 Period Since Course Completed**

Most UNSWIL respondents had exited programs 12 months previously (55.8%). The remainder had exited programs six to nine months earlier.

Most Skillmax respondents had exited programs less than 6 months before than survey was conducted (57.1%). The remainder had exited programs from 6 to 9 months before the survey was conducted.

#### **4.1.5 Period of Residence**

UNSWIL respondents had arrived in Australia an average of two years previously with a range of one to nine years from date of arrival.

Most Skillmax respondents had arrived in Australia in the two years preceding their enrolment in Skillmax (84.3%). All respondents had been in Australia for less than five years.

#### **4.1.6 Occupation**

UNSWIL respondents had worked in a range of occupations before coming to Australia. The main group had engineering backgrounds (37%), followed by health professionals (22.4%). Computer professionals were the next largest group (7.7%).

Skillmax respondents were mainly from professional backgrounds (70.5%). The main occupational group represented was engineers (36.9%), followed by computer professionals (13.4%). Health professionals are not accepted into Skillmax courses because of the availability of specialist courses for health professionals, like the ones run by UNSWIL.

#### **4.1.7 Overseas Work Experience**

Sixty-nine percent (69%) of UNSWIL respondents had more than five years of overseas professional work experience.

Almost seventy-four percent (73.7%) of Skillmax respondents had more than six years of overseas work experience.

#### **4.1.8 Job Applications Submitted and Job Interviews Attended**

In applying for jobs, 66.9% of UNSWIL respondents had submitted up to 50 job applications, with 28% having applied for from 51 to over 100 jobs (4% non-response rate). 41% had attended from one to five job interviews with 17% attending six or more (19.2% non-response rate).

In applying for jobs, 57.1% of Skillmax respondents had submitted up to 50 job applications, with 42.9% having applied for from 51 to over 100 jobs. 51.6% had attended from zero to three job interviews, 36.9% had attended from four to ten interviews and 11.5% had attended eleven or more interviews.

#### **4.1.9 How Jobs Found**

UNSWIL employed respondents had found their jobs mainly through the newspapers (30.9%), followed by work experience placements (22.5%), contacts (22.5%), approaching employer direct (8.4%), CES/private agency (7%) and self employed (8.4%).

Skillmax employed respondents had found their jobs mainly through the newspapers (41.5%), followed by work experience placements (21.3%), contacts (9.3%), CES/PES (8.8%), private employment agency (7.7%), approaching the employer direct (6.6%), setting up own business (2.2%) and other/non stated (1.6%).

The percentage of people in the Skillmax Program actually employed by their work experience placement employers or as a result of contacts made through work experience placements is, in fact, 28% not 21.3% as indicated by response to this question. The difference can probably be accounted for by the fact that a number of people, although employed by their work experience placement employer, applied for the jobs as a result of advertisements in the newspaper or by approaching the employer directly.

Of all UNSWIL respondents, 63.1% had found employment of some kind within 12 months of completing courses. Of the total group, 71.7% (109) had been looking for professional employment and of these almost half (45.8%) (50) found professional employment. Of the total group 54.6% (83) went on to tertiary study at either university (62.6%) or TAFE (37.3%).

Of all Skillmax respondents, 71.9% had found employment within nine months of completing courses. Of those who had completed courses six to nine months previously, 84.9% had found employment. 65.4% of professionals who had found employment had found professional employment.

#### **4.1.10 Analysis of Differences in Program Outcomes**

The studies are similar in many respects. The sample size for the UNSWIL study was 152 (50% response rate) while that for the Skillmax study was 217 (47.5% response rate). Both surveyed participants in courses over a year period (UNSWIL 1992/1993, Skillmax 1993/1994).

Both studies dealt with similar groups of people, mainly those with professional backgrounds. The key occupational group was engineers (around 35% for both samples) and there were similar minimum levels of English language proficiency for entry to courses (UNSWIL ASLPR 2+, Skillmax ASLPR 2). The majority of respondents in both surveys had been in Australia for two years or less and had an average age of around 36. Both groups had extensive overseas work experience.

Significant differences between the groups which are likely to impact on employment outcomes are: first, health professionals are not accepted into the Skillmax program but constituted 20.3% of UNSWIL respondents; second, many UNSWIL students were not actively seeking employment as they were pursuing further study goals; third, most UNSWIL respondents had exited programs from ten to twelve months before the survey was conducted (55.8%) whereas most Skillmax respondents had exited programs less than six months before the survey was conducted (57.1%); and, fourth, unemployment levels were higher at the time the UNSWIL study was conducted than at the time the Skillmax study was conducted.

The presence of a significant number of health professionals (20.3%) in the UNSWIL survey would affect employment outcomes as health professionals were the least likely to find professional employment of all occupational groups. Four (12.9%) of the 31 health professionals responding had found professional employment. Five (16.1%) had found employment outside of their profession and ten (32.2%) were enrolled in tertiary study.

The second key difference likely to affect UNSWIL students' employment outcomes is that many UNSWIL students may not have been actively seeking work after completing courses. The study does not indicate how many people were actively seeking work after completing courses. Other data provided, however, provides support for the assumption that many respondents were not actively seeking work. The study states, for example, that even though 95% of all respondents were professionals only 71.7% of people sought professional employment after completing courses. The study also indicates that 38.1% of people were enrolled in tertiary study and not in paid employment compared to 16.4% who were enrolled in tertiary study and in paid employment. This data indicates that the primary goal for many people was further education rather than employment. The Skillmax course, by comparison, targets skilled overseas trained migrants who are actively seeking work in their field in Australia.

The third key difference between the groups is in the length of time that has elapsed since each group had completed courses. The more time that has elapsed, the more likely people are to have found employment. The majority of UNSWIL respondents had exited programs from ten to twelve months before the survey was conducted (55.8%), whereas only 17% of Skillmax respondents had completed courses for this length of time.

The fourth key difference between the studies which would impact on employment outcomes is the economic conditions existing at the time when the surveys were conducted. The UNSWIL study was conducted in January 1993, whereas the Skillmax survey was conducted twenty months later, in August, 1994. The trend estimates for unemployment rate in NSW, ( figures taken from the ABS Publication, **September 1994 The Labour Force Australia**), over the period the UNSWIL survey covered, from July 1992 to January, 1993, rose from 10.5% to 11%. Over the period covered by the Skillmax study, from July, 1993 to August, 1994, the unemployment rate dropped from 11% to 9.5%. Employment outcomes could be expected to be better for Skillmax students based on this factor.

## **4.2 The Professional Interlink Program**

The Professional Interlink Program was set up in 1991 to assist overseas qualified professionals to enter their professions in Australia. The Program is based in Victoria. The program targets long term unemployed with at least 75% of places reserved for them. In 1992/1993, 90% of places were taken up by long term unemployed people. By comparison, 30.4% of Skillmax students responding to the survey had been unemployed for 12 months or more.

The program is DEET funded and auspiced by the Australian Chamber of Manufacturers and the Australian Multicultural Foundation.

The course itself focuses on people becoming “more familiar with Australian business culture, and with the skills needed to obtain work” (p.9) at a professional level. It includes a period of “work observation” with participants usually finding “employment either in the host company or through valuable contacts gained ... the potential of work observation as a catalyst for employment is undeniable.” (p.5)

The Professional Interlink program closely matches the Skillmax Program in the structure and content of its courses. Both programs focus on bridging the transferability gap for overseas skilled and experienced immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. The course components are very similar, focussing on job seeking skills and increasing students knowledge of Australian workplaces and the culture that exists there. Both programs also have a “work experience” or “work observation” component.

The Professional Interlink program is run over a six week period followed by four weeks of work experience. The Skillmax Program courses are from seven to twenty weeks (depending on the particular course) followed by eight weeks of work experience. Work experience is critical to employment, with longer work placements likely to impact positively on employment outcomes for the Skillmax Program.



Another key difference is the English language proficiency of participants on entry to the program. Professional Interlink accepts students with an English language proficiency of ASLPR 3+, whereas the Skillmax Program accepts students with an English language proficiency of ASLPR 2 to ASPLR 4 depending on the program they are entering. Students with higher levels of language could, generally, be expected to be more successful in finding employment than those with lower levels of English language proficiency. Based on this variable, Professional Interlink students would be advantaged in seeking employment.

The program does not generally select on the basis of professions. However, health professionals are not eligible. Students come from a range of professions and, as is the case with the Skillmax Program, engineers are the predominant group. All students need to have their professional qualifications accepted by Australian professional organisations.

The age of participants varies from 26 to 50 years of age. The author of the 1992-1993 annual report states that those in their mid-forties and older are "exceedingly difficult" to place.

#### **4.2.1 Program Outcomes**

From the program's inception in August 1991 to the time covered by the 1992/1993 annual report (figures quoted cover the period to September, 1993), 192 people have participated in courses, with 54% (104) of participants having gained employment. An additional 8% of participants had undertaken further study.

For the period covered by the report, October 1992 to September, 1993, 38 (40%) of the 96 participants had found employment. A further 13% had undertaken further study.

The program co-ordinator, Richard Jackman, stated that, in the second half of 1994, 44% of participants were finding work within three months of completing the program. He also estimated that around 60% of participants in courses over 1993/1994 had found employment.

Victoria has been the state worst affected by the recent recession. The trend estimates for unemployment was 4.7% in February, 1990, 9.7% in March 1991 and peaked at 12.5% in August and September, 1993. The unemployment level then began to fall to its current level of 10.5% (September, 1994). In September, 1994 the unemployment level in NSW was 9.5%. (Figures taken from ABS publication, **September, 1994 The Labour Force Australia**).

The course outcomes for Professional Interlink in comparison to the Skillmax Program will be negatively influenced by the prevailing economic climate and by the relative number of long term unemployed participating in the programs (Professional Interlink - 90%; Skillmax - 30.4%).

UNSWIL, Professional Interlink and Skillmax programs are similar in that they target people with overseas gained skills and work experience. However, each program targets a specific group or groups within the overall profile, for example, long term unemployed, health professionals, people whose primary immediate goal is test preparation or further education or people whose primary short term goal is employment in their field.

The comparison of the programs made above highlights factors which impact on employment outcomes. Key factors impacting on program outcomes discussed include the characteristics of the target group or groups, for example, occupational background, goals and length of unemployment and the prevailing economic conditions at the time when employment was sought.

#### **4.3 The Skillmax Program Evaluation Report (1992, Mograby & Eddie)**

The 1992 review had three aims:

“- to identify those factors that result in the delivery of an appropriate and effective program that enhances the future employment prospects of students;

- to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the program in meeting objectives and targets;

- to determine changes needed to the program to ensure that the assumptions upon which the program is based are relevant to the needs of overseas qualified people.”  
(p.16)

To achieve these aims, administration and planning mechanisms, program delivery, program objectives and program outcomes were assessed.

The evaluation involved developing a clear program description and obtaining the information needed to make judgements about program effectiveness.

A combination of survey questionnaires and group interviews were used to gather information about the program. Participants and work experience placement employers were surveyed. Various other stakeholders were interviewed.

#### **4.3.1 Comparison of Data from the 1992 and 1994 Evaluations**

Students surveyed in the 1992 study had enrolled in the program in April, 1991 and July, 1991. The survey was conducted in March, 1993, allowing outcomes to be examined from three months to seven months after courses had been completed. The total population consisted of 345 participants. 139 people returned surveys (40% response rate). The current study surveyed four student intakes, and so had a larger population base (458). The 1994 response rate of 47.5% was higher than that of the 1992 study.

In 1991 the Skillmax Program consisted of a Worksearch course of five weeks and a Crossover course of 10 weeks. Both programs had an additional work experience placement of five weeks. 63.4% of survey respondents had been enrolled in the five week Worksearch courses, and 32.8% in Crossover courses of 10 weeks.

In 1994 the Skillmax Program consisted of three courses. 35% of survey respondents had been enrolled in the 7 week Worksearch course, 42% in the Skillmax 10 course and 23% in the Skillmax 20 course. Respondents in the earlier study would generally have higher levels of English language on entry to the program which are associated with the Worksearch student profile (ASLPR 3/4) compared with Skillmax 10 (ASLPR 2+) and Skillmax 20 (ASLPR 2) student profiles.

### **4.3.2 Gender**

22.6% of 1992 survey respondents were women.

25.3% of all 1994 survey respondents were women. The level of women's access to the Skillmax Program has steadily increased over this period from 22.4% of those invited to classes in July, 1993 to 30.2% of those invited to classes in April, 1994. The numbers continued to increase in the two intakes following, rising to 34% by the end of 1994.

### **4.3.3 Age**

53.3% of the 1992 respondents were aged from 35 to 44 years old.

42.5% of the 1994 respondents were aged from 35 to 44 and 49% were aged from 25 to 34 years old. Students in the 1994 study tended to be younger than those in the earlier study. The 1994 study found that younger people were being employed more often than would be predicted by their representation in the survey respondents (+4.9%), whereas those in the 35 to 44 age group were less likely to be employed than would be predicted from their representation (-2.1%). This may have impacted positively on employment outcomes in the 1994 study.

### **4.3.4 Region of Birth**

63.1% of 1992 respondents came from Asia, 15.7% from Europe and 13.5% from the Middle East.

59.5% of 1994 respondents came from Asia, 23% from Europe and 9.8% from the Middle East. Survey findings indicated that people from Europe are more likely to find employment than predicted from their representation in survey respondents (+2.1%) and people from the Middle East less likely (-2.3%). This may have positively impacted on employment outcomes in the 1994 study.

#### **4.3.5 Period of Residence**

94% of 1992 respondents had been in Australia for 3 years or less.

95.8% of 1994 respondents had been in Australia for 3 years or less.

#### **4.3.6 Period of Unemployment Before Joining Skillmax**

72.1% of respondents in the 1992 study had been unemployed for between 1 and 6 months.

38.7% of respondents in the 1994 study had been unemployed for between 1 and 6 months. 28.4% had been unemployed for more than 12 months.

This difference may reflect the fact that the Skillmax Program in 1991/1992 had two courses only, Worksearch and Crossover 10, with 63.4% of students enrolled in the Worksearch. Worksearch students have higher levels of English language. They are therefore more employable and also less likely to have spent time learning English in Australia and so are less likely to have experienced longer periods of unemployment.

It may also reflect the fact that students in the 1992 study were looking for work at a time when unemployment levels were rising. Unemployment levels were relatively low before this period. Almost thirty six percent (35.6%) of respondents had worked in Australia before joining Skillmax. An assumption can be made that, because so many students were employed before joining the program respondents were more likely to have been unemployed for shorter periods of time than respondents in 1994. Over half of those employed before joining the program in 1991 (57.1%) had worked in jobs relevant to their qualifications and expertise.

The value of local work experience in enhancing employment prospects has been recognised by both of these studies and other research. Therefore, the 1992 respondents could be seen as advantaged in finding employment through their greater exposure to the Australian labour market.

#### **4.3.7 Work Experience Placements**

The public sector provided 40% of work experience placements in the 1992 study and the private sector provided 57.8% of places.

The employer questionnaire revealed that 33.3% of those employers who had taken students consequently employed them.

72.5% of respondents accepted a place in Skillmax because they needed Australian work experience.

81.3% believed their employment opportunities would be further enhanced with extended or increased work experience placement.

Only 36% expressed satisfaction with work experience placement efforts.

65.1% considered work experience placement to be appropriate.

In the 1994 Skillmax study, the public sector provided 37% of work experience placements and the private sector provided 63% of work experience placements. The public sector provided 27% of jobs found by respondents and the private sector provided 71% of jobs found by respondents.

33% of those employed had been employed by their work experience employers or through contact established through the placement.

Specific questions in relation to the appropriateness of, length of, or support provided in work experience placements were not asked in the 1994 study. However, issues related to work experience were frequently commented on in the open-ended questions. Responses to the question on the usefulness of various course components also give an indication of the importance of work experience.

Generally, work experience was one of the most highly valued aspect of the course. Negative comments about arrangements made tended to be program specific, with Worksearch students recommending that teachers organise their placements and four Skillmax 20 students commenting on the inappropriateness of their placements. Many students recommended extending networks with employers to enhance employment prospects for students.

A significant level of dissatisfaction with the appropriateness of placements is apparent in the 1992 study with only 36% of respondents expressing satisfaction with efforts made and 35% considering their placements inappropriate. The researchers comment that inappropriate work experience placements may impact significantly on program outcomes and participants' achievement of vocational goals.

#### **4.3.8 Occupational Groups and Level of Employment**

Information on the occupational distribution of respondents in 1992 relates to the kind of work experience placements found rather than occupations before coming to Australia. There is no indication in the report as to whether the work experience placements were in positions of the same level and type as respondents has worked in before coming to Australia.

Occupations of work experience placements compared to occupations where employment was found indicated that the proportion in clerical jobs has significantly increased (7.4% to 25.9%) and the proportion in para-professional jobs has significantly decreased (27.6% to 12.9%). The researchers conclude that this indicates that participants have not necessarily found employment commensurate with their overseas gained skills.

86.2% considered their jobs relevant to their qualifications or skills.

Of those respondents who had worked in Australia before joining Skillmax, 57.1% indicated that their employment at that time had been relevant to their qualifications and skills. These figures provide evidence for the positive impact the Skillmax Program has on people finding work appropriate to their skills. It does not, however, provide information on whether employment was commensurate with their skills or at the same occupational level as they had had before came to Australia.

54.2% of those placed in work experience were placed in professional occupations, 27.6% in para-professional occupations, 7.4% in clerical occupations, 4.2% in trades occupations, 4.2% in sales/service occupations and 2.1% in managerial/administrative occupations.

70.5% of 1994 respondents were employed in professional occupations before coming to Australia, 9.2% in managerial/administrative occupations, 7.8% in para-professional occupations, 9.2% in clerical occupations and 3.2% trades occupations.

People with para-professionals (76.5%), trade (85.7%) and clerical (90%) backgrounds were more likely to be employed than those with professional (69.9%) or managerial backgrounds (60%).

66.7% of all employed respondents were employed at the same occupational level as they had been employed in before coming to Australia. The groups with the least number of people employed at the same level as before arriving in Australia were managers (16.7%), professionals (65.4%) and tradespeople (50%). The majority of managers who were not employed at a managerial level were employed at a professional level (80%) and the majority of professionals who were not employed at a professional level were employed at a para-professional level (54%). A minority of people were, therefore, employed in an unrelated field.

The 1992 study appears to have significantly more para-professionals responding than the 1994 study (27.6% compared to 7.8%)

The 1992 study also implies that para-professionals tended to be employed in clerical positions. The 1994 study indicates that para-professionals who are employed are likely to be employed in the same occupation as they had worked in before coming to Australia, with 84.6% of those employed being employed at the same occupational level.

Findings from the 1994 study in this area are more comprehensive than in the 1992 study and indicate that respondents in 1994 were more likely to be employed at the same level and/or in a related field than 1992 respondents.



#### **4.3.9 Further Study**

41.1% of employed respondents in 1992 enrolled in further study.

Approximately 6% of respondents were studying full time.

37.2% of employed respondents in 1994 had enrolled in further study. This figure may underestimate the actual level of participation in courses as the question asked participants if they had completed any other courses since enrolling in the Skillmax Program.

#### **4.3.10 Perceived Barriers to Employment**

A similar question was asked in each survey about barriers to employment perceived by those unemployed. Significant differences emerged between responses to this question in both studies. The reasons for these differences are not clear.

In the 1992 study 52.9% of respondents considered the lack of jobs/lack of suitable jobs as reasons for current unemployment whereas 19.4% of 1994 study respondents indicated this as a barrier. This may be partially accounted for by the improved economic conditions being experienced at the time of the 1994 study.

In the 1992 study, 13.2% of respondents considered no/insufficient work experience as a barrier whereas 42.2% of 1994 study respondents indicated this as a barrier. This probably reflects the fact that a significant percentage of people in the 1992 study (35.6%) had worked in Australia before joining the Skillmax Program.

In the 1992 study 2.9% of respondents considered lack of English as a barrier whereas 16.5% of 1994 respondents considered English a barrier. This difference probably reflects the higher English language levels of students in the 1992 study, 65% of whom studied in the Worksearch course compared to 35% in the 1994 study.

#### **4.3.11 Source of Information about Skillmax**

Respondents in the 1992 study indicated that family or friends were the most common means of finding out about Skillmax (44.1%), followed by AMES Centre (41.5%), the CES (10.2%), the media (2.5%) and community organisations (1.7%).

Respondents in the 1994 study also indicated that family or friends was the most common means of finding out about Skillmax (45.4%), followed by AMES Centre or brochure (31.4%), the CES/PES (8.2%), the media (6.6%) and community or professional organisation (5.8%). Three percent (2.6%) of responses fell into the other category.

The key differences in methods of finding out about the program from the 1992 study to the 1994 study are a decrease in AMES Centres as the source of information (-10.1%) and an increase in the media (+3.7%) and community or professional organisations (+4.1%) as the source of information. Word of mouth remains the most common way that potential students hear about Skillmax.

The decrease in AMES Centres as the source of information about the program can be attributed to organisational changes introduced by NSW AMES in 1993. Before the changes were made, each NSW AMES region had one or more teachers who were identified as educational placement and referral teachers. Amongst other responsibilities, these teachers were responsible for the referral of exiting students to other programs. In 1993 procedures for the interview, placement and referral of students changed. An identified person was no longer responsible for the referral of students. Referrals could be done by teachers, assistant principals or educational placement and referral teachers (if they existed in the region). The benefits of having one person in each region with a depth of knowledge of referral options and who co-ordinated the referral process were lost. The referral process became more ad hoc. These changes probably account for the decrease in referrals from AMES regions.

#### **4.3.12 Usefulness of the Program**

In the 1992 study 88.9% of respondents found the course material highly appropriate.

The benefits of the program were seen as job search techniques (89.1%), awareness of job market opportunities (81.2%), Australian work experience (79.3%), confidence/motivation (76.9%), employment goal clarification (74.5%) and English language (69.1%).

Job search skills were considered the most satisfying aspect of course content (42.7%), followed by communication skills (26.6%), awareness of Australian workplace culture (22.6%) and English language skills (8.1%)

Teachers were seen as approachable (96.6%), helpful (96%), knowledgeable (86.1%) and experienced (86.7%). Written comments also emphasised these perceptions of teaching staff.

78.9% of all respondents indicated that Skillmax had met their vocational goals and 75.4% indicated that Skillmax had improved their chances of finding employment.

Questions used to gather information on the usefulness of the course varied in the studies. However, the trends emerging from responses can be compared.

In the 1994 study respondents indicated that the most useful course components were resume preparation (80.6%), covering letter preparation (78.8%), work experience (77.3%) and job interview practice (67.1%). Variations between students studying in different programs emerged. These are discussed in the data description section of this report.

Skill development relating to job seeking and familiarity with Australian workplaces and practices was considered more useful than English language training.

Information on students' perceptions of staff was not elicited. However, many of the comments recorded in response to the open ended questions requesting any general comments and suggestions for program improvement praised the support given by program staff.

85.9% of employed respondents considered that the Skillmax Program had significantly improved their chances of finding employment in their field.

Similar trends emerge in both studies with students valuing job seeking and workplace related content more than the development of their English language skills. The high quality of support given by staff is also affirmed in both studies.

Respondents in both studies considered that the Skillmax Program had significantly improved their chances of finding employment.

#### **4.3.13 Analysis of Difference in Employment Outcomes**

43.3% of respondents in the 1992 study were employed at the time when the survey was conducted. The researchers state that this outcome was comparable to other employment and training programs. They also note a significant contraction in labour market, in particular, the professional labour market over this period.

In the 1994 study, 71.9% of respondents had found employment since enrolling in a Skillmax course and, of these, 67.7% were still employed. The level of employment varied depending on the length of time since completing courses. 83.8% of those respondents in the first intake had been employed since enrolling in Skillmax. They had completed courses 9 months before the survey was sent. 85.7% of those in the second intake had been employed. They had completed courses 6 months before the survey was sent. 76.7% of those respondents in the third intake had been employed since enrolling in Skillmax. They had completed courses 3 months before the survey was sent. 48.4% of those respondents in the final intake were employed. This course had just concluded when surveys were sent.

Overall, Worksearch students were more likely to have been employed than other students (76.3%). 70.3% of Skillmax 10 students had found employment and 68% of Skillmax 20 students.

The results of the 1994 study are significantly better than those in the 1992 study, with overall employment rates of those currently employed at 67.7% and 43.3% respectively. The difference is even more significant when the fact that participants in the 1992 study had generally higher levels of English language than those in the 1994 study is taken into account.

In addition, if those intakes in the 1994 study which had completed courses for the same time period as those in the 1992 study, ie from three to seven months, are considered the difference is even more significant. If the employment outcomes of these two intakes are considered, ie those intakes which had completed courses three and six months before the survey was conducted, the overall employment rate for those employed since enrolling in the program is 81%. The overall employment rate for those still employed at the time of the survey is 77.6%.

Again employment conditions at the time need to be considered. Over the period from April, 1991 until March 1992 when the first survey was conducted unemployment in NSW steadily rose from just over 8% to just under 10%. The numbers of skilled vacancies dropped steadily over this period as well. However, from July, 1993 to August, 1994 when the second study was conducted the unemployment level had dropped steadily from just under 11% to 9.5%. The numbers of skilled vacancies rose steadily over this period as well. However, the overall employment rate at the times when each survey was conducted were similar, 9.5% to 10%. (Figures taken from ABS publication, **September 1994 The Labour Force Australia**).

## 4.4 Summary and Conclusion

In this section, two related studies were reviewed, **Learners in the Adult Migrant English Program, Institute of Languages, University of NSW** (Finnegan, 1993) and **The Skillmax Program Evaluation Report** (Mograby & Eddie, 1992). In addition, information on program outcomes for the Professional Interlink program was presented. The studies were described and the data compared to data from the current study. In addition, the effect of economic conditions on outcomes of each study was considered.

In comparing the first study, **Learners in the Adult Migrant English Program, Institute of Languages, University of NSW** (Finnegan, 1993), with the current study four significant differences were noted: first, health professionals are not accepted into the Skillmax program but constituted 20.3% of UNSWIL respondents; second, many UNSWIL students were not actively seeking employment as they were pursuing further study goals; third, most UNSWIL respondents had exited programs from ten to twelve months before the survey was conducted (55.8%) whereas most Skillmax respondents had exited programs less than six months before the survey was conducted (57.1%); and, fourth, unemployment levels were higher at the time the UNSWIL study was conducted than at the time the Skillmax study was conducted.

The Professional Interlink Program closely matched the Skillmax Program in its aims, structure and content. However, outcomes for the Professional Interlink Program and the Skillmax Program varied. Findings from the 1994 study of Skillmax participants indicated that 73.3% of those who had completed courses three months before surveys were distributed were employed when the survey was completed. Employment outcomes for the Professional Interlink Program are approximately 44% for the same period.

Two factors likely to contribute significantly to the difference in employment outcomes were proposed: first, the poor economic conditions in Victoria relative to NSW at the time; and, second, the fact that 90% of program participants are long term unemployed.

Findings of **the Skillmax Program Evaluation Report** (Mograby & Eddie, 1992) were compared to those of the 1994 study. The results of the 1994 study were significantly better than those of the 1992 study with the percentages of those currently employed 67.7% and 43.3% respectively. The difference is even more significant when the fact that participants in the 1992 study had generally higher levels of English language than those in the 1994 study is taken into account.

In addition, if those intakes in the 1994 study which had completed courses for the same time period as those in the 1992 study, ie, from three to seven months, are considered the difference is even more significant. The overall employment rate for those employed since enrolling in the program is 43.3% for those in the 1992 study compared to 81% for those in the 1994 study. The overall employment rate for those in the 1994 study who were still employed at the time of the survey was 77.6%.

On the basis of this consideration of the key difference between the respondents in both studies, English language level and the different economic conditions over the periods surveyed, it appears that the Skillmax Program in 1993/1994 was achieving significantly better outcomes than the Skillmax Program in 1991 (the percentage of participants employed in the 1994 evaluation was 34.3% more than in the 1992 study, ie, the employment rate in 1992 was 43.3% compared to 77.6% in 1994).

## 5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 of this chapter will discuss how the research findings support the hypotheses which have guided this study. In sections 5.4 and 5.5 the kinds of program improvements and future directions suggested by the research conducted will be considered. These suggestions will be taken up as recommendations in the final chapter.

In section 2.5 of this report, the three hypotheses for this research were presented: first, Skillmax program participants in 1993/1994 were more likely to have found employment than those in 1991; second, Skillmax program participants in 1993/1994 were more likely to have found employment in an occupation which fully utilised their skills and experience than Skillmax program participants in 1991; and, third, actions taken to improve the Skillmax Program after the 1992 program evaluation (**The Skillmax Program Evaluation Report**, Mograby & Eddie) were primarily responsible for any increases in employment outcomes.

A comparison of the research findings of the 1992 and 1994 studies reveals some significant differences. Specific findings relating to employment outcomes and level of employment which support the first and second hypotheses will be summarised in sections 5.1 and 5.2.

In section 5.3, relationships will be established between other research findings and actions taken to improve the Skillmax Program since 1992. The establishment of these relationships will provide evidence to support the hypotheses stated above. They will also provide a yardstick for assessing how well the Skillmax Program is achieving its aim of assisting non-English speaking immigrants to maximise the use of their overseas experience and skills within the NSW labour market.

Direct cause and effect relationships cannot be established between many of the actions undertaken and research findings. Specific findings, however, can serve as indicators that some of the 1992 recommendations have been successfully implemented and have contributed to improved program outcomes.



## 5.1 Summary of Findings Supporting Hypotheses One

A detailed comparison and analysis of research results from both the 1992 and 1994 studies is made in chapter 4, **Literature Review and Analysis**.

The first hypothesis that Skillmax participants in 1993/1994 study were more likely to have found employment than those in 1991 is clearly supported by comparing the results of both studies.

43.3% of respondents in the 1992 study were employed at the time when the survey was conducted. In the 1994 study, 71.9% of respondents had found employment since enrolling in a Skillmax course and, of these, 67.7% were still employed.

The results of the 1994 study are significantly better than those in the 1992 study. The difference is even more significant when the fact that participants in the 1992 study generally had higher levels of English language than those in the 1994 study is taken into account.

In addition, if those intakes in the 1994 study which had completed courses for the same time period as those in the 1992 study, ie from three to seven months, are considered the difference is even more significant. The overall employment rate for those employed since enrolling in the program is 81%. The overall employment rate for those still employed at the time of the survey is 77.6%.

Employment conditions at the time each study was conducted were considered. Over the period from April 1991 until March 1992 when the first survey was conducted, unemployment in NSW steadily rose from just over 8% to just under 10%. The numbers of skilled vacancies dropped steadily over this period as well. However, from July, 1993 to August, 1994 when the second study was conducted the unemployment level had dropped steadily from 11% to 9.5%. The number of skilled vacancies rose steadily over this period as well. However, the overall employment rate at the times when each survey was conducted were similar, 9.5 to 10%.

On the basis of this consideration of the key difference between the respondents in both studies, English language level and the different economic conditions over the periods survey, it appears that the Skillmax Program in 1993/1994 was achieving significantly better outcomes than the Skillmax Program in 1991 (the percentage of participants employed in the 1994 evaluation was 34.3% more than in the 1992 study, ie, the employment rate in 1992 was 43.3% compared to 77.6% in 1994).

## **5.2 Summary of Findings Supporting Hypothesis Two**

The second hypothesis, that Skillmax program participants in 1993/1994 were more likely to have found employment in an occupation which fully utilised their skills and experience than participants in 1991, is also supported by a comparison of findings from both studies.

Information on the occupational distribution of respondents in 1992 related to the kind of work experience placements found, rather than occupations before coming to Australia. There is no indication in the report as to whether the work experience placements were in positions of the same level and type as respondents has worked in before coming to Australia. This make direct comparisons of findings from the studies difficult.

In the 1992 study, occupations of work experience placements compared to occupations where employment was found indicated that the proportion in clerical jobs had significantly increased (7.4% to 25.9%) and the proportion in para-professional jobs had significantly decreased (27.6% to 12.9%). The researchers concluded that this indicated that participants had not necessarily found employment commensurate with their overseas gained skills.

Approximately eighty-six percent (86.2%) of those employed in the 1992 study considered their jobs relevant to their qualifications or skills. Of those respondents who had worked in Australia before joining Skillmax, 57.1% indicated that their employment at that time had been relevant to their qualifications and skills. These figures provide evidence for the positive impact the Skillmax Program has on people finding work appropriate to their skills. They do not, however, provide information on whether employment was commensurate with their skills or at the same occupational level as they had had before came to Australia. People may be employed in the same or a related field without being employed at the same level.

Approximately fifty-four percent (54.2%) of those placed in work experience in the 1992 study were placed in professional occupations, 27.6% in para-professional occupations, 7.4% in clerical occupations, 4.2% in trades occupations, 4.2% in sales/service occupations and 2.1% in managerial/administrative occupations.

Approximately seventy percent (70.5%) of 1994 respondents were employed in professional occupations before coming to Australia, 9.2% in managerial/administrative occupations, 7.8% in para-professional occupations, 9.2% in clerical occupations and 3.2% trades occupations.

People with para-professionals (76.5%), trade (85.7%) and clerical (90%) backgrounds were more likely to be employed than those with professional (69.9%) or managerial backgrounds (60%).

Almost sixty-seven percent (66.7%) of all employed respondents in the 1994 study were employed at the same occupational level as they had been employed in before coming to Australia. The groups with the least number of people employed at the same level as before arriving in Australia were managers (16.7%), professionals (65.4%) and tradespeople (50%).

However, the majority of managers who were not employed at a managerial level were employed at a professional level (80%) and the majority of professionals who were not employed at a professional level were employed at a para-professional level (54%). A minority of people were, therefore, employed in an unrelated field.

The 1992 study appears to have significantly more para-professionals responding than the 1994 study (27.6% compared to 7.8%).

The 1992 study also implies that para-professionals tended to find employment in clerical positions. The 1994 study indicates that para-professionals who are employed are likely to be employed in the same occupation as they had worked in before coming to Australia, with 84.6% of those employed being employed at the same occupational level.

Findings from the 1994 study in this area are more comprehensive than in the 1992 study. Findings from both studies indicate that respondents in 1994 were more likely to be employed at the same level and/or in a related field than 1992 respondents, thus providing support for the second hypothesis.

### 5.3 Summary of Findings Supporting Hypothesis Three

The third hypothesis that actions taken to improve the Skillmax Program after the 1992 evaluation were primarily responsible for increases in employment outcomes is supported by the establishment of relationships between research findings and actions taken to improve the Skillmax Program since 1992. A comparison of specific findings of the 1992 and 1994 studies also indicates that some of the 1992 recommendations have been successfully implemented and have contributed to improved program outcomes.

A number of recommendations in the **Skillmax Program Evaluation Report (1992)** related to the promotion of the program to employers, referring agencies and potential clients (particularly women) were made. (Recommendation 13, 19, 20, 24 27). Actions taken in relation to these recommendations were outlined in section 2.4. A number of research findings indicate that these actions have had an impact.

In the 1992 study, 22.6% of participants were women. A strategy to increase the level of women's participation in the program has been in place since the middle of 1993. Just over twenty two percent (22.4%) of those in programs in the July, 1993 intake of students were women. This grew steadily over the year to 30.2% of those invited to programs in the April, 1994 intake. By the end of 1994, 34% of all program places were offered to women. This improvement can be directly attributed to actions taken to increase the level of women's participation in programs. These actions are described in section 2.4 of this report.

The percentage of private sector employers providing work experience placements has increased since 1992 from 57.8% to 63%. This increase can be attributed to two changes made to the program. First, additional hours were allocated to the network officer position at the end of 1992 to increase the time available for promotional work with employers. The private sector, in particular, has been the focus of this work. Second, students took on responsibility for researching companies which could offer them appropriate work experience placements. This procedural change resulted in an increase in the number of employers supporting the program, particularly private sector employers.

Many changes to the work experience component to the course have been made since 1992. These include increasing the length of the placement from five weeks to eight weeks and, where appropriate, arranging for a face to face interview between the employer and student to take place before the placement is finalised. Although work experience was an area where suggestions for improvement were made, respondents in the 1994 study made many positive comments made about the value of their placements. In the 1992 study only 36% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their placements.

The impact of actions taken to promote the program to clients and referring agencies such as the MEQB and the CES are, also, reflected in research findings from both studies on how respondents found out about Skillmax. In the 1992 study, 2.5% of respondents found out about the program via the media. The number of respondents increased to 6.6% in the 1994 study. In the 1992 study, 1.7% of respondents found out about the program from community organisations. The number of respondents increased to 5.8% in 1994.

Recommendations were made in the 1992 study concerning the provision of vocational advice to students and the development of the skills of staff in this area. One of the major staffing changes that has occurred since 1992 has been the employment of an educational and vocational counsellor. The counsellor works with individuals and class groups on skills analysis and goal clarification processes. The increase in numbers of people enrolled in full time study from 6% in 1992 to 13.5% in 1994 may reflect an increased awareness by individuals of the skills or qualifications they need to be more competitive in the labour market.

In both surveys the usefulness of the job seeking components of the curriculum were highly valued. In both studies, too, the work and attitude of program staff were highly commended. Although research findings do not reveal any significant difference in this area, the importance of both of these elements in achieving successful outcomes cannot be overestimated.

A number of the key actions taken to improve the program since 1992 have involved the allocation of additional resources to support students and the curriculum. These resources have been used to employ an educational and vocational counsellor, convert the network officer position from a part time to a full time position, purchase additional equipment and materials and extend the hours of access of the Job Search Centre so that all students and some ex-students have access. The availability of adequate administrative support for the program has also enabled the program to present a professional image to students and employers.

The relationships between research findings and actions taken to improve the program since 1992 indicate that significant improvements have occurred in program delivery and program outcomes.

#### **5.4 Findings Indicating Areas of Program Needing Improvement**

Other findings support the need for further changes to be initiated to improve certain aspects of the program. The findings regarding the work experience component of the program is one such area. (See Recommendation 7).

Data from the 1994 study shows that Worksearch students are most likely to be employed of students in the three core programs. Just over seventy six percent (76.3%) of Worksearch respondents had found employment compared to 70.3% of Skillmax 10 respondents and 68% of Skillmax 20 respondents.

However, fewer Worksearch respondents were employed by work experience placement employers those respondents in the other two programs. Just over thirty-nine percent (39.1%) of Skillmax 10 respondents, 38.2% of Skillmax 20 and 22% of Worksearch respondents were employed by their work experience placement employer.

In the comments recorded by respondents, many Worksearch students expressed concern about procedures for negotiating work experience in the Worksearch Program. Worksearch students take more responsibility for approaching employers to negotiate placements than do students in Skillmax 10 and Skillmax 20. Students in Worksearch are less likely to be successfully placed in work experience than other students. Respondents suggested again and again that Skillmax staff negotiate the placements because Skillmax as an organisation has more credibility with employers than individual students have. Staff were also seen to have more extensive networks and are more likely to negotiate suitable placements.

The findings cited above and the comments from students indicate a need for a procedural change in this area.

Staff and student suggestions for program improvement made in the student and staff surveys were similar in content.

Staff comments focussed on three main areas. These were: the need for more spacious accommodation of a higher standard, upgraded equipment and materials; more effective promotion of the program to potential clients, employers and the CES; and, providing more support to the work experience component of the program. (See Appendix 9: Staff Comments & Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 14).

Approximately 75% of students responding to the survey recorded suggestions or comments. Over 5,000 words were recorded. (See Appendix 8: Student Comments). Student suggestions for program improvement focussed on three main areas. These were: the need for greater support in organising work experience placements and while on work experience placements; the need to extend networks with employers, especially in the private sector; and, the need to incorporate more contact with workplaces and workplace personnel into courses.

A number of more specific suggestions for program improvement made by both staff and students are taken up in the recommendations at the end of this report. (See Recommendations 11, 12, 13).

## **5.5 Future Directions**

Certain themes in comments by students and staff provided an indication of some possible directions for the program. Both students and staff commented on the need to provide additional support for students after courses were completed. Staff also suggested expanding services provided to include new target groups. Comments included expanding the use of the Job Search Centre and providing short courses in the evening.

Staff members also suggested exploring the possibilities for some cost recovery activities such as the program taking on some employment agency functions and/or case management.

Students were concerned to improve networks with private sector employers in order to increase the likelihood of the program leading to jobs.

These comments have influenced the formulation of the recommendations concerning the future direction of the program. (See Recommendations 18, 19, 20). These recommendations suggest a range of strategies for providing additional support to student especially those who have completed courses. A number of these strategies have already been discussed within the Skillmax Program and/or first steps taken in their implementation. The recommendations also suggest that additional funding be sought to expand Skillmax services and that linked skills courses be established with industries where employment prospects are good.



## 6. CONCLUSION

Research findings support the three hypotheses which guided the study. Skillmax Program participants in 1993/1994 were more likely to have found employment, and more likely to have found employment in an occupation which fully utilised their skills and experiences than Skillmax Program participants in 1991. In addition, actions taken to improve the Skillmax Program after the 1992 evaluation were primarily responsible for increases in employment outcomes.

Research findings show that the Skillmax Program in 1993/1994 was achieving its aim. Overall employment outcomes for Skillmax students in the study were significantly better than those for Skillmax participants in 1991.

Employment conditions at the time students were studying and looking for work obviously impacted on employment outcomes for the programs studied. However, this study argues that the significant improvement in outcomes since the Skillmax program evaluation undertaken in 1992 can be attributed to a range of internal program improvement strategies implemented since this time.

Critical to the improved program outcomes was the implementation of strategies which: increased the level of support to the program and students (the increase in hours allocated to the networking officer position and the employment of a full time educational and vocational counsellor); raised the profile of the program in the community; improved the quality of the curriculum (ongoing curriculum renewal processes, accreditation of course, changes to the organisation of work experience); and, enabled staff to further develop their professional skills, especially in labour market related areas.

The Skillmax Program was funded as a strategy for addressing the transferability gap and, by so doing, to assist overseas skilled and experienced immigrants to find employment where their skills and experience were being fully utilised. This study has demonstrated that the program is achieving its aim.

However, research findings also show that the problem of skills wastage is not completely solved by the provision of such programs. In the current study 66.7% of employed respondents were employed at the same occupational level as they had worked in before coming to Australia. This means that 33.3% of employed respondents were underemployed. The economy is not benefiting from the skills of those who are unemployed and not benefiting fully from the skills of those who are underemployed. Over half of respondents (52.5%) were either unemployed or underemployed.

Many of those who are underemployed will find work commensurate with their skills and experience with time. This is illustrated by the fact that six (22%) of those professionals who had held two jobs since enrolling in Skillmax had been underemployed in one of the two jobs held. However, the Skillmax Program and other programs of its kind supposedly bridge the transferability gap, ie, they enable skilled immigrants to gain local work experience, to develop job seeking skills in an Australian context and to develop an understanding of the culture of Australian workplaces.

It is difficult to argue, therefore, that people are unemployed or underemployed after completing such a program because of an individual deficiency. Other factors need to be considered. Hawthorne's study (1994) concludes that the main barrier to the full utilisation of the skills of immigrants from non-English speaking background is an undervaluing of those skills by employers.

Programs like Skillmax certainly make a difference, as this study shows. However, the Australian economy will only fully benefit from the skills and experience of immigrants from non-English speaking background when Australian employers recognise the value of the work skills and experience, as well as the linguistic and cultural knowledge and skills, of skilled immigrants.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **ACCOMMODATION AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES**

1. That the Skillmax Program be relocated to larger premises in a major business centre, close to public transport.
2. That equipment and materials be upgraded.
3. That teaching hours be allocated for the ongoing acquisition, maintenance and promotion of materials and resources.

### **PROGRAM PLANNING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

4. That resources be allocated for the development of a comprehensive regional program monitoring system, in consultation with personnel from DIRETFE with expertise in this area.

### **PROMOTION/MARKETING**

5. That a comprehensive, integrated marketing strategy be developed and implemented.
6. That additional strategies be explored to extend networks with private sector employers.

## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

7. That strategies be implemented to maximise student contact with workplaces and workplace personnel during courses. The following strategies are recommended.
  - 7.1. That the program of visiting speakers be an integral part of the syllabus for all programs. That speakers be invited who are able to share information on various professions and industries, Australian workplace culture and job seeking skills.
  - 7.2. That visits to workplaces become an integral part of the syllabus for all programs. That industry visits be organised across programs so that students can visit workplaces appropriate to their occupation.
  - 7.3. That work experience placements for all programs be negotiated by Skillmax staff. That a target of 95% be set for placing available students in work experience.
  - 7.4. That a Skillmax staff member maintain on going contact with the student and work experience provider over the period of the placement.
  - 7.5. That opportunities be provided for students, individually or in a group, to meet with staff to discuss issues that arise during work experience.
  - 7.6. That functions for employers and students to meet be organised a minimum of twice per year.
  - 7.7. That a mentor program for Skillmax students be established and that strategies be developed to involve ex-students and work experience placement employers as mentors.

8. That the length of the Skillmax 20 course be reviewed in order to establish if the same objectives can be achieved in a shorter time.
9. That the current Worksearch course be used as a basis for the development of an accredited course.
10. That short evening courses targeting the ongoing workplace and job seeking language related training needs of employed and unemployed skilled immigrants, for example, resume and covering letter preparation, job interview techniques, career planning, presentation skills, report writing, be established.

## STAFFING

11. That established levels of **non**-classroom teacher staffing, ie, network officer, educational placement and referral teachers, program managers, counsellor and clerical staff, be maintained or increased in recognition of the critical role they play in achieving employment outcomes.
12. That an expression of interest be used as the basis for recruiting teaching staff to Skillmax. That labour market/industry related expertise take precedence over seniority of service or length of time on transfer list in the selection of teaching staff.
13. That additional strategies aimed at extending the vocational knowledge and skills of Skillmax staff be identified. The following strategies are recommended:
  - 13.1 secondments of staff to EWP/Skillmax, DIRETFE and DEET;
  - 13.2 participation of staff in private and public sector recruitment processes;
  - 13.3 organisation of staff development activities which provide staff with up to date information on changes in labour market trends and policies, workplaces and services available to assist job seekers;
  - 13.4 visits by staff to workplaces on a regular basis through the organisation of work visits and/or visits to students in work experience placements.

## **LINKS WITH OTHER AGENCIES**

14. That on going contact with CES offices be maintained in order to increase awareness of what the Skillmax Program offers skilled jobseekers, communicate skills based training needs of clients to CES, identify possible areas of co-operation and better use DEET services to support the job seeking efforts of students in the program.
15. That the existing relationship with MEQB be strengthened and that areas of co-operation be identified and pursued.
16. That links with with EWP/Skillmax Program be strengthened in areas such as staff development, staff rotation, establishment of mechanisms for sharing information on workplaces and course provision and in the promotion programs.
17. That links with professional organisations, private recruitment agencies, TAFE Industry Training Divisions and tertiary institutions be strengthened so that the appropriacy of the professional skills of students can be better ascertained and to ensure that advice provided to students is up to date and well informed.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

18. That additional support strategies for assisting students to find and maintain employment be developed and implemented. That these strategies include:
  - 18.1 the establishment of a mentor scheme;
  - 18.2 the development of joint initiatives with other organisations such as the course piloted with Toastmasters International in the second half of 1994;
  - 18.3 the provision of short courses;
  - 18.4 increased access by ex-students to the Job Search Centre;
  - 18.5 support for the establishment of a student association.
19. That opportunities for accessing additional funds, eg industry and DEET, to expand the services Skillmax offers be identified and pursued, eg Job Skills brokerage, case management, taking on employment agency functions.
20. That possibilities for the development of linked skills courses in partnership with industries with good short term and long term employment prospects be explored.

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## PROFILE FOR SKILLMAX PROGRAMS

SKILLMAX 20	SKILLMAX 10	WORKSEARCH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum O.P. ASLPR2 or Stage 3 CSWE</li> <li>• Writing skills usually commensurate with oracy</li> <li>• Lack of confidence in job seeking</li> <li>• Need to upgrade skills concurrently to be competitive in labour market</li> <li>• Dealing with issues around settlement</li> <li>• Has little or no awareness around the needs and working of the labour market</li> <li>• May not have seriously applied for jobs</li> <li>• Has unclear goals</li> <li>• Assessment of qualifications often not finalised</li> <li>• Does not have the specific language to describe own profession</li> <li>• Has no strategies for researching jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At upper level of O.P. ASLPR 2+</li> <li>• Writing skills commensurate with oracy</li> <li>• Skills nearly labour market ready</li> <li>• Settlement issues mostly worked through</li> <li>• Has reasonable resume but not competitive for occupation</li> <li>• Has some labour market awareness</li> <li>• Is goal oriented</li> <li>• Has reasonable strategies for researching jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum O.P. ASLPR 3/4</li> <li>• Writing skills commensurate with oracy at professional level</li> <li>• Resume needs some upgrading</li> <li>• Has actively applied for appropriate jobs</li> <li>• May have had several interviews</li> <li>• May know gaps in the labour market</li> <li>• Has strategies for researching jobs</li> <li>• Will be able to find own work experience</li> <li>• Has reasonable presentation skills, but not quite competitive for their profession</li> <li>• Has substantial overseas professional/trade experience</li> <li>• Has some awareness of labour market and work in Australia</li> <li>• Has only a little cross-cultural awareness of the Australian labour market and work practices</li> <li>• Settlement issues mostly worked through</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX 2: NSW AMES LEARNER PATHWAY CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

### Learner Pathways Curriculum Framework

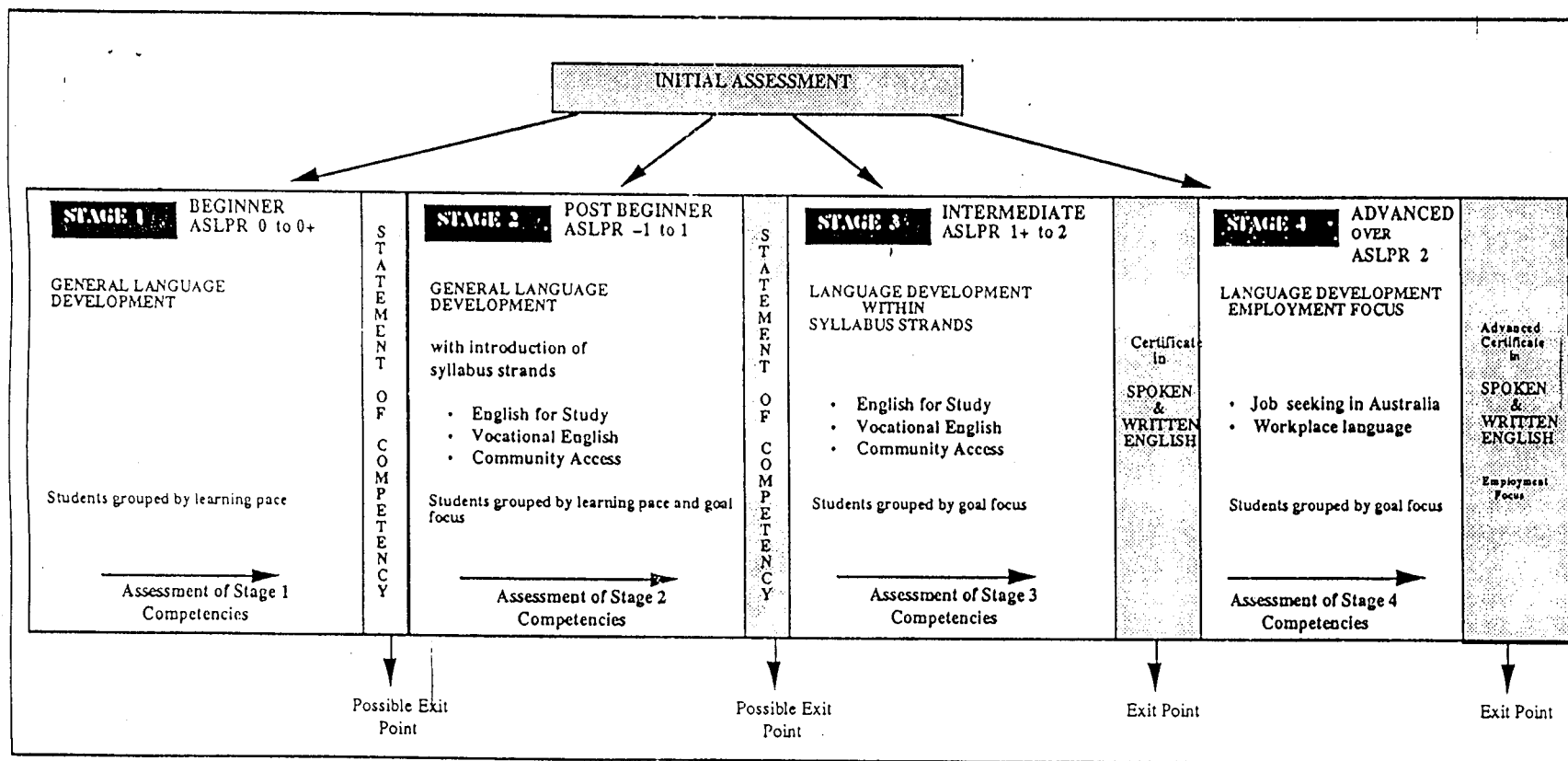


Figure 1

APPENDIX 3: ACSWE - COMPETENCIES

Module 1 - Job Seeking in Australia	Module 2 - Workplace Language
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can outline the context of employment relevant to qualifications, training and experience</li> <li>2. Can apply a range of strategies to set realistic employment goals</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can identify the structure and culture of Australian workplaces relevant to own field</li> <li>2. Can apply a range of strategies to investigate Australian workplaces</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Can enquire about an employment opportunity</li> <li>4. Can participate in an interview for employment</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Can respond to and give oral instructions relevant to the workplace</li> <li>4. Can negotiate complex/problematic spoken exchanges relevant to the workplace</li> <li>5. Can participate in group discussions relevant to the workplace</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Can read informational texts relevant to employment</li> <li>6. Can read and interpret advertisements for employment</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Can read informational workplace texts</li> <li>7. Can read procedural workplace texts</li> <li>8. Can read diagrammatic/graphic workplace texts</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Can complete relevant job application forms</li> <li>8. Can prepare a job application letter</li> <li>9. Can prepare a résumé or portfolio</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Can complete formatted workplace texts</li> <li>10. Can write reports relevant to a workplace context</li> <li>11. Can write workplace messages</li> <li>12. Can write formal letters relevant to a workplace context</li> </ol>

Figure 2



NSW ADULT MIGRANT ENGLISH SERVICE  
SKILLMAX PROGRAM

Ground Floor,

2 HASSALL STREET, PARRAMATTA NSW 2150 PHONE: (02) 633 5488 FAX: (02) 893 8675

17th August, 1994

Dear,

Please find attached a questionnaire. The questionnaire has been prepared to get feedback from you, a former student in the Skillmax Program, on our Program.

The questionnaire takes approximately fifteen minutes to complete. All information collected will be treated confidentially.

I would very much appreciate it if you would take the time to complete the survey

The feedback you provide will be used to:

- Make our courses more relevant to the English language and vocational needs of our students
- Provide our funding authority, the NSW State Government, with information on how many of our students have found employment and/or enrolled in further study
- Provide other training courses based on your current training needs
- Provide information for a research project on the effectiveness of the Skillmax Program

If you need further information or would like to discuss any issues arising from the survey please contact me on the telephone number printed above.

Please place the completed questionnaire in the postage paid envelope enclosed and return to the Skillmax Program by Friday, 2nd September, 1994.

Thankyou again for completing the questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,

Production Note:

Signature removed prior to publication.

Principal  
Skillmax Program

New South Wales Government  
Department of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training & Further Education



NSW ADULT MIGRANT ENGLISH SERVICE  
SKILLMAX PROGRAM

2 HASSALL STREET, PARRAMATTA NSW 2150 PHONE: (02) 633 5488 FAX: (02) 893 8675

## SKILLMAX QUESTIONNAIRE - POST COURSE EVALUATION

CLIENT ID NO:

Mr Vladimir

SKILLMAX 10

STARTS:

FINISHES:

### *How to Complete this Questionnaire*

Where answers are provided, please tick the appropriate box.

Where no answers are provided, please write your answer in the space provided (on dotted line/s).

### (I) EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

1. What was your occupation before coming to Australia?

-----

2. How long were you working in your occupation overseas?

- ☐ Less than 1 year  
☐ 1-5 years  
☐ 6-10 years  
☐ 11 years or more

3. How long were you unemployed in Australia before joining Skillmax?

- ☐ Less than 1 month  
☐ 1 month-2 months  
☐ 3 months-5 months  
☐ 6 months-11 months  
☐ 12 months-17 months  
☐ 18 months or more

4. Have you been employed since enrolling in your Skillmax course?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If "No", go to question 13.



# APPENDIX 4: COVERING LETTER & QUESTIONNAIRE

5. When did you find your first job?

- ☐ While studying in a Skillmax course
- ☐ While on work experience placement
- ☐ Less than 3 months after completing course
- ☐ 3 to 5 months after completing course
- ☐ 6 to 12 months after completing the course

6. Were you employed by your work experience placement employer or through contacts established during your work experience?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

7. How many applications for jobs did you make before finding your first job?

- ☐ 1-10 ☐ 11-20 ☐ 21-50 ☐ 51-100 ☐ 100+

8. How many interviews for jobs did you attend before finding your first job?

- ☐ 0-3 ☐ 4-10 ☐ 11-20 ☐ 20+

9. Are you employed now?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

10. What jobs have you had since leaving the Skillmax Program?

(a)

Position 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Was the position in the same field that you worked in before coming to Australia?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

(b)

Position 2 \_\_\_\_\_

(if applicable)

Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Was the position in the same field that you worked in before coming to Australia?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

11. How important was attending a Skillmax course in assisting you to get a job in your field?

- ☐ Most important
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Not very important

12. How did you find your job/s?

- ☐ Newspaper ad (English press)
- ☐ Newspaper ad (Other language press)
- ☐ Commonwealth Employment Service (CES)
- ☐ Professional Employment Service (PES)
- ☐ Skillmax work experience placement
- ☐ Approaching employer direct
- ☐ Contacts in your ethnic community
- ☐ Other contacts
- ☐ A private employment agency
- ☐ Set up your own business
- ☐ Other (Please specify) -----

Go to question 16

13. How many applications for jobs have you made?

- ☐ 1-10      ☐ 11-20      ☐ 21-50      ☐ 51-100      ☐ 100+

14. How many interviews for jobs have you attended?

- ☐ 0-3      ☐ 4-10      ☐ 11-20      ☐ 20+

15. What do you believe has been your main difficulty in finding work?

- ☐ No vacancies at all
- ☐ No vacancies in my field
- ☐ Considered too old by employers
- ☐ Lacked necessary skills or education
- ☐ Insufficient work experience
- ☐ No/Insufficient local work experience
- ☐ Own ill health or injury
- ☐ Too far to travel or transport problems
- ☐ Language difficulties
- ☐ Unsuitable working hours
- ☐ Difficulties with childcare or other family responsibilities
- ☐ Other (please specify) -----

## (II) STUDY/TRAINING SINCE LEAVING THE SKILLMAX PROGRAM

16. Have you completed any other course/s since leaving the Skillmax Program?

- ☐ Yes      ☐ No

If "No", go to question 18

17. (a) What courses have you completed?

Course Title/s	Ir
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----
-----	-----

(b) What was your main reason for taking the course/s:

☐ To improve skills related to current occupation  
☐ To improve English language skills  
☐ Career advancement  
☐ To retrain (difficult to get job in current occupation)  
☐ Other (please specify) -----  
 -----

18. What skills do you believe you need to develop (or further develop) to assist you to find employment, to improve your performance in your current job or to move into a different job?

-----  
 -----  
 -----

### (III) FEEDBACK ON SKILLMAX PROGRAM

19. How did you find out about the Skillmax Program?

☐ AMES Brochure  
☐ AMES Centre  
☐ Family/friends  
☐ Migrant Education, Qualification Board  
☐ Professional Organisation  
☐ Commonwealth Employment Service  
☐ Community organisation  
☐ Newspaper - English  
☐ Newspaper - Language other than English  
☐ Other (please specify) -----

20. Did you have access to work experience during your Skillmax course?

☐ Yes
 ☐ No

# APPENDIX 4: COVERING LETTER & QUESTIONNAIRE

21. Which parts of the course were most useful in improving your chances of gaining employment in your field?

(Circle a number - 1 = "very useful", 5 = "not useful at all".)

Access to local work experience	1....2....3....4....5
Setting realistic employment goals	1....2....3....4....5
Making enquiries about employment opportunities	1....2....3....4....5
Participating in employment interviews	1....2....3....4....5
Reading and interpreting job ads	1....2....3....4....5
Preparing job application letters	1....2....3....4....5
Preparing resume	1... 2....3....4....5
Receiving information on the structure and culture of Australian workplaces	1....2....3....4....5
Researching workplaces	1....2....3....4....5
Learning workplace language - speaking and listening	1....2....3....4....5
- reading and writing	1....2....3....4....5
Access to Job Search Centre	1... 2....3....4....5
Other (please specify) _____	

22. Do you have any suggestions for improving the Skillmax Program?

-----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----

23. Do you have any other comments?

-----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----  
 -----

Please place your completed survey in the addressed, postage paid envelope provided and return to the Skillmax Program by 2/9/1994.

THANKYOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

- Rec. 1 It is recommended that the program's aims and objectives be clarified and incorporated in formal program documents.
- Rec. 2 It is recommended that the program should fundamentally continue.
- Rec. 3 It is recommended that the under-employed component of SKILLMAX (SKILLMAX in the Workplace) be either:
- (a) discontinued with its resources being re-allocated to the Unemployed Component of SKILLMAX; or
  - (b) re-designed to a more appropriate delivery form for the program in the public sector environment.

### PROGRAM CO-ORDINATION

- Rec. 4 It is recommended that a SKILLMAX steering committee be established comprising representatives from stakeholder groups to provide policy direction and feedback for the program.

### PROGRAM PLANNING

- Rec. 5 It is recommended that SKILLMAX's business plan be refined and further developed and that such business plan be reviewed annually.
- Rec. 6 It is recommended that program performance indicators be further developed to enable effective monitoring of program performance.
- Rec. 7 It is recommended that formal consultative and advisory links be established with the Department of Employment, Education and Training and the policy area within DIRET&FE to ensure that labour market information is available to assist in SKILLMAX program planning.
- Rec. 8 It is recommended that program intakes be targeted to reflect labour market changes with particular emphasis on skills in demand in the labour market.

**APPENDIX 5: SKILLMAX PROGRAM EVALUATION  
RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTION PLAN**

- Rec 9 It is recommended that appropriate consultative and advisory links be established with the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs to ensure that immigration information is available to assist in program planning.
- Rec 10 It is recommended that program outcomes be clarified and that employment be acknowledged as a primary outcome of the program.
- Rec 11 It is recommended that following the above, program managers formalise documentation of program outcomes.
- Rec 12 It is recommended that, in line with the actions recommended in Recommendations 5 and 6, a post-program monitoring system be developed and implemented to enable monitoring of program outcomes and measurement of program achievement.
- Rec 13 It is recommended that the CES and Department of Social Security be approached to explore appropriate links to improve the referral process and provide assistance into the above monitoring system.
- Rec 14 It is recommended that SKILLMAX's eligibility criteria be reviewed to determine their appropriateness.
- Rec 15 It is recommended that AMES in consultation with the Migrant Employment and Qualifications Board (MEQB) review the appropriateness of the eligibility criteria in relation to recognition of overseas qualifications.
- Rec 16 It is recommended that, in line with Recommendation 8, courses be based upon homogeneous client groups.

## PROGRAM DELIVERY

Rec 17 It is recommended that:

- (a) AMIS and Filemaker be linked;
- (b) an allocation be made in the program budget for the funding of a position responsible for data entry and maintenance of the program's records to ensure integrity of the information and facilitate program monitoring;
- (c) the existing data systems be reviewed and changed to enable effective use of the data held therein;
- (d) the program data be reviewed to ensure appropriateness and adequacy for monitoring and evaluation purposes;
- (e) program data for both program components be computerised.

Rec 18 It is recommended that additional fax and computer resources be allocated to the program.

Rec 19 It is recommended that AMES develop a SKILLMAX marketing strategy to raise employers' awareness of and participation in the program.

Rec 20 It is recommended that additional hours be allocated to the Networking Officer position for the purpose of undertaking promotional work.

Rec 21 It is recommended that SKILLMAX guidelines be published and that such guidelines include specific program aims, objectives and outcomes.

Rec 22 It is recommended that if the SKILLMAX in the Workplace component continues in its current format that:

- (a) Networking Officer position be funded specifically for the SKILLMAX in the Workplace; and
- (b) the hours allocated to the position should be proportional to those allocated for the Networking Officer's position in the unemployed component of the program.

Rec 23 It is recommended that the assessment and selection process for the unemployed component of SKILLMAX be reviewed with a view to reducing the time lags between:

- (a) the enquiry and interview stages; and
- (b) the interview and commencement of course.

Rec 24 It is recommended that referral processes be documented and that links with other agencies be formalised.

Rec 25 It is recommended that the Assessment and Referral Teacher's role be reviewed to determine its appropriateness with respect to the provision of vocational advice to program applicants and clients.

Rec 26 It is recommended that if the above review determines that Education Placement and Referral Services teachers (EPRS) have a role in the provision of vocational advice to program applicants and clients then steps be taken to ensure that adequate and appropriate labour market training and information is provided to EPRS teachers.

Rec 27 It is recommended that the following measures be taken to improve the participation of women in the unemployed component of SKILLMAX:

- (a) specific marketing of the program to women via AMES centres, community organisations and the media;
- (b) a review be undertaken of the provision of childcare to enable women to participate equitably in this program.

#### STAFFING MATTERS

Rec 28 It is recommended that all SKILLMAX position descriptions be reviewed and that, where industrially appropriate, be amended where necessary to ensure that labour market knowledge or experience is included as competency skill.

Rec 29 It is recommended that within the SKILLMAX program an overt training and development strategy be implemented to develop the program language delivery and vocational skills of teacher staff and that this strategy be linked to AMES's Human Resources Management Plan and the recently instituted Professional Development and Appraisal Scheme.



Rec 30 It is recommended that:

- (a) the training and development strategy include an induction program for new staff;
- (b) consideration be given to incorporating the following as components of the training and development strategy:
  - (i) job rotation of teachers across Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programs; and
  - (ii) secondment of staff to labour market program areas within DIRET&FE.

Rec 31 It is recommended that a training and development strategy be implemented for program management staff with such strategy being linked to AMES's Human Resources Management Plan and performance management systems.

#### LINKS WITH VOCATIONAL AND BRIDGING TRAINING

Rec 32 It is recommended that program management take a pro-active role in developing, in consultation with the relevant assessing/registering and vocational training providers, further initiatives based on the Special Funding Initiatives approach.

#### LINKS WITH OTHER AREAS WITHIN DIRET&FE

Rec 33 It is therefore recommended that program management establish closer links with areas within DIRET&FE such as the Vocational Training Board, Vocational Services, Policy Unit and MEQB with the aim of improving program delivery by accessing and utilising the skills and services available within those areas.

## RECOMMENDED ACTION PLAN

<i>Phase 1: Clarify and consolidate program objectives, direction and delivery</i>	<i>Phase 2: Improve program's planning and review processes</i>
<p><b>Task 1:</b> prepare a working paper to clarify program objectives and outcomes</p> <p><b>Task 2:</b> prepare and publish program guidelines</p> <p><b>Task 3:</b> prepare a paper to explain how program structure and design can enhance employment outcomes</p> <p><b>Task 5:</b> obtain approval for additional clerical support and computer equipment</p> <p><b>Task 6:</b> prepare a brief for the review of the A&amp;R process</p> <p><b>Task 7:</b> prepare a paper outlining the best financial and other welfare support measures available to clients</p> <p><b>Task 8:</b> develop a strategy on how to increase female participation in the program.</p> <p><b>Task 9:</b> prepare a paper outlining the consultative mechanisms needed to improve SKILLMAX's responsiveness to changing labour market needs</p>	<p><b>Task 1:</b> review SKILLMAX in the Workplace to determine appropriateness of delivery model</p> <p><b>Task 2:</b> develop a business plan for the program</p> <p><b>Task 3:</b> organise a workshop to develop appropriate performance indicators</p> <p><b>Task 4:</b> contact DILGEA regarding regular provision of immigration data</p> <p><b>Task 5:</b> prepare a paper exploring the possibility of organising courses based upon homogeneous client groups</p> <p><b>Task 6:</b> assess the appropriateness of the program's eligibility criteria</p> <p><b>Task 7:</b> prepare a working paper on language proficiencies for specific stages of clients</p> <p><b>Task 8:</b> prepare a working paper on alternative sources of funding for certain program activities</p> <p><b>Task 9:</b> review program's data monitoring system</p> <p><b>Task 10:</b> prepare a program evaluation and review cycle</p>
<i>Phase 3: Enhance the provision of labour market and program management training</i>	<i>Phase 4: Improve program marketing and coordination</i>
<p><b>Task 1:</b> assess the skill requirements of A&amp;R and SKILLMAX teachers</p> <p><b>Task 2:</b> review position descriptions</p> <p><b>Task 3:</b> prepare a training strategy for teachers and program managers</p> <p><b>Task 4:</b> develop a formal induction course for new staff</p> <p><b>Task 5:</b> prepare a job rotation and secondment strategy</p> <p><b>Task 6:</b> organise quarterly meetings between program managers and teachers of different components of the program</p>	<p><b>Task 1:</b> prepare a marketing strategy for SKILLMAX.</p> <p><b>Task 2:</b> obtain approval to increase the time allocated for the Networking Officer position</p> <p><b>Task 3:</b> prepare a SKILLMAX information kit for promotional activities</p> <p><b>Task 4:</b> develop a communication strategy for the program</p> <p><b>Task 5:</b> prepare an options paper on program co-ordination incorporating a review of the need for an oversighting/co-ordinating body.</p>

## Skillmax offers

- Professionally qualified teachers with expertise in labour market and workplace training
- Networking Officer who co-ordinates work experience with employers.
- Educational Counsellor a registered psychologist who provides career planning and vocational counselling.
- Educational, placement and Referral Staff who place clients in appropriate courses and make referrals for further training where appropriate.

For more information about Skillmax courses phone:

**633 5488**

NEW SOUTH WALES  
**AMES**  
QUALITY LANGUAGE & LITERACY SERVICES

NEW SOUTH WALES  
**AMES**  
QUALITY LANGUAGE & LITERACY SERVICES

## Skillmax

A unique State Government program administered by the NSW Adult Migrant English Service.

Skillmax programs are held at:

Ground floor 2 Hassall Street  
Parramatta NSW 2150

Phone: **633 5488**



December 1994

## APPENDIX 6: SKILLMAX STUDENT BROCHURE

NEW SOUTH WALES  
**AMES**  
QUALITY LANGUAGE & LITERACY SERVICES

Are you ready to work  
in your field in Australia?

Is English your second  
language?

## Skillmax

Gets people into work

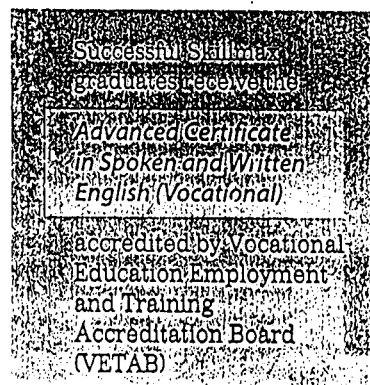


## Skillmax courses cover:

- Orientation to Australian work culture
- Work Experience  
Most Skillmax clients complete two months work experience in their field of expertise.  
More than 250 public and private sector organisations offer work experience to Skillmax clients every year.
- Job seeking skills and strategies
- Communication skills  
for casual and formal workplace interaction

## Skillmax is the course for you if:

- You are of Non-English-speaking background
- You are a permanent resident of Australia or holder of a relevant temporary permit
- You have been resident in Australia for less than five years
- You have overseas qualifications and experience or overseas skills and experience in your field of expertise
- You are seeking work in your own or associated field in Australia
- You have overseas documents translated and assessed (where appropriate)
- You are able to attend a full-time course and work experience



## Job Search Centre

### This centre provides

Access to:

- Fax and phone
- Photocopying
- Local and interstate papers
- Job and Course Explorer Database
- Apple Mac and IBM computers and laser printers

A specialised job seeking library containing:

- Company reports
- Business directories
- Professional magazines
- Information on Australian workplace issues and practices

Centre staffed from 9am to 5pm  
After-course access two nights per week

## Benefits to your organisation

- first-hand access to overseas skills and experience
- opportunities to market products and services internationally
- openings for cross-cultural exchange. Skillmax can bring another perspective to the workplace
- clients can undertake and successfully complete projects on an autonomous basis

## Skillmax

The Skillmax program is administered by NSW AMES, part of the NSW Department of Industrial Relations, Employment, Training and Further Education

For further information  
on how to participate  
contact:

Skillmax  
2 Hassall Street  
Parramatta 2150

Phone: **633 5488**

Fax: **893 8675**

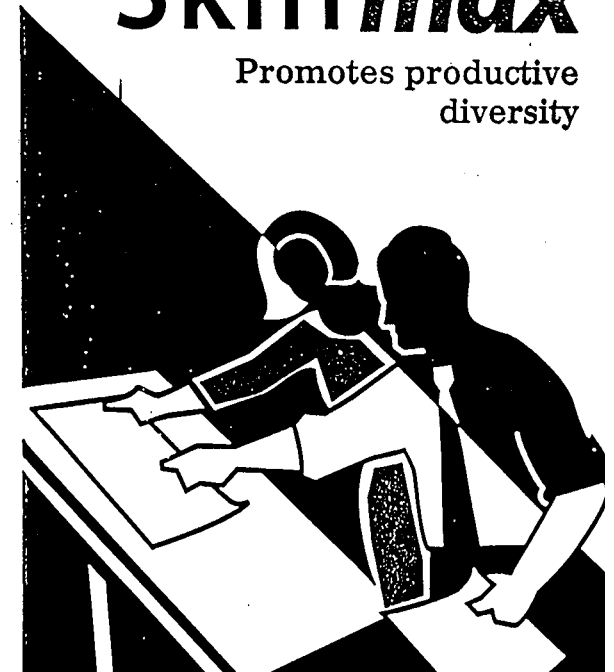


### • What is Skillmax?

A NSW Government funded re-orientation program for skilled migrants with overseas training and experience

## Skillmax

Promotes productive  
diversity



## Skillmax clients have:

- qualifications or training and a high level of competence in their field
- advanced English communication skills
- the motivation and ability to rejoin their profession/ trade in Australia

## Skillmax work experience

- is for a maximum of 8 weeks, allowing time for the completion of a project
- involves no salary or payment
- is fully insured (Public Liability and Personal Accident) with GIO

## Skillmax clients also have:

- knowledge of industry and services in their previous country
- a well developed network of contacts in their country of origin
- competence in a range of languages required by Australian business



- Work experience placements are an integral part of the Skillmax program
- Employers who participate in the program gain access to talented technical and professional migrants
- Skillmax clients are skilled in their field and are able to function productively after initial orientation. They require minimal supervision
- Skillmax clients come from backgrounds including engineering, building, information technology, manufacturing, accounting, administration, economics, science and the arts



## **APPENDIX 8: STUDENT COMMENTS**

### **SKILLMAX 20 - COMMENTS**

#### **1. Context of Employment**

More chances to communicate in a real situation with native speakers instead with migrants only.

Invite different kinds of professionals into the class.

Invite some ex-students to talk about their experiences.

Teachers should be aware of the commercial needs and trends.

#### **2. Telephone Enquiries and Job Interview Preparation**

More emphasis on telephone technique.

More telephone skills.

More activities during the course: telephone role plays, interviewing practice.

Focus on interview technique and role play.

#### **3. Job Application Forms, Covering Letters, Resumes**

No comments.

#### **4. Australian Workplaces**

No comments.

#### **5. Workplace Language**

Better communication skills.

Increase English (listening, conversation, writing).

Skillmax should be more concentrated on general English skills.

More English needs to be taught.

More conversation and discussion.

More emphasis on workplace English .

Teachers to correct students' grammar mistakes while they are talking.

Any wrong sentences should be corrected by the teacher directly during any discussion.

Workplace culture and language.

Teach more about cultural background and current affairs.

## **APPENDIX 8: STUDENT COMMENTS**

Some difficulty understanding Oz language in my workplace.

More individual conversation for the workplace.

More conversation including participation of all students (teacher should look after that).

By concentrating discussion between every student and his teacher and between students. Giving more chance to students to ask any question any time. General talking about daily life movement in the class.

Focussing more on technical terms.

More technical English, if possible.

Writing short messages.

### **6. Curriculum - General Comments**

All students to have chance to show their ability.

### **7. Job Search Centre**

More time available for Job Search Centre activity.

Ex-students should have unlimited access to the Job Search Centre especially on to the computers in preparing application letters until they find a job.

Some tapes were not good/not clear. TAFE Granville (library) have some TAFE compilations regarding interviews/technique. It's better if Skillmax can secure some copy of their tapes (they have good clear copies of tapes).

Use more IBM computers.

### **8. Work Experience**

*Facilitating Employment/Relationships with Employers*

The teaching purpose should stick to the point which help student to get employment.

Allocate one officer from AMES to negotiate with prospective employers and match the students background.

Improve networking with private sector and arrange work experience as quick as we can

To organise a program between Skillmax and companies to encourage work experience for students attending Skillmax to have a chance to work.

*Appropriateness of Placement*

To have working experience in a suitable place (company, institution) is very important.

Offering real work experience.

Placement for work experience in appropriate structured job. More effective program on clients skill development.



## APPENDIX 8: STUDENT COMMENTS

After the initial interview with the company, I found a problem. The company wasn't suitable. The company was very small. It was run by someone who didn't speak good English. They didn't have enough money to get a project overseas. I wanted to change. My teacher wouldn't listen to my ideas. I tried. I stayed there for two months. I didn't get any training from the employer. The experience wasn't relevant. I spent the time getting the files in good order. I didn't have a table, chair or any equipment. I was cheap labour. No teacher contacted me during the two months of work experience. (paraphrase of telephone conversation).

Teach students how to get work experience placement - which institution etc. Some students have chosen some company that cannot offer related work experience.

Reallocating clients to training vacancies available eg cashier, salespeople, although they are of different skills provided they are willing to take such training so that working experience and chances to contact Australian culture although not in their proper professional can be obtained. Follow up. Not just sales, we need after sales service.

### *Length of Placement*

Four weeks local experience is not enough. Employers require 6 months or a minimum of 1 year local work experience. It would be better if local experience will be increase to 6 months or more and with an additional allowance either from the government or the company. Some of the facilities were not working well. It needs repair/constant maintenance.

### *Organisation of Placement*

Work experience in block system is very useful. 2 days a week is not useful for employer or employee.

Have more contact with the employer to analyse the problem for migrants and to have feedback from the work experience.

## **9. Course Length**

Six month class, 8-12 weeks work experience.

Maximum time for Skillmax is 5-10 weeks.

Shorten the duration of the Skillmax Program.

The course has to be brief and comprehensive.

## **10. Course Organisation**

Less students in a class.

Students should attend classes more than 85%.

Giving notice for clients when they apply if the class location will be in other places such as city and not Parramatta.

Women engineers should be more encouraged to look for job in their professions

Create a special English course two hours, two evenings a week.

Together with the Skillmax course, people (80%) need a motivational course in order to keep positive thinking regarding their personal objectives.

## APPENDIX 8: STUDENT COMMENTS

### 5. Workplace Language

More practice in spoken English is needed.

More time on communication skills will help to improve the skills of the migrant.

### 6. Curriculum - General Comments

Increase the efforts of both teacher and students.

I think students should have more time for one to one appointments and on the whole the course should provide more encouragement, especially at the beginning.

Less time on preliminaries. Straight into the important aspects like mock interviews and work experience for people especially on the worksearch program.

### 7. Job Search Centre

Library could have more publications/books on Australian industries, particularly those in NSW - helps in researching for work experience/jobs.

Old students be allowed to use ILC for at least one day/week (day time).

Please increase ILC facilities for ex-students.

Access to computer and other services for those who are doing other jobs than of their own profession even after completion of Skillmax Program.

Computer resources not enough in rush hour.

More computer time for preparing job applications since most job seekers do not own or have easy access to a PC.

More funds to Job Search Centre. During the course I found that teacher and all staff are very co-operative and taking extra efforts to give is all required information. Facilities like fax, photocopy, computer, telephone, newspapers, provided during the course are very useful.

### 8. Work Experience

#### *Facilitating Employment/ Relationships with Employers*

Skillmax can approach the government to change the current approach of getting job for a non-English speaking background people. Skillmax should do a survey about the high unemployment rate for the people from non-English speaking background. I think the overseas professional people has the capability to do job in Australia but why they are not getting a job, why it takes too long?

Course objective must be to secure employment or work experience with less emphasis on language skills to those fluent in English.

To access local work experience is the most difficult for students. Many could not have access to work experience. Would AMES work more closely with prominent employers such as the local, state and federal governments for more work experience opportunities.

This program can generate more places for work experience in private sectors, that would definitely help new migrants to get access in private sector jobs.

Skillmax should have a better connection with employers to introduce/lead the students moving the first step, ie work experience into the industry.

## APPENDIX 8: STUDENT COMMENTS

### *Appropriateness of Placement*

No comments.

### *Length of Placement*

Longer local experience.

A minimum of 6 months work experience...in order to impress the potential employer that I am fit to deliver the goods they wanted and make them feel I do have the ability.

More time should be allocated to looking for work experience placement because it is difficult to find work experience in the short period allowed by insurance regulations.

For professional migrants especially engineers, the duration of work experience which is at present 4 weeks is insufficient and it needs to be increased so that one can demonstrate varieties of skills and can increase the chance of getting employment. Enough work experience may be considered at other places also while finding job with other employer. During work experience I was deputed overseas and CES had stopped my social security benefits. Also I was informed to stop work experience after 4 weeks whereas Skillmax had given a letter for 8 weeks work experience. I believe that I could get employment because of my overseas work and enough work experience so that I could demonstrate my skills.

### *Organisation of Placement*

It is good to have permanent staff to talk on behalf of students for volunteer work experience if students wish to do so.

But access to finding local work experience was insufficient because the teachers are not taking very much interest in helping the students to find local work experience. Teachers should help students to find local work experience. Every student joining the Skillmax Program should get work experience.

I think it would be better if it is Skillmax who is going to contact the establishment or company for the work experience as what Sydney ITEC is doing. I do understand that Skillmax wants the students to be independent and develop self confidence but by arranging work experience by themselves would just lead the students to do jobs like filing or typing, jobs that won't help some of the students to boost their self confidence. The company will be more trusted to our skills base on field of our profession if the introduction and arrangement will be done by Skillmax. Please note that this is what I believe and opinion as an immigrant and new to Australian office rules and procedures.

More emphasis should be given on getting work experience as half of the students couldn't even get voluntary work experience. Work experience helps a lot in making useful contacts and references.

Find employers willing to take students before the course begins. Allow lead up time of 3 to 4 months so that employers can prepare to take student. AMES staff should negotiate places not students. Staff from an organisation such as AMES have more credibility with employers. ( paraphrased from phone conversation)

AMES may initiate local experience gaining for clients/students by themselves like Sydney City Missions. Even the old and older students who could not get job may be assisted in gaining local experience by AMES.

During the course and after the course it is difficult to find local work experience. So that some method has to be devised to ensure to get work experience. I tried to get work experience from many employers but unable to get it as employer did not know me beforehand.

## **APPENDIX 8: STUDENT COMMENTS**

May be Skillmax should give more emphasis in finding local experience by individual student assisting him to convince certain employers.

Compulsory work experience to be arranged.

Permitting job seekers to seek work experience from more than one employer. One at a time wastes valuable time. If AMES feels that its reputation is at stake, then the introductory letter needs not be given but allow the job seeker to quote the authority of insurance cover. Thankyou for running the program.

Access to local work experience is the most important element of the course. Is it possible to allow the students to start work experience before they finish the course?

There should be frequent contact between the Centre and the students on work experience to monitor the progress of the students and the problems they encounter. Generally I found the course to be beneficial, except for the agonising experience I had at the work place.

Arranging work experience in Federal and State Government organisations.

I consider the voluntary work experience is not a good idea to obtain local experience since it will worsen the industrial relations and make the volunteer in an awkward situation in the workplace. Students can choose some low level temporary work (with payment) as a start which is more useful to their experience as well as their income.

### **9. Course Length**

Seven weeks seems a bit too long.

It can probably be reduced to 4/5 weeks instead of 7 weeks.

Should be more structured. Should be for a longer duration.

### **10. Course Organisation**

The class I joined was very crowded, it was about 26 persons. I would suggest to make the classes less in number of students ie 15-17 students to give the opportunity to each to do more activities in the class as well as reducing the period of the course with many students I felt there was a lot of wasting time.

We had 2 groups together (about 26). It was a large group. Better to have small groups.

Teacher not sufficient to look after every students particular problems and difficulties.

Maybe max 12-15 students in one group.

Certificate could be provided only for those students who fulfil all the requirements of the Skillmax course for which it is set up.

Put up an advertisement on newspaper and also making every possible steps, ie through the Australian Embassy to let all migrants to know this organisation and what they are doing and the purpose.

The publicity can be improved through the CES and Institution of Engineers.

A problem was the time spent on the train to come to Parramatta. I often thought it was a waste of good time. Why don't you offer a course in the city? Then you are more flexible with your time, you have got more time. And I rather did all my phone calls, research etc at home. So I thought the travelling was quite a waste of time.

I think there should be more Skillmax in different suburbs.

## APPENDIX 8: STUDENT COMMENTS

### 11. Selection of Students

As much as possible to have the students from similar professions in one group.

It would be more helpful if the Skillmax Program can specialise in different fields so that more depth of that field can be learned by the client. For example, in my case, the construction field. The client can be grouped together in the same course. Some of the subjects were most helpful to us, eg preparation of resume, letters, applications of jobs (prepare of letters) etc .

Some teachers are good in a particular field (professions) therefore group the students by professions not by the time they can spend.

### 12. Staffing

Skillmax should employ staff with engineering background because with English knowledge one has to have knowledge of engineering opportunities in present market.

There should be a professional person to discuss about the problems lying ahead of overseas professionals in the job market.

Teachers having technical background be employed.

### 13. Brickbats

The program put too much emphasis on improving various aspects individual characters and exhaust candidate too much energy in researching company's background before the interviews (ie certainly no harm, but not so efficient!)

Skillmax Program is grossly inadequate dealing with the need of professionals. It is very generalist in nature and treats all participants at par without caring for individual needs. Worksearch course does not recognise the shortcomings of the individual, never tries to address the same and leaves entire responsibility on the participants which tantamounts into shirking responsibility and defeats purpose of attending such courses. Such courses should be more individual oriented and needs based, needs dedicated and sympathetic teacher, well equipped mentally to take responsibility. If needed, worksearch course should be abandoned and formulate result oriented courses.

It would be much useful if Skillmax staff stops intimidating professionals by treating them like kindergarten students and get down to business. Many of the students have acquired the so-called "communication skills: way back when. A case in the point was when a teacher tried to convince the students that it is the lack of these skills which prevents them from getting a job. We all know the truth is otherwise....

### 14. Bouquets

I must appreciate the services AMES offered.

The course content is very good.

Skillmax Program is set in the perfect way.

Anyway thankyou very much for your kindly help.

## APPENDIX 8: STUDENT COMMENTS

I very much appreciate the work and tuition given by Skillmax teachers.

Teachers were very good. They have patience to correct our letters, selection criteria - even for 10-15 times. Because of this I was able to prepare a very good selection criteria for my present job. ... ILC teachers are excellent. Skillmax Counsellor is another good resource.

The Skillmax Program based on my experience is definitely very suitable as it is and I can't think of other things to improve it. The Skillmax Program I attended was both a learning experience and fun ... Thanks to all this help.

I consider the Skillmax Program the best available for migrant engineers/industry related jobs. I think that joining the Skillmax Program was a turning point for me personally. Besides offering me a number of facilities and opportunities, it enabled me to interact with many other fellow students and share amongst ourselves our experiences of job hunting and the process of settling down in the new country...this was extremely useful! I would like to express my thanks to the staff at AMES and hope that this organisation continues to help migrants in time to come.

I think the Skillmax Program is excellently conducted and do not have any suggestions for improving it. However, the number of mock interviews could perhaps be increased.

The course is well structured. I wish to thank the Skillmax Program organisers for providing me with a well structured course. I gained knowledge on written application for jobs and job interview skills.

I believe the Skillmax Program is very successful.

Although I was only there for a very short time I would like to thank teacher ... for her advice for the job interview and for the material that she gave to me about interviews and behaviour and regulations in the workplace which I have found very useful. I wish I could have had the opportunity to complete the course because I think it is very useful.

Needs to be recognised/accredited by all public and private sectors widely. State and Federal governments should increase their funding to AMES.

I believe that the current structure of the course is quite adequate.

I have always regretted not having completed the Skillmax courses (especially the work experience component), but I had no choice at the time. I would like to complete the course when my temporary long term assignment terminates and if I do not find a proper job by then.

## SKILLMAX STAFF SURVEY RESPONSES

### 1. What do you see as the major strengths of the Program?

Information, practice and confidence building - interview and document preparation particularly.

Staff Input. Promotional strategies teachers/clients. Student/client input and contributions, eg, surveys/feedback.

As a teacher - the team spirit, the materials development, the networking officer position, student input. For the student - course content, opportunity to practice job seeking skills (videoed, taped), Job Search Centre, networking through other students, work experience.

Control over the program. We can react to the constant changes in the labour market. The expertise of my fellow teachers - constant updating and research into a better product. Teamwork - and a commitment to excellence.

Non-language gains, eg, building of self-esteem, giving students a belief in their skills as applicable to the Australian workplace - confidence building. Skilled, enthusiastic, dedicated teachers. Job seeking skills to suit the Australian context. Work experience.

Exposure to Australian workplaces. Work experience.

The course content and network for work experience. Support structure, eg counselling, network and JSC. Credibility of course (quite well known after years of being around).

The teachers and their openness to change and commitment to quality. The curriculum and shared knowledge.

Teachers. Syllabus. Connections with industry and public sector for work experience. Self access centre and computer 'training'.

Well developed, 'refined' curriculum/structure/resources. Wide network/expertise in work experience placements.

**2. What suggestions do you have for improving the Program?**

Maintaining the profile and market push. Better use of technology and links into business and industry, eg, Internet promotion, E mail etc.

More resources to accommodate all clients, eg, computers, up to date/current materials (continuous updates). Better facilities to promote a higher profile. ADVERTISING.

IBM training for teachers. Upgrade equipment - telephones, computers, tape recorders, video copier. Purchase intercom phones for 'in class' practice of telephoning. More IBMs. Accommodation - interview rooms, group rooms, windows. Re-introduce pronunciation classes - very successful in the past. Current students are missing out. Release time to organised files of materials for Skillmax 20 as for Worksearch.

Skilled, supportive/encouraging team of teachers. Participative management. Excellent curricula. Good balance of class and individual attention given to students. Voluntary work experience provision - gained in ways suited to skills of students.

Larger accommodation - more room to divide class into small groups and JSC. Don't divide Worksearch into 2 x 5 week course per term - too short for anyone. 7 - 10 weeks as done currently is the better alternative. Number should not exceed 28 (26 if one teacher in training).

A need to see that teachers are appointed to the program with necessary skills. The staffing of specialist programs need specialist teachers. There are ex-Skillmax teachers who can't access Parramatta. The need for an Assistant Principal - I mean there have been 8 changes in Skillmax APs since the end of 1990. Accommodation MUST be improved.

More industry speakers for the students. More industry visits for the students. Work experience workplace visits by teachers (currently a time management problem for teachers). More (modern, IBM) computer facilities for students. Wide publicity of survey results to encourage a higher profile of the program's successes, not only to ethnic newspapers, but to employer organisations, BRW articles/ads etc - also may be useful for future funding securement.

Do more marketing. More liaison with employers not just big public sector departments - but private companies too. Newspaper ads.

More focus on helping most students into work experience. More workplace visits hence more feedback and improved learning to help students and continuous topping up of staff knowledge in work/industry related.

Improve facilities - accommodation + computers. NEW TECHNOLOGY - interactive video etc. More advertising to attract clients. Continued staff development and sharing of knowledge would be enhanced if a more conducive work environment could be provided.

More connection with CES as per network officer's initial work. Continue and expand work experience follow up and contact with companies. JSC - computers upgraded and more IBM compatible, ie, equal numbers of Apple Macs and IBM compatibles. Staff for Skillmax be given adequate opportunities to expand workplace knowledge, eg, staff development of workplace change etc.

Improved monitoring of work experience. Analysis of Worksearch program/length and work experience placement procedure. ACCOMMODATION improvement/closer links with EWP, other Skillmax. Development of evening courses - cost recovery.



**3. What do you see as future directions for the Program?**

Perhaps entry into the job subsidies market. Maybe some employment agency (case work) function.

As part of a 'higher profile', utilise teacher expertise into other areas as well as what we're involved in now, eg, business, travel, hospitality etc. Interstate/overseas programs and teacher movement.

Skillmax distance learning? Phone classes for isolated professionals? Just an idea - don't know if there's a need. Continuing its high standard of course presentation and excellent 'personal care' of students. Improved PR in better designed and presented accommodation. Continuing to update course content and facilities to keep abreast with current trends in employment. Provide AMES with a 'quality' corporate image. Employ a systems analyst - for information systems to assess logically our computer needs and directions and repair and maintenance. Include in budget repair, replacement and update of all equipment.

Working with case people referred from the CES (more 12 - 18 month unemployed people). Greater exposure of program, eg, to MEQB, employers. Need more than one networking officer! (Also who is skilled enough to take over if/when Sue wants a break).

A greater refinement of courses approximating students' needs, desires. Backing up courses with skilling on computers for engineers etc. AMES bought computers for engineers for autocad. Why not us?

Depending on student numbers, perhaps refine classes more according to professions/needs, eg, 5, 7, 10, 15, 20 weeks courses. Maybe not feasible.

It will grow as more and more people are informed about the program.

Moving towards case management, using our expertise to reach other target groups.

Continue to grow and attract groups not targeted before. Explore employment consultancy possibilities. More contracts to improve employment prospects for clients (both resulting from work experience and general applications).

Worksearch is marketable, ie cost recovery possibility. Skillmax 10 and 20 progressing as is with continued 'quality circle' meetings on Fridays to cross-reference knowledge re work experience placements and employment opportunities.

Development of mentor scheme linking current and post course clients. 'Fee for service' courses for students in employment. Closer contacts with CES officers.