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THE SKILLMAX PROGRAM
AN EVALUATION

Karen Banfield
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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

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