



6 July 2015

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: ee.reps@aph.gov.au

Supplementary submission to inquiry into inhibitors to employment for small business and disincentives to working for individuals

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) thanks the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment for the opportunity to provide a supplementary submission to the Committee's inquiry, following FECCA's appearance at the public hearing on 17 June 2015.

FECCA highlights the three broad categories of Australia's immigration intake:

- Permanent immigration – comprising the Migration Program (which includes skilled, family, and special eligibility categories) and the Humanitarian Programs.
- Temporary immigration – including those on Student visas, Temporary Work (Skilled) (subclass 457) visas, and Working Holiday Makers.
- Other movements – immigration of New Zealand citizens, returning and emigrating Australian citizens, and other visas not classified under permanent or temporary migration.

Many migrants are highly qualified:

Almost half of recent permanent immigrants and temporary residents had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher qualification prior to arrival in Australia. A substantial portion—about 30 per cent of recent permanent immigrants and 25 per cent of temporary residents at November 2013—obtained a certificate, diploma or higher qualification after arrival.¹

¹ Productivity Commission, 'Migrant Intake into Australia: Productivity Commission Issues Paper, May 2015, 16.

Migrants in all streams of immigration possess skills and qualifications. Many humanitarian entrants are highly skilled; however, they face specific barriers to employment including an inability to prove their skills and qualifications due to lack of documentation.² Family entrants, while entering Australia through the family reunion program, are also skilled and many wish to join the workforce in positions similar to those that they worked in while living in their country of origin. Skilled migrants, including those entering Australia on 457 visas, have fewer difficulties having their skills recognised. Nonetheless, many may face discrimination when applying for jobs due to their accent, name or appearance.

Migrants should not be locked into jobs that Australian-born workers do not want to do. By not utilising the skills and qualifications of migrants, Australia is missing out many positive effects on our country's economy.

Volunteering

Volunteering is a means to address gaps in local workplace experience for migrants and increase familiarity with Australian workplace culture. Placement of migrant and refugee jobseekers in volunteering positions relevant to their qualifications and interests requires an adequate organisational infrastructure and some investment on behalf of the host organisation in order to be able to manage volunteers. Addressing language and cultural barriers for volunteers from migrant or refugee backgrounds would require one-on-one support and therefore the ability to employ adequate human resources to coordinate this support. Without incentives or financial support from the government, many organisations are reluctant to engage in volunteering programs with people from non-English speaking backgrounds because of the perceived costs and because they do not feel comfortable with the challenges that the person might face.

Conclusion

FECCA encourages the government to promote the benefits of cultural diversity in the workforce to small business employers.

FECCA's 2014-15 *Access and Equity Report* addressing, inter alia, the issue of employment will be published shortly, and a copy will be provided to the Committee Secretariat upon publication.

² See Appendix A: Mike Ockerby, 'Foreign University Qualifications: Overcoming the Hurdles', *SALT: African Australian News Magazine* (Issue 6, March 2015), 8-9.

FOREIGN UNIVERSITY QUALIFICATIONS

OVERCOMING THE HURDLES

by Mike Ockerby

Arranging a time to meet with Dr Amos Davies is not easy; he's overworked, he works unsociable hours, and frequently he's plain exhausted.

But the work and hours Dr Davies juggles aren't at a busy GP clinic; nor is he flat out making home visits when 9-to-5 doctors have knocked off.

Instead, Dr Davies works hard as a carer at a suburban Adelaide group home for people with disabilities. Currently he works nights, from 7pm to 7am.

It's not the sort of work Dr Davies envisaged he'd be doing, 15 years ago, while he was studying medicine. But it's a step up financially from his previous position - working on the production line at a car parts factory - and it's infinitely more satisfying than his first Adelaide job, as a meat process worker.

Amos Davies first set foot in Adelaide ten years ago with a new family, ready to embark on a new life.

The Sierra Leonian-born doctor had just spent six years in Ghana; he'd fled to that country to escape the fighting that was ripping apart his home country.

While in Ghana, Amos completed the medical degree he'd begun in Sierra Leone, and married his wife, another Sierra Leonian-born refugee.

In September 2005, the newlyweds and their new daughter set sail for Australia, a land of peace and, hopefully, opportunity.

Amos smiles and shakes his head when he describes how different Australian life is.

"To be frank with you, Australia is like - wow! But getting your profession back on track is another issue."

Dr Davies has ambitions of reviving his stalled medical career. Even as a child, he knew it was what he wanted to do.

But getting his qualifications recognised here is no easy thing; there are exams to sit, and fees to pay before those exams can be sat. Amos has ticked off the first stage of the two-part test - a written exam - but that still leaves his clinical skills examination. Before he's ready for that, he admits his rusty skills will need a lot of brushing up on.

The regulations covering the recognition of foreign qualifications are different according to what job you do, and which country you trained in.

Broadly speaking, if your qualifications are from a European country or an English-speaking nation, it's a lot easier to make the transition. That's something a not inconsiderable number of Africans have discovered. It's also a fact acknowledged by the Commonwealth Immigration Department and the West Australian Government in a 2011 federal parliamentary inquiry.

Of course there are other factors too: that same inquiry heard that the Immigration Department has no settlement services specifically for Australia's African community. South Africa's then-High Commissioner also noted:

"Many African refugees/migrants have tertiary qualifications, as well as significant family and informal contacts in their country of origin. Except for a limited range of institutions - the police, welfare services and the Refugee Review Tribunal, few government organisations or the corporate sector have made an effort to recruit individuals from these communities."

And then there's the sheer difficulty of tracking down the right information - knowing which websites to look



APPLICATION FOR
EMPLOYMENT

PERSONAL INFORMATION



at, which departments to contact, which agencies might be able to help navigate the maze. Even this writer (Australian-born, university-educated and with 20+ years as a journalist) found it tricky!

The realities of life as a refugee can also be a big factor. It's not just that you might have lost the pieces of paper that prove your qualifications, or that these papers might have been destroyed (by rebels, by government forces, by whichever group is terrorising a population).

No: the papers might disappear but the trauma remains.

As I sit with Amos Davies outside the Hindmarsh Library on a quiet February afternoon, it's clear that a lot of his 'head space' is still filled with Africa. As he explains, "You see, this refugee thing has put me off. It's like you're still struggling for survival."

In his heart of hearts Amos knows he still has what it takes to be a good doctor. But maintaining that self-belief - overcoming the 'doom and gloom' as he calls it - is a big hurdle.

"I don't think it's so difficult entering the Australian system. It's me more than the system.

"I really lost my self-esteem, I think that's the biggest problem. The problem is my psyche."

And, again, we come back to the reality of what years and years of disruption, terror and turmoil can do to your skill level. It's a recurring theme.

"It's even more difficult for me, because I've been out of practice for about ten years now."

One thing Amos doesn't have to work at is his commitment to his family. Now the proud and happy father of three children, they are - along with his wife - his main priority.

It's partly for them that he aims to sit his clinical skills exam by early 2016. But Amos knows too that even if no medical job eventuates, he will have proved something to himself.

And if he still can't get a job as a doctor? Plan B is to perhaps go back to university and study engineering. He admits such a profession would be second-best after medicine - anything would be a distant second to medicine - but after so long out of the system he's desperate for a greater academic and intellectual challenge.

Of course, whichever professional challenge he embraces, Amos knows it will be tough; he feels though that it's something he just has to do.

And so as we say our farewells (it's school pick-up time and the next 'shift' in Amos' day is about to begin), with just the hint of a smile he declares, "But people have done it, so I should be able to do it - with determination!"

SALT Magazine would love to hear your stories and experiences too. Email us - hello@saltmagazine.org.

If you need help getting your qualifications recognised, or don't know where to start, try the SA Government's Skills for All group - phone 1800 506 266, or visit the Infocentre at 55 Currie Street Adelaide.