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**From:** Katherine Cheng  
**Sent:** Thursday, 22 August 2002 8:17 PM  
**To:** jscm@aph.gov.au  
**Subject:** Submission re: Skilled Migration

I would like to contribute to this enquiry by telling "my story" as it illustrates some of the 'gaps' in the system. I would also like to tell the story of a friend of mine, who is a potential "skilled migrant" to Australia but who may have been put off by the discrimination she experienced. I will conclude with some suggestions about policy and procedural mechanisms.

I came to Australia in 1986 as a dependent of my mother and step-father. At that time, I had a university qualification and secondary school teaching experience. I was fluent in English. I arrived in Australia after having spent 2 months in the UK at Cambridge University's International Summer School (I was awarded a bursary).

But no one "knew what to do with me" in Australia (Perth), because my university degree was not "known" or accepted or even acknowledged, I was not considered a "graduate." And yet, when I applied for hospitality jobs (after attending a job training course for hotel front desk staff), I was told I was "over-qualified" because I had post-secondary education!

So I had to spend 2 years as an under-graduate at a university. If I had gone to the United States, those two years would have been spent as a (post-) graduate student. Since I have completed that qualification, I have worked in the TAFE and University sector and policies have changed. I understand that my degree from the Philippines (from a Jesuit university and considered among the best, if not the best, private university) is now deemed "comparable" to an Australian undergraduate degree.

Just when I thought that we in Australia have a better understanding of the education and professional experiences of our South East Asian neighbours, something proves me wrong!

A friend of mine, with a university degree and over 10 years of experience in middle management in advertising and film production, has decided on a career change and decided to enrol at an international cookery training school based in one of the TAFE colleges.

She has experienced the same amount of discrimination. Her years of experience has been de-valued simply because the staff are unfamiliar with the Philippines and what goes on in the advertising and film & television industry over there. She was expected to attend classes in "writing marketing plans" and "business communication" when she has had practical experience, and quite honestly, could have **taught** the classes. In fact, most of her classmates relied on her tuition to get the marks they did.

I am currently a registered psychologist and qualified teacher. I realise that I am "luckier" than many other emigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (such

as Poland or Yugoslavia) because I am at least working as a professional in my field. I have met ex-teachers, ex-engineers, ex-university lecturers, ex-professionals from other countries who are now cleaners, shoe repairmen, cab drivers because they cannot get accreditation or acknowledgement of their years of expertise.

The Philippines (my country of origin), has a population of literate, highly-educated middle class who speak English fluently. Many of them have the entrepreneurial background and skills that Australia needs, but most of them are attracted to the United States and Canada. In fact, at least a third of my high school class are in the United States, many of them in middle management positions or in professional jobs.

*None of them would have been attracted to Australia as a country of temporary or permanent residence, because their qualifications (gained in an English-speaking university system) and / or professional experiences would not necessarily be recognised or valued in Australia.*

*Many of them believe that the White Australia policy is still in place, if not in official policy, then in everyday life.*

*Many of them believe that the only Filipinas (women from the Philippines) that Australians "know about" are the ones who emigrate as the brides of much older men (most of whom are from rural areas and poorly-educated).*

A few months ago, there was a letter to the editor of the Australian, describing the current shortage of priests in Australia. It also said that the Philippines has a large pool of seminarians, many of them university educated, and most of them fluent in English. But it appears that there is a barrier somewhere in the system, and the letter asked if there was a racist element in there, since Australia had no problem with "importing" young men from Ireland decades ago.

To attract skilled migrants to Australia, I think we need:

- improved knowledge of the education system/s of our neighbouring countries
- an acknowledgement that the education system/s of our neighbouring countries may be comparable to our own (I find it amusing that we are proposing an "American style" first and second year generalists courses at university, but in the 80s, my liberal arts degree was de-valued as not specialist enough for me to proceed to post-graduate study!)
- more up to date knowledge about professional experiences of potential migrants (for example, many of the advertising agencies in the Philippines produce advertising in English. Most people in Australia "accept" that Singaporeans speak English, but find it difficult to accept that Filipinos are fluent in English.)
- to ensure that bureaucrats who make decisions about qualifications have the knowledge or access to people who do
- to value the experiences of those who are from English as a 2nd language or non-English speaking backgrounds
- to provide re-training or up-skilling to those who are interested (I recently saw an advertisement from WA's Education Dept for people who are qualified teachers from other countries)

If we are to attract skilled young (and not so young) people from around the Asia-Pacific region, those in the government, private and public sector are going to need to be more sophisticated, more knowledgeable (about what goes on outside Australia), and more flexible.

(signed)

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