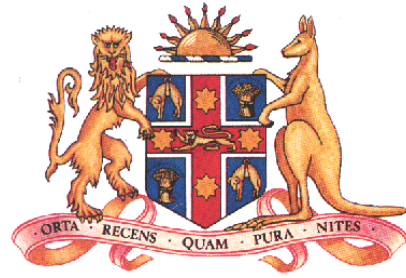




Community Relations Commission
For a multicultural NSW



NSW Government

**NSW Government submission to the
House of Representatives
*Joint Standing Committee on Migration***

in response to the:

***Inquiry into Overseas Skills Recognition,
Upgrading and Licensing***

July 2005

House of Representatives Inquiry into Skills Recognition, Upgrading and Licensing

1. Introduction

National skill shortages across a range of occupations, industries and regions are constraining Australia's economic development. Governments, industry and unions agree that reducing skill shortages is a critical and priority concern. Research¹ undertaken in NSW highlights the importance the vocational education and training system (VET) plays in developing Australia's skills base. It plays a specific purpose in recognising and upgrading overseas skills and qualifications of migrants. In 2001, 37 per cent of persons enrolled in VET in Australia (excluding full fee paying students) were born overseas – half as high again as the share of the overseas born in the population (24.6 per cent) and the labour force (23.4 per cent).

The NSW vocational education and training system plays a unique role in supporting skills development. By way of example, in 2004, TAFE NSW provided vocational education and training to over 21 000 students who had only overseas qualifications at the time of their enrolment.

TAFE NSW data also shows that overseas born students enrolled in courses across the skill spectrum. Some 25 percent of these enrolments were in higher skill level courses (AQF 4-6), 16 percent in skilled trades (Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) 3), almost 20 percent in AQF1-2 courses and some 40 percent in short courses. This latter category includes a range of courses designed to equip students with requisite skills to operate effectively in the labour market, including significant components in the areas of vocational literacy and English language for specific purposes as well as industry specific skill development.

¹ Toner, P. 2001, *The Impact of Skill Migration on Skill Formation and the Labour Market*, NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training and Employment Studies Centre, University of Newcastle.

2. Current arrangements for the recognition of overseas skills and qualifications

2.1 Recognition of overseas skills and qualifications

In New South Wales and across Australia there is no single authority to assess or recognise all overseas gained skills and qualifications. Many organisations are involved, depending on the type of qualification or occupation and whether the assessment is required for the purpose of:

- migration
- further study
- employment.

People wishing to migrate to Australia under the Skilled Migration Program are required to obtain an occupational skills assessment prior to migration, conducted by an assessment authority nominated by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). Following migration, an additional assessment for employment in Australia may be required.

2.1.1 Overseas Skills Advisory Service

The NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), as the main provider of skills training provides the *Overseas Skills Advisory Service* (OSAS). This service disseminates:

- information and advice to overseas qualified migrants on the requirements to work in their occupation in New South Wales
- assessments for general employment purposes, of overseas qualifications against Australian education levels.

Permanent residents and temporary residents holding visas that allow them to work with no restrictions may lodge an application with OSAS. Families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants form a significant proportion of assessments completed by the OSAS.

Assessments are primarily paper based with successful applicants receiving a Statement of Equivalence. In the first instance, applicants are required to submit certified photocopies of:

- award documentation
- course details for each of study
- residential status.

If the above documentation is not available or difficult to interpret, the applicant may be also be interviewed and or the application referred to another authority.

For the financial year 2003-2004, OSAS completed 1,418 assessments. Of these, 287 were referred to the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) and 436 were referred to other agencies for further assessment. The greatest number of assessments completed was for people from India, China and the Philippines.

Overseas qualifications are assessed against the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). The AQF is a unified system of national qualifications in schools, vocational education and training and the higher education sector.

The information and advice provided by OSAS is primarily sourced from *Using Overseas Skills – A NSW Guide (“the Guide”)* and the Country Education Profiles published by the Australian Education International (AEI), through NOOSR. A number of professional occupations are registrable or licensable and following assessment, OSAS refers applicants to the relevant authorities.

Applicants may appeal the outcome of an OSAS decision. Currently fees are not charged for either the assessment or the review of an assessment.

2.1.2 Trade Recognition

Many people with trade skills and experience do not have formal qualifications in Australia, such as may be obtained via an apprenticeship. These skills and experience may have been obtained through formal training or on-the-job experience either in Australia or overseas.

Trade certification, via the skills recognition process, could be of great benefit to people who:

- are unemployed and seeking employment
- are seeking a promotion where they work, as certified tradespeople are generally paid more than those without certification
- need a licence to work in a licensed trade
- wish to undertake further education in a trade area.

Applications for trade recognition are assessed by the Vocational Training Tribunal (VTT) under the provisions of Section 37 of the A&T Act.

Successful applicants are issued with either a Certificate of Proficiency (satisfactory on-the-job experience and off-the-job training) or a Craft Certificate (satisfactory on-the-job experience), both of which are accepted throughout Australia and applicants are formally recognised as tradespeople. Recognition in this way is supported by the Commonwealth and State governments, employers, unions and registered training providers.

2.1.3 Vocational Training Tribunal (VTT)

The VTT is constituted under Section 59 of the A & T Act. When dealing with an application for trade recognition, the VTT considers the:

- length of time the applicant has been working in the trade
- the nature and duration of training the applicant has received in the trade
- any relevant qualification held by the applicant in relation to the trade
- such other matters, (including the applicant's performance in any examination or test set by the VTT) as it considers relevant.

If a person has experience working in a particular recognised trade but does not have formal qualifications in that trade, he/she can apply to have his/her trade skills assessed and formally recognised by the VTT and receive trade certification. They may do this if they have:

- worked in the particular trade for at least four years (either in Australia or Overseas), or
- completed an apprenticeship or other trade training (either in Australia or overseas), or
- completed a recognised industry assessment program or acquired an appropriate qualification.

A person may apply electronically online via <http://apprenticeship.det.nsw.edu.au/index1.htm> - or in person by visiting the offices of the VTT. An application fee of \$125 is payable.

The VTT may request additional evidence such as a trade test.

Trade tests are generally co-ordinated by TAFE NSW and incur an additional cost to the applicant of \$250.

An applicant may appeal against the decision of the VTT to refuse trade recognition or the VTT's request to undertake a trade test. The Vocational Training Appeal Panel is also constituted under the A&T Act and on appeal, takes a fresh look at the application and any new evidence available since the VTT hearing. There is no cost for the appeal process.

2.1.4 Licensing

In New South Wales some trades and professions are subject to licensing and registration. If appropriate, the VTT refers applicants to the relevant licensing authority. The VTT advises applicants that following trade recognition, applicants may need to undergo further education and or training in order to apply for a licence.

NSW industries which support licensed trades include:

- Avionics

- Automotive
- Building and Construction
- Electrotechnology.

In relation to professional occupations following assessment of overseas qualifications by OSAS the applicant is referred to the relevant registering or licensing authority.

2.1.5 Recognition of overseas skills for purposes of studying in TAFE NSW

TAFE NSW recognition services are designed to encourage participation in vocational education and training at a level commensurate with an individual's existing knowledge, skills and experience.

The recognition of overseas skills and qualifications is a TAFE NSW service provided for people seeking entry to and/or advanced standing in TAFE NSW courses. Recognition services for TAFE NSW study purposes include:

- Recognition of overseas secondary and post secondary school qualifications to meet course entry requirements. This recognition service allows TAFE NSW course applicants with overseas skills and qualifications to obtain an assessment of the general comparability of their overseas qualifications to the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) for entry into a TAFE NSW course. This service is fee-free for TAFE NSW course applicants regardless of residency status.
- Recognition of overseas skills and qualifications to obtain advanced standing in a TAFE NSW course. This form of recognition allows enrolled students to gain an exemption from modules or units of competency where they are able to establish that they have already achieved the learning outcomes or competencies for that module or unit.

The provision of advanced standing allows people with overseas gained skills and qualifications to complete TAFE NSW courses in a shorter time frame. It also facilitates the acquisition of a vocational education and training qualification for those who cannot get recognition of their overseas skills and qualifications for employment purposes or who wish to acquire new or additional skills.

2.1.6 TAFE NSW commercial recognition services

TAFE NSW provides recognition services, on a fee-for-service basis, for individuals who seek an assessment of their previous learning and work experience towards the equivalent of a TAFE NSW course or qualification. These commercial recognition services are also available for people with overseas skills, qualifications and experience.

Individuals who seek recognition on a fee-for-service basis are issued with the relevant TAFE NSW testamur and transcript of results if 100 per cent recognition is achieved for the target TAFE NSW course or qualification. If less than 100 per cent recognition is achieved, the applicant has the option to undertake the remaining structured learning available to complete the target course or qualification.

2.1.7 Trade tests conducted by TAFE NSW

TAFE NSW conducts trade tests, upon request from the VTT, for applicants seeking recognised trade certificates from the VTT. People with trade skills, including applicants with trade skills gained overseas, must first apply to the VTT for assessment of their trade skills. The VTT requests that TAFE NSW conduct trade tests only where it is deemed necessary in its assessment of applications for recognised trade certificates.

TAFE NSW trade test policy requires that all trade tests be designed to assess the skills and knowledge that a tradesperson would need to demonstrate in the normal course of their work and that they be free from cultural or gender bias. TAFE NSW supports trade test applicants through provision of orientation sessions and information packages. Accredited interpreters are also made available to all applicants who request them.

2.1.8 Documentary evidence in support of recognition of overseas skills in TAFE NSW

TAFE NSW recognition policy and associated guidelines require that strategies for assessing the student's previous learning and work experiences be carefully chosen in consultation with the applicant to avoid potential discrimination. For example, a challenge test may be administered rather than submission of a portfolio of documentary evidence which, for valid reasons, the student may be unable to provide. Students are also given the opportunity to discuss their application for recognition of prior learning with the assessor and be provided with meaningful feedback. Accredited interpreters, if requested, are also provided to facilitate the recognition of prior learning process.

TAFE NSW staff may accept statutory declarations in support of applications in cases where course applicants and enrolled students with overseas skills and qualifications are unable to provide sufficient documentary evidence to support their application for admission to and or advanced standing in TAFE NSW courses.

2.2 Current arrangements for recognition of the overseas qualifications of employees

2.2.1 Recognition of overseas skills and qualifications for employment as a school teacher

Permanent residents, Australian citizens and long term temporary visa holders

NSW recognizes overseas trained teachers who:

- possess appropriate qualifications
- satisfy probity checks
- demonstrate appropriate levels of English language skills
- demonstrate appropriate teaching skills through the Department's mandatory Pre-employment Program for Overseas Trained Teachers
- successfully undertake a personal suitability interview.

When assessing the qualifications of overseas trained teachers, the Department examines the content of these qualifications in order to determine if subjects studied provide a suitable background to teach in the relevant key learning areas.

The Institute Of Teachers Regulation 2005 - Section 7 makes the following reference to prescribed qualifications for new scheme teachers:

- (a) a degree from a higher education institution within Australia
- (b) a degree from a higher education institution outside Australia that is recognised within the guidelines of the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition.

Whilst DET refers to advice provided by the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) on higher education in overseas countries including the assessment of institutions, it does not necessarily adhere to NOOSR's comparative assessment of overseas qualifications to Australian qualifications, in making judgements on the acceptability of the qualifications of overseas trained teacher employment applicants.

For example, if NOOSR deems a particular qualification as being equivalent to a TAFE qualification, DET investigates factors such as entry level requirements for the qualification, and whether the qualification is recognised by an accrediting authority in that country. This may lead to the acceptance of overseas qualifications of some people, where those qualifications may not meet the minimum requirements, as established by NOOSR, for migration under the Skilled Stream of Australia's Migration Program.

Student visa holders

DET assesses the qualifications of people seeking to undertake study to gain a teaching qualification in a NSW university. Student visas are generally valid for 12 months. Based on the department's advice, the university may admit the student to a teacher education program. Towards the end of the study, the student participates in a personal suitability interview, along with permanent resident and Australian citizens graduating teachers who are applying to teach under the Graduate Recruitment Program. Following a successful interview, student visa holders are provided with a letter of professional standing.

During university term time, student visa holders can undertake up to 20 hours work per week. This would not include teaching with the Department as they are not qualified. Completion of their program prior to the expiry of their visa would enable them to teach in a NSW public school on a part time or full time casual or temporary basis, subject to a satisfactory criminal record check.

Short term visa holders

Short term visa holders have their qualifications assessed to ascertain that they hold the equivalent of a degree and teacher training. Subject to a check of their visa status and clearance through a criminal record check they may be approved to teach in NSW.

These teachers provide a valuable casual teaching service to NSW public schools.

2.2.2 Recognition of overseas skills and qualifications for employment as a TAFE teacher

TAFE NSW recruitment and staff selection policy addresses the selection of staff with overseas qualifications. This policy requires that selection panels consider the qualifications and skills of overseas-qualified applicants and outline steps for assessing applicant's overseas qualifications. For appointment as a TAFE teacher the applicant must demonstrate appropriate technical or professional qualifications plus from two to five years, as appropriate, vocational and or industrial experience.

In addition TAFE NSW provides an information package to all job applicants which includes information about recognition of overseas qualifications and referral services for applicants requiring additional assistance in establishing the comparability of their qualifications for employment purposes.

2.2.3 NSW Adult Migrant English Service (AMES)

The NSW AMES selects teaching staff through a competitive selection process based on essential and desirable criteria related to the performance of teaching duties. It appoints teachers who possess:

1. any of the following teaching qualifications awarded by an Australian University or tertiary institutions, or its overseas equivalent.
 - a) Bachelor degree
 - b) Advanced Diploma
 - c) Diploma

provided that it is at least three years full-time in length, or its part-time equivalent.

AND

2. A recognised postgraduate TESOL qualification which has resulted from a course of study having at least the following characteristics:
 - i) Content focus on English language, language learning and TESOL methodology
 - ii) A practical component including at least sixty hours of supervised and assessed practice teaching in TESOL; and
 - iii) No less than 100 contact hours in total devoted to i) above, or the equivalent in distance education programs.

NSW AMES aims to select teaching staff through a competitive selection process, which allows for the recognition of teaching qualifications and experience gained in countries outside Australia where these are assessed as equivalent to Australian teaching qualifications and experience. Knowledge and skills in the culture and languages of migrant communities are considered desirable teacher qualifications by AMES and teachers coming from these backgrounds have been encouraged to apply.

The NSW AMES Qualifications and Assessment Committee assesses the overseas qualifications of teachers on an individual basis from certified documents and makes frequent reference to information provided by the Teaching and General Academic Panels of NOOSR.

Applicants who are determined to be eligible for employment on the basis of their overseas qualifications and/or experience are then included in the selection process with all other applicants.

The Qualifications Assessment Committee requires the following documentation from each applicant with overseas qualifications and/or applicants:

- a certified copy of the applicant's academic qualifications. This should provide sufficient detail to enable the committee to determine the level of the course studied (e.g. diploma, Bachelor degree, Master's degree, etc.), the length of the course, the major field of study completed, and the extent of teacher training, including practice teaching, undertaken.

A copy of the testamur only is normally not sufficient for the committee's purposes;

- certified copies of statements of service from institutions where applicants have been employed as teachers. These should provide sufficient detail to allow the committee to determine the length of service, whether it was full time or part time, and whether the experience was with school level or post-school students. The statement should also identify any particular responsibilities held, for example, for course design, student assessment or materials development.
- all documentation in languages other than English must be accompanied by certified translations into English.

Applications which are not supported by sufficiently detailed documentation cannot be considered by the Qualifications Assessment Committee.

2.2.4 Recognition of overseas trained doctors – Area of Need Programme

The New South Wales Department of Health contributes significantly to addressing medical workforce shortages in NSW through the Area of Need Program. The Program enables the recruitment of suitably qualified overseas-trained doctors into declared Area of Need positions on a temporary basis, while efforts continue to attract medical practitioners with general registration on a permanent basis.

The Area of Need Program involves a number of stakeholders that play a particular and defined role at various stages of the Program. The NSW Department of Health, in consultation with members of the Area of Need Advisory Committee, has developed a set of principles to underpin and guide policy development and practice of the Area of Need Program.

Area of Need Position

The NSW Health Department manages the application process for Area of Need Status. In line with processes available on the Departmental website, applicant organisations or employers seeking AON status within NSW are, without exception, required to:

- Submit a position description (template descriptions have been developed in consultation with relevant medical Colleges)
- Provide documented evidence that genuine attempts have been made to attract Australian resident doctors.
- Seek support of Area Health Services, medical Colleges and other relevant stakeholder organisations.

Assistance from the medical Colleges is sought to identify alternative service delivery models that may support service delivery without utilising AON.

Recruitment of Doctor

The employer recruits and selects an overseas trained doctor considered suitable for the position.

In the NSW public health system, this involves standard public employment recruiting practices, with the addition of a review of the applicant's qualification and experience by a clinical subcommittee of the appointments committee. The process involves:

- review of curriculum vitae and qualifications;
- interview by selection committee
- review of experience and qualifications to assess the potential for the doctor to be registered by the Medical Board.
- contact with professional referees to obtain opinion in relation to the applicant's skills and performance.

Once the employer has identified its preferred applicant for the position, application is made to the NSW Medical Board for conditional registration to practice in the position.

Different procedures apply to specialist and non-specialist/GP positions, as set out below.

Assessment Process for Area of Need Specialists

Application documentation is forwarded to the Australian Medical Council (AMC) and relevant Specialist Medical College. The College and the AMC will conduct parallel processes – AMC verifying the validity of the documentation, and the College assessing the applicant's suitability for the position.

Upon verification of documentation by the AMC and assessment of suitability by the College, the College will make a recommendation in relation to the applicant to the Medical Board, which is advised to the employer.

This process generally takes between eight and 12 weeks, but may be longer and varies between Colleges.

Assessment Process for Area of Need Non-Specialist Positions and GPs

Application for registration of hospital non-specialists and GPs is made direct to the Board.

A clinical interview panel undertakes assessment. Interview is in the form of a 45-minute to one-hour oral assessment of the applicant's clinical knowledge,

previous clinical experience, and skills (including communication skills) and judgement. The questions are clinical scenarios based on everyday practical situations relevant to the position applied for.

The composition of the panel is reflective of the position being applied for – either a General Practitioner Assessment Panel or an RMO/CMO Assessment Panel.

The Assessment Panel makes recommendations to the Board regarding the suitability of the applicant for the position and any supervision or refresher training required.

Interview panels sit approximately every two weeks, and assessments are usually done within one to two months of application.

Conditional Registration

Based on the relevant assessment, the Board will make a determination whether to grant conditional registration. If granted, registration will be only for the position applied for, will specify supervision requirements and may include restrictions on practice.

Supervision

Supervision by a more experienced doctor will always be required.

In the case of specialists, the College will make a recommendation to the Board on supervision and further assessment requirements.

In the case of non-specialists and GPs, the Assessment Panel will make these recommendations.

The NSW Health Department, in conjunction with the Medical Board, is developing structured guidelines on supervision requirements.

Continuing Assessment

In all cases, the Board requires that OTDs be subject to regular assessment by the supervisor. This is usually required monthly for three months, then three monthly for the balance of the first year of registration and then, if registration is extended, six monthly. Assessment of specialists is undertaken by a Fellow of the relevant College.

Findings of the assessment are reported to the Board and used to gauge satisfactory performance, upon which continuing registration is based on. If performance is unsatisfactory, the Board may withdraw registration.

Subject to satisfactory reports and renewal of the declaration of the position as an Area of Need by the Department of Health, registration may be extended on an annual basis.

Communication of Processes

The NSW health Department maintains an Area of Need Programme web site in the Internet. This web site includes links to a broad range of information on the processes and policies related to the programme. There is a linkage to AON vacancies for the different categories of medical practitioner.

Most information has further linkages to relevant bodies such as the NSW Medical Board, medical Colleges, Australian Medical Council, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and the Health Insurance Commission.

3. Current arrangements for upgrading overseas skills

3.2 TAFE NSW

3.2.1 Curriculum products

TAFE NSW develops a range of curriculum products to support people seeking to upgrade their overseas skills for employment purposes.

Bridging and refresher programs have been specifically developed for overseas-qualified professionals, paraprofessionals and trades people seeking registration, licensing and employment.

Programs are offered in a variety of vocational areas including engineering, accounting, electrical, automotive and hairdressing. A number of courses are available, for instance in the transport area, to assist overseas-qualified trades people to obtain a licence in their trade, upgrade their skills to meet Australian technology and other requirements. This may also contribute to evidence required by the NSW Vocational Training Tribunal for issuing of a trade certificate of proficiency or a craft certificate.

In the transport area bridging and refresher courses are available for overseas-qualified trades people in the automotive light vehicle, vehicle painting and panel beating areas.

In the metal and manufacturing area TAFE NSW has designed a Graduate Certificate in Engineering - Refresher course for people with overseas qualifications in engineering at university graduate level. The course includes an introduction to the Australian workplace as well as technologies individuals may not have been exposed to prior to arrival, such as general computing and computer aided drafting.

A Certificate Level III course is also offered by TAFE NSW for people seeking electrical licensing. This course is the recommended essential course for

those seeking a Qualified Supervisor Certificate – Electrician issued by the Office of Fair Trading (NSW).

3.2.2 TAFE NSW delivery of ‘upgrading’ programs

TAFE NSW delivers refresher and bridging programs for professionals, paraprofessionals and trades people seeking recognition, licensing and registration.

TAFE NSW is a major contributor to the Department of Education, Science and Training’s *Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme* (LLNP). This program aims to enable job seekers to improve their English language, literacy and numeracy skills to assist them in securing sustainable employment or to participate in further education and training.

TAFE NSW delivers LLNP training, under the Advanced English – Vocation Specific stream of the LLNP, including specifically designed programs for job seekers who are seeking overseas skills recognition and registration. Between 2002 and June 2005 these refresher and bridging programs included:

- Preparation for the Professional English Assessment (PEAT) for Overseas Trained Teachers (5 programs)
- English and Workplace Training for Overseas Trained Teachers (2 programs)
- Teachers Bridging Course (4 programs)
- Teachers Bridging Course for Overseas Qualified School Teachers (2 programs)
- Bridging Course for Overseas Accountants (13 programs)
- Orientation for Overseas Health Professionals (7 programs)
- Nursing Language for Overseas Qualified Nurses (7 programs)
- Computer Technology for Engineers and Professionals (8 programs)
- Hairdressing Retraining (1 program)

In addition, TAFE NSW offered an Automotive Refresher for Overseas Qualified Trades under the LLNP that was cancelled. Significantly applicants who attended the pre-course information session were not eligible to participate as they were either employed or did not have a National Reporting System (NRS) rating at level 3 in oral communication, reading and writing.

3.2.3 Support services and resources

Support services are provided by TAFE NSW staff to people seeking recognition of overseas qualifications and skills. Such staff include Institute Multicultural Education Coordinators (IMECs), recognition coordinators, counsellors, head teachers and centrally through the TAFE Multicultural Education Unit (MEU). Relevant printed information is also available at campuses and colleges as well on the TAFE internet site in a range of community languages.

The TAFE MEU also provides an advisory service to staff involved in recognition. In addition, TAFE MEU develops resources to assist in assessing the comparability of overseas qualifications for study purposes in TAFE NSW. Resources developed include the *Recognition of Overseas Secondary School Qualifications for Admission to TAFE NSW courses, A Guide for TAFE NSW Staff (April 2004)*. The publication has a supporting promotional brochure which is available in 22 languages other than English.

3.3 Apprenticeships and Trade Recognition

The Department has processes in place, via trade skills recognition and accelerated adult apprenticeships, that identify requirements or pathways for skills upgrading.

Accelerated adult apprenticeships have been established in the trades of Engineering (Mechanical) and Engineering (Fabrication). Credit towards the nominal term of an apprenticeship in these trades is granted when certain conditions are met, including evidence of previous experience in the trade and an assessment of the apprentice's competence. The NSW Government supports the cost of training for approved apprentices and new entrant trainees who are Australian citizens, permanent residents and New Zealand citizens permanently residing in Australia.

The results of a trade test, commissioned by the VTT, can also be used as an assessment tool to identify areas of skills gaps for a particular applicant, thereby giving them a platform for identifying and addressing the areas of skill need.

3.4 School Teachers

3.4.1 Professional English Assessment for School Teachers (PEAT)

Teachers who obtained the majority of their teaching qualification in a country where English is not the main language are required to demonstrate an appropriate standard of English language skills by undertaking the Professional English Assessment for Teachers (PEAT). The PEAT instrument has been designed and is administered by the University of NSW Institute of Languages (UNSWIL). The PEAT is contextualized to teaching in NSW schools and assesses candidates in the four skills areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Candidates must achieve Band A (full professional proficiency) in all four areas before proceeding to the next stage in the process of approval to teach with the Department.

The PEAT is undertaken at a cost to the candidate of \$363. Any of the four components may be undertaken again after three months if the required standard is not met, at a proportional cost.

The following table provides information on the number of overseas trained teachers who sat the PEAT and satisfied its requirements in the period 2002 - 2004.

Year	No who sat PEAT	No who passed	%
2002	585	130	22.2
2003	497	123	24.7
2004	870	153	17.6

The Department has recognised that the component of PEAT with which candidates have most difficulty is writing. In consultation with TAFE, the Department has arranged for the development of a program specifically for overseas trained teachers to enhance their written English skills to enable them to succeed in the writing component of the PEAT.

The Department has worked with UNSWIL to design a program to enhance the writing skills of PEAT candidates who achieved an A result in three of the four components but achieved a lesser result in writing. Priority for the program will be given to teachers in secondary subject shortfall areas such as mathematics, science and technological and applied studies. The program will commence in the second half of 2005.

3.4.2 Pre-employment Program for Overseas Trained School Teachers

The Pre-employment Program for Overseas Trained Teachers was developed by the Department following consultation with interest groups including primary and secondary principals' groups and the NSW Teachers Federation. The program was developed in response to concerns raised by principals that overseas trained teachers need appropriate orientation to prepare them for teaching in NSW public schools.

This mandatory program assists overseas trained teachers who may be eligible for full approval i.e. those with Australian or New Zealand citizenship or Australian permanent residency status, to make a comfortable transition into the NSW educational environment.

Only teachers who have appropriate teaching qualifications, have been cleared through probity checks and have demonstrated an acceptable standard of English language proficiency through PEAT (where applicable) progress to the Pre-employment Program for Overseas Trained Teachers.

Categories of overseas trained teachers who are exempt from the program are:

- short term visa holders, who are eligible to hold a casual teaching approval for a limited period
- teachers who taught in a NSW public school in the last five years under a teacher exchange program

- teachers who can demonstrate two years in the last five years of successful teaching experience in a recognized Australian school
- re-employed teachers
- teachers who completed their teacher education in NSW.

The Pre-employment Program for overseas trained teachers includes:

- an orientation program of 12 days, comprising: an introductory two day workshop covering the NSW curriculum, school organisation, cultural awareness, introduction to NSW classroom practice, student management and child protection; a nine day in-school placement including observation and professional discussion, supported by a coordinating teacher; and a one day concluding workshop
- in-school assessment of five days
- bridging course, in which an overseas trained teacher applicant could be recommended to participate, if during the in-school assessment there are areas of concern regarding their teaching practice which could be addressed within a 15 day period of additional in-school support. The bridging course offers between five and 15 days of additional supervised in-school experience.

Following successful completion of the program and a successful personal suitability interview, applicants are approved to teach.

Since its implementation in May 2004, to the end of term one, 2005, 239 overseas trained teachers have participated in the Program and 225 have been approved to teach in NSW public schools. Participants who did not successfully complete the program have been recommended to participate in the bridging course or advised to undertake additional teacher training, such as a Graduate Diploma in Education, at an Australian university.

3.5 SKILLMAX Program

NSW AMES delivers the *Skillmax Program* which is aimed at assisting people of non-English speaking backgrounds who have overseas qualifications, training and/or skills and experience to enter into employment at levels commensurate with their overseas qualifications, training and/or skills and experience. Through the program NSW AMES delivers a range of courses covering oral and written communication skills for workplace interaction and jobseeking skills and interview techniques.

The main target groups for the *Skillmax Program* are as follows:

- public sector employees working in positions which underutilise the skills and qualifications they gained overseas;
- public sector employees who are working in areas undergoing restructuring or technological change and who require English language training so they can be deployed to alternative work or benefit from further training within their organisations;

- employees working in occupations for which their skills are irrelevant;
- job seekers.

The *Skillmax Program* has an annual budget of \$1.776 million. In 2004, 1,373 participants took part in the *Skillmax Program*:

3.6 English Language Course for Skilled Migrants Entering Australia Under the Skilled Designated Area Sponsored (SDAS) Scheme

The Skilled Designated Area Sponsored (SDAS) scheme allows residents of Australia, who live in certain areas (a designated area), to sponsor their skilled relatives to permanently migrate to Australia.

A concession is available under this scheme to applicants who do not have the required vocational standard of English. Applicants may qualify to migrate with a functional level of English (overall band score of 4.5 on the four components of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS)). To do so, applicants must pay to undertake an English language course before being granted a visa. This concession is only available if a State/Territory government of Australia decides to participate.

In early 2005, NSW was accepted for inclusion on the list of State and Territory Governments that have the requisite arrangements in place for the English language concession for skilled migrants.

NSW AMES provides an English Language Course designed specifically for skilled migrants who are sponsored under the SDAS Category by a family member living in NSW and who do not meet the usual language requirements to qualify for migration under this category.

Through this course, depending on need, the client receives 200 hours of supervised language training, vocational counselling, access to independent study facilities and are issued a Certificate IV in Spoken and Written English upon successful completion of the course.

The course has been designed for flexible delivery through distance learning, face-to-face and e-learning modes. The course includes oral and written English language skills, job search skills and vocational counselling. NSW AMES provides the DL and e-learning components. Adult and Community Education providers provide the interview skills component.

The first course application was received in February 2005. To date four migrants have paid for the course, with two commencing study.

3.7 English Language Assessment for Overseas Qualified Nurses

The NSW Nurses and Midwives Board requires certain overseas qualified nurses to successfully complete an assessment program conducted by the College of Nursing before registration or enrolment is granted in NSW. Applicants from non-English speaking countries to the NSW College of Nursing Assessment Program are required to have achieved a specified level in one of a number of English language tests within the previous two years.

Applicants may have completed such a test before arriving in Australia or may pay for testing with an organisation authorised to conduct these tests. NSW AMES conducts assessments under the International Second Language Proficiency Rating Scale (ISLPR) on a fee for service basis.

In 2004 NSW AMES tested 162 overseas qualified nurses applying for the College of Nursing assessment program, with a number of these nurses being tested a number of times.

3.8 Assessment of Permanent Resident Overseas Trained Doctors Not Currently in the Australian Medical Workforce

NSW AMES is contracted by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) to conduct assessments of language and cultural competency of permanent resident overseas trained doctors not currently in the Australian medical workforce, who wish to work as general practitioners in Australia.

These assessments form part of the RACGP Permanent Resident Overseas Trained Doctors Project which aims to attract and assist these professionals to become GPs. The assessment undertaken by NSW AMES is only one of a number of steps that these overseas trained doctors who have been resident in Australia and have not worked in the Australian medical workforce need to undertake in order to be allowed to work as a GP in Australia.

NSW AMES has been undertaking these assessments for the RACGP since early 2005. These involve the testing of English language levels using the International Second Language Proficiency Rating Scale (ISLPR) and assessment of cultural competencies through interview.

4. Areas for Improvement

4.1 Communication

4.1.1 Web portal and Job Network Checklist

NSW is a member of the SCIMA Overseas Qualifications Working Group and supports the development of a national web portal on Australia's skills assessment and recognition processes, and the development of the Job Network Checklist.

4.1.2 Processes to be followed by migrants in order to achieve recognition of overseas skills and qualifications post-arrival

Comments made by TAFE NSW field staff providing support services to people with overseas skills and qualifications also suggest that overseas entrants, including those arriving as skill stream migrants with higher levels of English language proficiency, are often unaware of the processes that need to be followed to achieve recognition post-arrival. Post-arrival communication strategies also need to be developed and implemented to ensure that overseas entrants have access to relevant information on arrival.

To address this issue it is recommended that DIMIA, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) work in collaboration with relevant State and Territory vocational education and training organisations including the NSW Department of Education and Training, in particular, State Training Services and TAFE NSW, to develop State and Territory-specific information strategies.

Information packages, available in a variety of languages outlining post-migration recognition and assessment procedures would be helpful to migrants both pre and post migration. As part of this package information on the Australian Qualification Framework in languages other than English would be advantageous in assisting migrants to better understand the scope, breadth and range of Australian educational qualifications.

Enhanced electronic information links would greatly assist communication, in particular, the development of one portal for skills recognition and assessment.

4.2 Efficiency

4.2.1 Rural and Regional Migration

The settlement of skilled migrants in rural and regional areas remains a priority for the NSW government. The report of the Commonwealth/NSW Working Party on Migration to Sydney and Regional NSW made the following recommendations:

Recommendation 13: DIMIA, The NSW Department for State and Regional Development (DRSD) and the Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW (CRC) should collaborate on future activities to

promote skilled migration to regional employers, in conjunction with relevant local councils and regional advisory committees.

Recommendation 14: Regional Development Boards (RDBs) and Regional Certifying Bodies (RCBs) should be the point of contact for regional employers to seek further information about skilled migrants.

Recommendation 15: DIMIA and DSRD should cooperate to ensure RDBs have appropriate information and training to fulfil their role under Recommendation 14.

In response to this, the CRC, along with DIMIA have entered a cooperative strategy to promote migration and settlement in regional and rural NSW. In addition to consultations with local government, the organisations have embarked on a series of consultations in regional NSW to meet with local employers to discuss various aspects of rural and regional migration, including the employment of skilled migrants outside of the Sydney metropolitan area.

Despite these achievements, to date, there still remains a limited number of skilled migrant-specific programs in operation in rural and regional NSW and there exists low levels of knowledge regarding migrant skills, recognition processes and specific cultural training. It is important that if this issue is to be pursued, that the Commonwealth provide continued support to regional and rural employers, as well as skilled migrants themselves to understand processes in skills recognition. It is the Commonwealth government's responsibility to ensure that programs such as the Migrant Skills Strategy are funded and implemented.

4.2.2 Establishment of a one-stop recognition information referral and advisory service

Current arrangements for recognition involve multiple assessment authorities and institutions. Based on information from field staff providing support services to people seeking recognition of overseas skills and qualifications, it appears that many overseas entrants find post-arrival recognition, licensing and registration arrangements complex. Moreover, they find the need to contact a number of assessment authorities and institutions confusing and time consuming.

To address this issue the Commonwealth Government should consider the establishment of a one-stop recognition information/referral and advisory service catering for trade, professional and paraprofessional occupations at a State and Territory level.

4.2.3 Increased resourcing to support trade recognition services for overseas migrants

Applications for trade skills recognition are processed within four to six weeks of receipt, if the VTT has all the required information available for assessment. A request by the VTT for further evidence will extend this timeframe. The OSAS strives to complete assessments within weeks of application.

The Commonwealth Government is using the skill migration program to assist in addressing skill shortages. Increases in skill migration intakes may well impact on resources currently available for recognising and assessing for employment purposes, the skills and qualifications of overseas-trained migrants.

New South Wales is noting an increasing number of applications for trade skills recognition from other states and territories, as only New South Wales and Queensland have such a process.

It is essential that agencies charged with responsibility for assessing and recognising overseas skills and qualifications are adequately resourced to meet the increased numbers entering Australia through the Skilled Migration Program.

4.2.4 Overseas qualified school teachers

DET is in the process of introducing new technology for the processing of applications for employment, preparation of academic prescription advice and updating the credentials of teachers who gain qualifications in additional areas of teaching. It is anticipated that streamlining of these processes will greatly improve services for all teachers accessing DET's recruitment services, including overseas trained teachers.

4.3 Elimination of Barriers

4.3.1 Community Relations Commission Committee on the Recognition of Overseas Nursing Qualifications

In late 2004 the NSW Premier approved the establishment of the Community Relations Commission Committee on the Recognition of Overseas Nursing Qualifications a committee with the following terms of reference and composition.

Terms of Reference

The Committee has been established to:

1. examine the requirements of the Nurses and Midwives Board of NSW, specialist colleges and other nursing organisations or by statute, which

impact on the ability of a nursing graduate, particularly those with qualifications from the Philippines, Indonesia and India to obtain registration or employment in the NSW health sector.

2. examine the differential requirements or differential concessions for employment as nurses that apply to individuals with overseas, particularly Filipino, Indonesian and Indian nursing qualifications.
3. examine overseas models for recruiting and preparing nurses trained overseas to work in different countries' health systems, including the use of government-to-government agreements.
4. examine preferential work arrangements, concessions and opportunities that may arise through the use of various visa options for trainees.

In this regard the Committee will:

- a. examine and identify barriers to the employment of Filipino, Indonesian and Indian trained nurses in the NSW health sector.
- b. propose a range of strategies to overcome the identified barriers while maintaining high standards of health care and patient safety.

Membership:

- Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW – lead agency (Chair and Secretariat)
- NSW Department of Health
- Nurses and Midwives Board of NSW
- NSW Nurses Association
- Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs

Outcomes

There is a clear agreement between agencies to work collaboratively together to remove barriers while ensuring that standards are not lowered.

The committee will examine the possibility of recruiting nurses from the Philippines, India and Indonesia who are most likely to meet the standards for registration or who could meet the standard with a moderate amount of extra training. This may involve identifying the highest quality training institutions in those countries (for example, the University of Indonesia in Jakarta) and interviewing candidates in their home countries.

The committee will examine the bridging courses available in other Australian states and territories for overseas qualified nurses and consider whether such a course is appropriate for New South Wales and what form such a course should take.

The committee will examine overseas models for recruiting nurses including the use of government-to-government agreements (such as the agreements the UK government has signed with the governments of the Philippines, India and Spain).

The committee will report its findings and recommendations to the NSW Premier. It is anticipated that to achieve a robust outcome the committee will need to report in late September 2005. This deadline will allow the Department of Health to incorporate the outcomes into its recruitment strategy for 2006.

4.3.2 Overseas Trained Doctors

The recognition and employment of permanent resident overseas trained doctors continues to be a major area of contention in medical and political realms, especially given the severe shortage of doctors available for employment in rural and regional Australia. Groups such as the Australian Doctors Trained Overseas Association have maintained a vigorous campaign to highlight alleged discrepancies between criteria used to assess and recruit doctors from overseas and overseas trained doctors already residing in Australia.

In NSW no-one is allowed to practice as a doctor unless he or she is assessed to be competent by the NSW Medical Board or the relevant college. The recent case of Dr Jayant Patel, highlights the responsibility that certifying bodies must take in ensuring that high standards are maintained in appointing medical personnel, whether they are recruited locally or overseas.

4.3.3 Eligibility requirements for participation in upgrading programs

Many migrants entering Australia through the Skilled Migration Program, despite achieving recognition of their overseas skills and qualifications may require additional support to access employment. This support may include additional training and work experience opportunities in their field of expertise to be able to compete effectively in the Australia labour market.

CASE STUDY

A civil engineer from Jordan arrived in Australia in 2000 under the Skill Migration Program. His qualifications had been recognised for migration purposes. On arrival and for a year, the civil engineer unsuccessfully sought employment in his occupation. He worked in various occupations, including labouring and customer service. TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute, Ultimo Campus runs a one semester bridging course for overseas qualified engineers, Computer Technology for Overseas Trained Engineers. The civil engineer from Jordan enrolled in the course and on completion was employed by the Roads and Traffic Authority as a civil engineer.

Many families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants also require refresher/bridging or upgrading training opportunities to gain employment in related occupations/professions. The English language proficiency levels of these entrants may, however, be lower than that of skill stream migrants. These family members are therefore more likely to require access to refresher/bridging or 'upgrading' training programs integrated with English language training.

CASE STUDY

An overseas qualified accountant migrated from Sri Lanka to Australia in 2003. On arrival she found that she needed advanced vocational English language skills specific to her occupation, knowledge of Australian taxation law and Australian work practice to gain employment. After unsuccessfully applying for several positions in her field, she heard about a bridging course for overseas qualified accountants, Advanced Diploma in Accounting – Bridging at TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute, Randwick Campus. After completing the course, she gained employment with a major Sydney hotel as a professional accountant. In commenting on the course, she indicated that it provided her with the language, knowledge and skills she needed to practice as an accountant. The course also provided her with better understanding of management practices and supervisory roles in an Australian workplace environment.

In order to maximise skilled migrants' integration into the Australian labour market in jobs related to their previous qualifications and skills it is recommended that the Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) review the availability and appropriateness of Commonwealth programs in order to maximise skilled migrants integration into the Australian labour market in jobs related to their previous qualifications and skills. Particular regard should be given to the availability of bridging, refresher and 'upgrading' training programs that:

- provide specifically designed modules to facilitate recognition and understanding of local legislation, standards and practices
- incorporate Australian workplace orientation modules (cross-cultural communication skills, job-seeking skills, OH&S etc)
- provide integrated English language training
- provide for local work experience opportunities in the skilled migrant's field of expertise, and
- can be accessed by the under-employed.

TAFE NSW Institute Multicultural Education Coordinators provide information and referral services to people from non-English speaking backgrounds seeking access to programs and services delivered by TAFE NSW. They have noted the impact, as described by overseas entrants, of the two-year waiting period for eligibility to Centrelink benefits and other settlement services on migrants' access to refresher, bridging and upgrading programs. It appears that the priority for these entrants, on arrival, is to find employment that will generate income to support themselves and their families. Full time employment, albeit in low skill occupations, effectively precludes their access

to Commonwealth funded programs such as the Language Literacy and Numeracy Programme (LLNP) which might otherwise facilitate skills recognition.

In order to participate in the advanced English language stream of the LLNP, all clients must be of working age (generally 15 to 64), registered with Centrelink as unemployed and seeking full-time work and not a full time student. In addition, clients must be from a non-English speaking background and a citizen or permanent resident – regardless of income support or be a temporary or provisional visa holder of a specified sub class. Clients must be assessed with language skills at National Reporting System (NRS) level 3 or above in all macro skills (oral communication, reading, writing and numeracy). In the case of vocationally specific courses only, numeracy may be at NRS level 2, provided all other macro-skills are at NRS level 3.

It is recommended that Commonwealth funded refresher bridging and upgrading programs should be available to full-time employed overseas qualified migrants who are seeking recognition.

Australian citizens returning after significant time overseas, who have completed most of their education overseas and hold overseas qualifications, often encounter difficulties in accessing Commonwealth-funded programs appropriate to their needs. Restrictions often apply to their enrolment in Commonwealth-funded English programs (e.g. AMEP) and to other Commonwealth-funded programs that assist with English, employment and/or recognition (e.g. LLNP).

It is strongly recommended that Australian citizens returning after significant time overseas with qualifications gained overseas should have access to programs (including English language programs) that will facilitate the recognition of their overseas qualifications and their opportunities for employment.

4.3.4 Availability of documentary evidence

Many migrants do not bring documentary evidence of their qualifications and employment experiences to Australia. In particular, spouses of primary applicants appear to be unaware of the importance of transcripts of academic records and original copies of qualifications for obtaining recognition in Australia.

For migrants from war torn countries, a further issue may be that the awarding authority is no longer operating. For other migrants, changes to educational systems may result in little information being available initially about the new systems. The *Overseas Skills Advisory Service (OSAS)* will accept statutory declarations but only in limited circumstances.

If migrants are unable to access documentation from the originating country, there may be concerns surrounding fraudulent documentation. It is imperative that the Commonwealth government continue to work closely with originating

countries to implement processes for determining authentic documentation. The Overseas Qualification Conference, held annually, should continue to give priority to this issue.

It is essential that DIMIA inform families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and, wherever possible, humanitarian entrants of the importance of having transcripts of academic records and original copies of qualifications available for recognition purposes when they arrive in Australia.

4.3.5 Translation of documents

DIMIA currently provides a fee-free document translating service for eligible visa holders (permanent visa holders in the main) who have been in Australia for less than two years. This service is, however, quite limited and applies only to the highest educational/vocational qualification and is limited to not more than 100 words of translation unless there are exceptional circumstances.

It is strongly recommended that DIMIA facilitate recognition processes, particularly for families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants by extending its fee-free document translating service to incorporate:

- transcripts of academic records required for recognition purposes
- all employment certificates that establish requisite on-the-job training for the recognition of trade skills
- documents that attest to off-the-job training required for issuing a trade certificate.

Humanitarian entrants are often unable to provide evidence of their education and employment history. They complete statutory declarations relating to their academic record and their on-the-job and off-the-job training.

DIMIA should consider extending fee-free translation policy to statutory declarations completed by humanitarian entrants who are seeking skills recognition.

4.4 Early identification and response

4.4.1 Information requirements on pre-arrival qualifications and occupations

There is a need for comprehensive data about the pre-arrival occupations and qualifications of overseas qualified entrants and their post-arrival occupational outcomes to inform the planning of bridging, refresher and upgrading courses.

Data relating to the pre-arrival qualifications and occupations of entrants which are not subject to the requirements of the Skill Migration Program do not appear to be collected, analysed or disseminated by DIMIA or other Commonwealth government agency. There is also a lack of available

information/data relating to these entrants' use of their overseas qualifications and skills in Australia.

To address these issues it is strongly recommended that data on the occupation, qualifications, age, English language proficiency levels and local government area of intended residence of family members of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants be made available to government agencies for planning purposes.

It is also recommended that DIMIA consider researching the post-arrival experiences of families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants in its Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia.

It is further recommended that DIMIA make data available in relation to entrants who gained recognition pre-arrival (skill stream migrants) and those who will seek skills recognition post-arrival (families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants with overseas qualifications and skills) including their:

- *Australian Standard Classification of minor occupations prior to arrival*
- *local government area (LGA) of intended residence*
- *country where qualifications were completed*
- *English proficiency levels/groups.*

There is also a need for program planning to be informed by trend data in relation to post-arrival assessment outcomes for skill stream and other entrants who:

- are required to obtain registration or a license post-arrival to practice their occupation, or
- seek membership of professional associations (for example, engineers, accountants) to increase their employment opportunities.

It is strongly recommended that assessing authorities consider making trend data available in relation to overseas entrants whose qualifications are deemed not completed or whose trade assessments are not successful post-arrival.

4.5 Employer awareness and acceptance

4.5.1 Employer expectations

OSAS advises that even following an OSAS assessment employers may seek further information from OSAS about the nature of qualifications. OSAS has reported that their assessed qualifications are regarded with suspicion by employers. This applies especially to generalist qualifications.

Technical or professional qualifications often can be assessed by a regulatory authority, although clients have reported conflict over decisions arrived at by

these authorities, compared with their pre-migration expectations and understanding.

There is also evidence that entrants with overseas skills and qualifications are unsuccessful in the labour market because employers deem them to have insufficient experience in their occupation in Australia².

It is strongly recommended that the Commonwealth Government consider establishing an employment program to provide up to six months' work experience so that migrants with overseas qualifications and skills are able to obtain the local work experience sought by employers.

4.6 National consistency in licensing arrangements

Training Packages are "sets of nationally endorsed standards and qualifications for recognising and assessing people's skills" and describe the competencies (skills and knowledge) needed to perform in the workplace. The competency standards within each Training Package outline the performance criteria, evidence requirements and qualification outcomes. There are industries where Training Packages are not used, or partly used by regulators as the basis for determining competency for licensing purposes.

Licensing arrangements vary between states and territories and within industry for the recognition of both skills and qualifications.

New South Wales has agreed to participate on the Commonwealth-State working group proposed by the Prime Minister that will, inter alia, assist in developing and implementing cooperative approaches to overcome the current licensing impediments.

4.7 Alternative approaches to skills assessment and upgrading

4.7.1 National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR)

The National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition's (NOOSR) assessments of overseas qualifications are primarily for employment purposes and are often not appropriate for assessment for study purposes. It is recommended that the TAFE NSW practice of developing resources to guide assessment for entry and/or advanced standing in TAFE NSW courses be considered as a model of good practice and be adopted nationally.

4.7.2 Alternatives recommended by NSW Police

NSW Police has identified several critical areas for improvement to the way in which skills are assessed prior to and upon arrival for entrants under the skills program, as well as those under the migration, humanitarian and family streams who seek registration, assessment or upgrading of skills upon arrival. These include:

² Source: DIMIA 2003 *Report of the Review of settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants, commonwealth of Australia, Canberra*

- Stringent and objective security qualification checks for entrants prior to recruitment in high risk professions such as medicine
- Adequate and appropriate induction, training and support for newly arrived professionals in regional and rural areas, without compromising standards for security and qualification checks in the hope of attracting greater numbers in such locations
- Greater availability of and accessibility to individual case coordination support for newly arrived migrants under the skilled migration program, especially in light of the recent disestablishment of the Specialist Migrant Placement Officer program. The absence of such support for skilled migrants, note NSW Police, ignores the reality that, regardless of the program under which they enter, most new arrivals and their families are subject to the pressures of settlement that may make them vulnerable to depression, suicide, family violence and antisocial influence, behaviour and alliances.
- Standards and practices for migration agents, particularly unethical or criminal practices with reference to licensing.

4.7.3 Future directions recommended by the NSW Department of Health

NSW Health has been actively involved in the RACS/ACCC Review of the Assessment of Overseas Trained Surgeons.

This review has made a wide-ranging set of recommendations designed to achieve a more objective, transparent and efficient process. Included among these recommendations are:

- objective curriculum/competency based assessment criteria;
- streamlined assessment by a dedicated assessment unit;
- oversight of practices by an external body (possibly the AMC); and
- consideration of a form of mutual recognition for overseas specialist courses.

Through the ACCC/AHWOC Review of Other Medical Colleges, it is anticipated that many of these recommendation will be transferred to other specialties, as well as to general practice.

4.8 Moving to greater national consistency

NSW is aware that DIMIA is developing a national portal to house information concerning Australia's skills assessment and recognition processes. The portal, a kind of internet gateway, will help to provide a "one stop information shop" for migrants needing information about skills recognition and licensing processes, once they arrive in Australia. It is essential that the portal hold state and territory specific information related to skills recognition, upgrading and licensing arrangements.

Steps must be taken to ensure the currency of the information.

6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

DIMIA should ensure that families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and, wherever possible, humanitarian entrants are informed of the importance of having transcripts of academic records and original copies of qualifications available for recognition purposes when they arrive in Australia.

Recommendation 2:

DIMIA, DEWR and DEST should work in collaboration with relevant State and Territory agencies including the NSW Department of Education and Training, in particular, State Training Services and TAFE NSW, to develop State and Territory-specific information strategies.

Recommendation 3:

DEST and DEWR should review the availability and appropriateness of Commonwealth programs in order to maximise skilled migrants' integration into the Australian labour market in jobs related to their previous qualifications and skills. Particular regard should be given to the availability of bridging, refresher and upgrading training programs that:

- provide specifically designed modules to facilitate recognition and understanding of local legislation, standards and practices
- incorporate Australian workplace orientation modules (cross-cultural communication skills, job-seeking skills, OH&S etc)
- provide integrated English language training
- provide for local work experience opportunities in the skilled migrant's field of expertise, and
- can be accessed by the under-employed.

Recommendation 4:

Commonwealth-funded refresher bridging and upgrading programs should be available to full-time employed overseas qualified migrants who are seeking recognition.

Recommendation 5:

Australian citizens returning after significant time overseas with qualifications gained overseas should have access to programs (including English language programs) that will facilitate the recognition of their overseas qualifications and their opportunities for employment.

Recommendation 6:

DIMIA should consider facilitating recognition, particularly for families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants by extending its fee-free document translating service to incorporate:

- transcripts of academic records required for recognition purposes
- all employment certificates that establish requisite on-the-job training for the recognition of trade skills
- documents that attest to off-the-job training required for issuing a trade certificate.

Recommendation 7:

DIMIA should consider fee-free translations of statutory declarations completed by humanitarian entrants who are seeking skills recognition

Recommendation 8:

Data on the occupation, qualifications, age, English language proficiency levels and LGA of intended residence of family members of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants should be made available by DIMIA to government agencies for planning purposes.

Recommendation 9:

DIMIA should consider researching the post-arrival experiences of families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants in its Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia.

Recommendation 10:

DIMIA should make data available in relation to entrants who gained recognition pre-arrival (skill stream migrants) and those who will seek skills recognition post-arrival (families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants with overseas qualifications and skills) including their:

- Australian Standard Classification of minor occupations prior to arrival
- local government area (LGA) of intended residence
- country where qualifications were completed
- English proficiency levels/groups.

Recommendation 11:

The Commonwealth Government should consider establishing an employment program to provide up to six months' work experience so that migrants with overseas qualifications and skills are able to obtain the local work experience sought by employers.

Recommendation 12:

The TAFE NSW practice of developing resources to guide assessment for entry and/or advanced standing in TAFE NSW courses should be considered as a model of best practice for possible adoption by other educational institutions.

Recommendation 13:

The Commonwealth Government should consider the establishment of a one-stop recognition information, referral and advisory service catering for the recognition of trade and professional skills and qualifications at a state and territory level and that this service cater for the differing language and educational backgrounds of migrants.

Recommendation 14:

That work continue at a national level, such as being taken by the Overseas Qualifications Conference, to address issues of quality in assessment documentation.