

Other issues in overseas skills recognition

Introduction

- 7.1 This chapter covers other issues relating to skills recognition and licensing that impact on the mobility and employment of overseas trained workers in Australia. These issues include English language proficiency, acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers, work experience, early identification of skills and bridging courses. The chapter also considers the particular difficulties facing humanitarian entrants. Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion on document and identity fraud issues.

English language skills

- 7.2 As Australian research has reinforced, 'English language proficiency stands out as a key factor determining the ease of settlement and labour market success of immigrants'.¹ This point was also supported

1 Productivity Commission, *Economic Impacts of Migration and Population Growth*, p. xxii. See also Birrell et al, *Evaluation of the General Skilled Migration Categories*. On the importance of English language proficiency to successful migration employment, as indicated in LSIA data, see Richardson, *Changing Labour Force Experience of New Migrants*, pp. 59-71.

in evidence to the inquiry. For example, Certified Practising Accountants (CPA) Australia commented that:

The level of English language skills of candidates seems to be the greatest barrier to the skilled migration process. Our experience of skilled migration applicants tells us that important processes are often not met due to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of information. The required minimum English language level for skilled migration may need to be increased so as to assist migrants accessing employment in the longer-term.²

7.3 Under the General Skilled Migration (GSM) program, English language skills form an essential part of the recognition process. The Australian Skilled Recognition Information (ASRI) website states:

You must have sufficient English language ability to be able to work in Australia. This is known as 'vocational' English. Generally, you will be required to sit the International English Language Testing System test to evidence your English language ability.

A higher level of English may be required for certain occupations. You can find out if your occupation requires a higher level of English by contacting the assessing authority for your nominated occupation.³

7.4 Additional points under the GSM program points test are awarded if the applicant demonstrates higher than 'vocational' English.⁴ To demonstrate vocational English, an applicant must achieve a band score of at least 5 on all components of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test: speaking, reading, listening and writing.⁵ Australia's health professions, however, require a higher level of English ability and have mandated IELTS band 7 as the lowest allowable standard for clinical registration.

7.5 English language skills play a vital part in a migrant's search for work. Table 7.1, summarising data from the Department of

2 CPA Australia, *Submission No. 39*, p. 2.

3 DIMA website, <http://www.immi.gov.au/asri/background.htm#g> (accessed 24 July 2006).

4 There are currently concessions, under certain circumstances, to this requirement for some visas under the GSM program and ENS.

5 The IELTS provides an assessment of whether candidates are ready to work in an English speaking environment. The test can be taken at test centres around the world. Results are graded across nine bands: band 1, non-user to band 9, expert user.

Immigration and Multicultural Affairs' (DIMA) Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA), matches the employment status of migrants at six and 18 months after arrival with their assessment of their English language ability immediately after arrival.

Table 7.1 LSIA2—English proficiency and unemployment

English speaking ability immediately after arrival	Unemployment rate six months after arrival	Unemployment rate 18 months after arrival
English 1st language	14%	4%
Very well	16%	7%
Well	18%	11%
Not well	33%	26%
Not at all	16%	25%

Source DIMA, 'Migrant Labour Market Outcomes', Fact sheet No. 14, 22 April 2005, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/14labour.htm> (accessed 17 August 2006).

- 7.6 A number of recent reports have commented on the importance of English language proficiency on the labour market outcomes of migrants. One recent study has recommended a higher standard of English for skilled employment, particularly in the professions, and changes to the pre-entry IELTS levels for international students.⁶
- 7.7 CPA Australia, one of the assessing authorities for accountants (many international students have enrolled in accounting in seeking permanent migration to Australia), commented that its research had suggested that 'English language skills are the key determinant for gaining professional accounting employment':
- We would support any move by DIMIA to increase the English language competency requirement for skilled migration.⁷
- 7.8 With regard to requiring a higher standard of English for all skilled migrants, one witness suggested that consideration be given to raising English language requirements for particular professions rather than across the board:

... there was a discussion about lifting the IELTS score from 5 to 6 for all skilled migrants. To me, this is quite a blunt instrument and may impact on our ability to attract skilled

6 Birrell et al, *Evaluation of the General Skilled Migration Categories*, pp. 165-166.

7 Ms Nicholls, CPA Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 November 2005, p. 37.

trades. A preferred alternative is to look at the specific communication requirements for each occupation and to incorporate any higher IELTS scores that are required into the skills assessment process.⁸

- 7.9 In terms of English language proficiency for international students, DIMA commented to the Committee on the possible need to tighten up the English language requirements for people transferring out of the student stream and into the permanent resident scheme through the GSM program:

There was some suggestion that people were able to enter an Australian university and receive a degree but come out without necessarily the English language skills we would expect.⁹

- 7.10 It is important that the efficacy of the English language component of the migration program be monitored to ensure that it continues to meet its objectives, given the significance of this area to the overseas skills recognition process. In particular, the Committee believes there needs to be emphasis on workplace English language training. Evidence over the course of the inquiry highlighted that 'relatively small improvements in English speaking capacity would result in relatively large improvements in labour market status'.¹⁰
- 7.11 The Committee does not support increasing the IELTS requirement across all groups but rather favours a more targeted review of requirements on an occupation basis. The Committee also believes the English level competencies of migrants should continue to be monitored, particularly to ensure adequate vocational English standards, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Recommendation 45

- 7.12 **The Committee recommends that:**

a) applicants under the skills stream, employer sponsored (including Labour Agreements) and temporary visa categories such as the 457 visa be required to have vocational English as a minimum standard;

8 Mr Fitzhardinge, Western Australian Skills Advisory Board, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 November 2005, p. 3.

9 Mr Fox, DIMA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 27 March 2006, p. 37.

10 Engineers Australia, *Submission No. 76*, p. 6.

- b) the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs specify the manner in which language proficiency is assessed; and**
- c) an independent evaluation be conducted to ensure that consistent standards of English language competence are being applied.**

English language tuition and translation services

- 7.13 Witnesses emphasised the particular problems faced by migrants from a non-English-speaking background:

Non-English-speaking migrants are disadvantaged. They take between two and six years to upgrade their qualifications, depending on their level of language skill and the type of course that they have undertaken.¹¹

People with English as a second language (ESL) often have difficulty accommodating industry terminology or technical terms for their occupation.¹²

- 7.14 Migrants from a non-English-speaking background would benefit from English classes that ‘fast track acquisition of industry terminology and technical terms in their field’.¹³ The Committee supports the further investigation by DIMA of the merit of industry specific language courses.
- 7.15 Witnesses also emphasised the need to provide ‘easy to understand information to people from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background’ and to consult migrant specialists such as Migrant Resource Centres ‘to review written materials to ensure they are easy to understand by people from NESB’.¹⁴
- 7.16 English language tuition is provided by the Australian Government through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) to help newly-arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants (under certain visa categories) from non-English-speaking backgrounds settle successfully in Australia. (As discussed in Chapter 1, skills stream migrants under certain visa categories who have less than functional English incur an additional visa application charge.)

11 Dr Tilbury, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 November 2005, p. 56.

12 South Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, *Submission No. 99*, p. 1.

13 South Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, *Submission No. 99*, p. 1.

14 South Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, *Submission No. 99*, p. 1.

- 7.17 The program is available to those who have been assessed by DIMA as not having basic English skills. DIMA funds organisations in each state and territory to provide tuition through AMEP, which provides up to 510 hours of basic English language tuition to migrants and refugees from non-English-speaking backgrounds.
- 7.18 The Committee heard that 510 hours of English tuition was a 'one size fits all approach' that was insufficient for employment purposes, and that the eligibility of the program needed to be extended and based on need:¹⁵
- The 510 hours program is like the other immigration department programs. It is designed to bring people to a settlement level, which is basically a survival level ... It does not provide a level of services which enables anybody to be independent, to participate in society or to go and get a job, even the most basic job.¹⁶
- 7.19 Migrants and humanitarian entrants who are assessed by DIMA as having functional English are not eligible for tuition under AMEP. The Committee is concerned that those who do not qualify for English tuition, and those who have reached their maximum hours allocated, may still not have attained a level of English proficiency suitable for resuming their chosen occupations in Australia.
- 7.20 The Committee acknowledges the impact that extending the eligibility requirements for AMEP can potentially have on employment outcomes, particularly of humanitarian entrants. The Committee notes that DIMA did not extend the 510 hours following its 2003 review of settlement services, mainly due to a shortfall in past take-up. DIMA should include a general review of the 510 hour limit in its next review of settlement services.
- 7.21 The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) provides a document translation service and a 24 hour a day, seven days a week, telephone interpreting service to migrants with limited English skills. DIMA provides eligible clients (mainly those with permanent visas) with fee-free extract translations into English of certain personal documents necessary for their settlement in Australia.

15 See, for example, Mr Machar, Australian Refugee Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 November 2005, p. 64.

16 Mr Liston, Australian Refugee Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 November 2005, p. 63.

7.22 The Committee heard that for eligible visa holders DIMIA now funds only one document translation in each of the following categories: identity, relationship, facilitation, education and employment. However, witnesses observed that often translations are needed for multiple documents for skills recognition purposes.¹⁷ The Committee acknowledges the difficulties this may cause humanitarian entrants in particular, because of the requirements of government departments and assessing authorities for multiple documents to be translated:

These new arrangements have adverse impact on skills recognition and employment prospects for the newly arrived migrants who often need several documents in one category e.g. references from employers, and other training and educational documents. This also creates a barrier for accessing TAFE, University, other educational institutions and for State registration for trades.¹⁸

7.23 The current restriction on translating services also falls short of AEI-NOOSR and Overseas Qualification Unit (OQU) requirements:

Even under special request, DIMIA will only translate one transcript not any award documents ... AEI-NOOSR require both the award and transcript to be translated prior to assessment. We clearly have two Commonwealth bodies with conflicting policies. The WA OQU and other State OQUs require the same. Professional bodies require multiple and other documents to be translated and this is clearly specified on their application forms.¹⁹

Recommendation 46

7.24 The Committee recommends that the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs extend its fee-free document translating service, to provide for three documents in each category for each eligible visa holder.

17 See, for example, Mr Player, Western Australian Department of Education and Training, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 November 2005, p. 18.

18 Western Australian Government, *Submission No. 16*, p. 4.

19 Western Australian Department of Education and Training, *Submission No. 20*, p. 9.

Acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers

7.25 One of the Committee's terms of reference included identifying areas where Australia's procedures can be improved in terms of awareness and acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers. As DIMA commented:

Australian employers, in some parts of Australia, remain sceptical and perhaps risk averse in hiring people with skills from overseas. There is still an element of that around. There is still an element of people not hiring people from overseas who may actually have quite good English but, because of a strong accent or something, they may be reticent about taking that person on.²⁰

7.26 This comment was echoed in other evidence:

Some of the evidence that came through the reference group's inquiry suggests that employers are not always as welcoming of those with overseas qualifications as they are of people with local qualifications ...²¹

The skill-sets of some permanent migrants are being under-utilised in the Australian labour market, and it is clear that in some cases they are not valued as equivalent to Australian qualifications.²²

7.27 This area was raised as of particular concern when it involved employer acceptance of overseas qualifications for those from non-English-speaking backgrounds:

We ... interviewed 40 mainstream employers and asked them what they thought about employing people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, especially refugees, and they tend to see overseas qualifications from non-English-speaking countries, whether formally recognised or not, as something they cannot rely upon. This is again this point about formal recognition versus informal recognition. One can have formally recognised skills from a non-English-speaking country and employers just do not take them

20 Mr Rizvi, DIMA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 5 September 2005, p. 13.

21 Ms Jeremic, Training and Skills Commission SA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 November 2005, pp. 17-18.

22 Engineers Australia, *Submission No. 76*, p. 7.

seriously, so this is a problem that does not solely depend on whether skills are recognised or not.²³

- 7.28 The Committee was, however, pleased to hear that the Brotherhood of St Laurence had seen 'evidence of employers showing increasing awareness and acceptance of overseas qualifications, skills and experience'.²⁴ The importance of building local support networks and providing workplace cultural training to address this area cannot be understated. It is critical that an awareness be built of the value of overseas skills and culturally diverse workers to the workplace.
- 7.29 DIMA's *Living in Harmony Partnerships Program* promotes the benefits of diversity to Australian employers, business and regional areas to bring together business and migrant job seekers to make best use of the diverse skills and experience of this workforce.²⁵ DIMA's Australian skills expos and industry outsourced officers also further build awareness by industry and employers of the occupational skills of migrants.

Work experience—offshore and local

- 7.30 Work experience is another important part of the overseas skills recognition process and, like English language proficiency, assists in achieving optimum employment outcomes.
- 7.31 Under the GSM program, there are a range of work experience requirements where applicants must have been in a skilled occupation for specified periods immediately before applying. There is an exemption to the work experience requirement for those who have studied in Australia for two years or more – although this is currently under review, given the value placed by employers on work experience:

Last year we visaed something like 16,000 overseas students as permanent residents. They completed their studies and converted to permanent residence. Increasingly, however, employers are saying, 'The university degree is great, but we actually need a bit more,' and often that involves some sort of work experience, a professional year or something like that.²⁶

23 Dr Colic-Peisker, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 November 2005, p. 54.

24 Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Submission No. 23*, p. 2.

25 Living in Harmony program website, <http://www.harmony.gov.au/partnerships/index.htm> (accessed 2 August 2006).

26 Mr Rizvi, DIMA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 5 September 2005, p. 9.

- 7.32 The Committee heard many claims of a preference by Australian employers for local work experience:

... I see qualification recognition as the first step but a step that may not get people very far. One ... respondent said that the biggest problem was that his [offshore] work experience was not taken into consideration by employers at all. The fact that he had offered documents of qualification that were recognised did not mean anything to them. Interviewers told him, 'We are not interested in what you were doing before. We want to know about your work experience in Australia'.²⁷

I have actually had somebody who has migrated as an independent migrant come to me and say, 'I can't get work because they want Australian experience'.²⁸

- 7.33 As one witness summed it up:

... formal recognition may not mean much without finding a way to secure some Australian job experience and, via this experience, being able to provide Australian references.²⁹

- 7.34 While employers may look for local work experience, it is often as a way of obtaining reliable references:

Employers place great value on people being able to demonstrate their local skills by having a person speak to those experiences. The industry is very familiar with most of the major players, and they will respect particular opinions. Local work experience is invaluable. ... People who come here can then practice those skills and also become more aware of local requirements and even use that period to tease out whether there are any gaps and look at where we can provide some additional upgrading training to bridge those gaps.³⁰

- 7.35 The Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Workers Union of Australia (CEPU) argued that it is:

... not so much a problem with qualifications but a problem with employer's preferring employees with local experience. A solution to this may be some sort of Government sponsored

27 Dr Colic-Peisker, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 November 2005, p. 61.

28 Mrs Cunningham, Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development, Northern Territory, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 November 2005, p. 11.

29 Dr Colic-Peisker, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 November 2005, p. 54.

30 Mr Kingsley, Department of Education and Training, New South Wales, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2005, p. 7.

placement program which allows migrants who are successfully assessed as being trade equivalent are able to gain the requisite local experience that makes them able to gain local employment.³¹

7.36 The Committee's report, *To Make a Contribution: Review of Skilled Labour Migration Programs 2004*, further commented on this area and examined potential avenues for improving migrant access to local work experience. Submissions to that Committee urged that:

- employers be made more aware of the opportunities for employing skilled migrants;
- private companies be given some financial incentive to employ skilled migrants as is the case for trainees;
- cross cultural training should be provided to skilled migrants to help them to present themselves favourably to Australian employers and recruitment agencies;
- local support networks be created;
- short term bridging programs be provided for skilled migrants;
- tailored job-matching services or services be implemented to gain Australian work experience for each migrant ...
- more funding for existing programs for migrants be provided; and
- there be better coordination of notification of employment opportunities nationally.³²

7.37 The Committee noted a very similar range of comments over the course this inquiry. In particular, witnesses emphasised the importance of building local support networks and of training programs in workplace culture to assist migrants in presenting themselves favourably to Australian employers and recruitment agencies:

CPA Australia is currently working with the Department for Victorian Communities to offer a transition to work program for our migrant members in 2006. The program will focus on success strategies, interview skills, training and workplace communication skills. Professional bodies and government organisations have a role to play in assisting skilled migrants into professional jobs for which they are qualified.³³

31 CEPU, *Submission No. 87*, p. 7.

32 Joint Standing Committee on Migration, *To Make a Contribution: Review of Skilled Labour Migration Programs 2004*, p. 142.

33 Ms Nicholls, CPA Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 November 2005, p. 38.

- 7.38 The Committee notes that professional bodies, such as CPA Australia, could be further supported to deliver skilled migrant transition to work courses, noting that they have large networks of members and good industry contacts to facilitate this area.
- 7.39 The Committee also heard about the results achieved through a range of state based work experience programs. The Victorian Government funds migrant employment programs with work experience components, including the Skilled Professional Migrants Program delivered by the Adult Multicultural Education Service³⁴ and the Overseas Qualified Professionals Program delivered by the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE.³⁵
- 7.40 The Queensland Department of Employment and Training's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program includes work placement projects for unemployed migrants covering trades and professions. The Department also manages the Migrant Work Experience Program, delivered by Corporate Solutions Queensland, which provides training in administration.³⁶
- 7.41 The Western Australian Government's Employment Directions Network includes a work experience program:

We cover the insurance for people to undertake work experience. We also offer a very small amount of money just to help out with fares, because that is an additional cost and most of those people are on very limited incomes. We set targets that they have to meet when offering work experience opportunities to the general population, and particularly to migrants through the migrant resource centres, where we fund career services ... we are very well aware that eight of 10 jobs are never advertised, that people get them through networks and through things like work experience, through being in the environment and being able to demonstrate that they are capable of undertaking the tasks, so it is a very important pathway.³⁷

34 AMES Skilled Professional Migrant Program website, <http://www.ames.net.au/spmp#Article-30> (accessed 16 July 2006).

35 See Ms Tkalecic, Department for Victorian Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 November 2006, pp. 11-12.

36 Ms Arrol, Queensland Department of Employment and Training, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 March 2006, p. 45.

37 Ms Hull, Department of Education and Training, Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 November 2005, p. 29.

- 7.42 Some Migrant Resource Centres provide work experience programs funded by state government community grants schemes. Queensland's Multicultural Development Association runs an employment program covering resume writing, job search activities, and interview preparation, and an office administration work experience program through a multicultural community jobs plan scheme.³⁸
- 7.43 The Skillmax program in New South Wales aims to assist overseas trained people to better use and further develop their skills and qualifications through:
- Courses for newly-arrived skilled migrants in the language of job seeking and cross cultural understanding of the Australian workplace and job seeking practices
 - Courses for public servants from non-English speaking backgrounds who were working below the level of their overseas qualifications, skills and/or experience.³⁹
- 7.44 The Committee heard high praise for the New South Wales Government's Skilled Migrant Placement Program and the Migrant Career Development Program. The Skilled Migrant Placement Program provided holistic pathways to qualifications assessment, bridging courses and work experience. It is reported that over 5,000 migrants were assisted at an average cost of \$228 per person in the final 14 months of the program. The Migrant Career Development Program organised placements for skilled migrants in the public sector.⁴⁰
- 7.45 Some were critical of the New South Wales Government decision to terminate the Skilled Migrant Placement Program and the Migrant Career Development Program, and remove the work experience component from the Skillmax employment support program.⁴¹ It appears that a key barrier to the development of work experience programs is the inability of service providers to cover the cost of insurance:

38 Multicultural Development Association, *Submission No. 13*, p. 3.

39 New South Wales Government, *Submission No. 84a*, p. 2.

40 Ms Howell, Migrant Employment and Training Taskforce, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2005, pp. 21-22.

41 See Ms Rice, Migrant Employment and Training Taskforce, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2005, pp. 21-22.

... there is no funded service in New South Wales currently providing the required insurance to enable migrants to take up work experience placements.⁴²

- 7.46 A number of witnesses noted that gaining access to employment related support programs was impeded by the fact that migrants resident in Australia for less than two years, excluding humanitarian entrants, are not eligible for the full range of Job Network services. This is discussed below.
- 7.47 The facilitation of migrant employment was examined in depth in DIMA's review of settlement services in May 2003.⁴³ Another review of settlement services would be timely, given the dynamic nature of Australia's migration program and the comments received by this Committee on this area over the course of two inquiries.

Recommendation 47

- 7.48 **The Committee recommends that the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs explore local work experience initiatives in a further review of migrant settlement services in 2007.**

The review should consider the development of new service options for migrants and humanitarian entrants that would allow them to gain work experience early on in their job search and provide them with scope to combine work experience with English language and other training elements, with a particular emphasis on workplace culture and use of technology. The role of professional bodies in providing transition to work programs should also be considered. This review would also look at English language training, particularly industry specific language courses.

Early identification of skills

- 7.49 A significant number of people who enter Australia through the humanitarian stream, or through a range of family reunion visas, hold professional or trade qualifications in their country of origin:

42 Ms Rice, Migrant Employment and Training Taskforce, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2005, p. 17.

43 DIMA, *Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*, pp. 107-145.

The misconception often exists in the broader Australian community that if you are a refugee you are most likely to be uneducated and unskilled.⁴⁴

7.50 While research shows that refugees may be less educated than other migrants, this does not mean that as a group they have no skills at all. (The particular skills recognition issues facing humanitarian entrants are discussed below.)

7.51 At present there is no requirement for pre-arrival assessment of migrants arriving outside of the skills stream, including humanitarian entrants, and it was argued that:

There need to be more opportunities for pre-arrival assessment for those not coming under the skilled migration stream, and more accessible opportunities for pre-arrival recognition and upgrading for others should also be offered – for instance, for families of skilled migrants.⁴⁵

7.52 The need to consider what skills others beyond the skills stream migrant might bring was also raised by other witnesses:

[There is a] significant discrepancy between the level of service that is provided to a principal applicant when they are getting their skills assessed offshore as opposed to their spouse or partner or other qualified relatives who are skilled. There are two reasons why it is really important. One is that if they are not afforded a parallel process in terms of their recognition, there is a risk that Australia misses out on those skills. People are going to find it harder to get employment, it is going to take longer to get employment and there are issues about if, when people arrive, there is a delay in looking for and getting employment then there are implications for the family. So it impacts on the community and the family.⁴⁶

7.53 A delay in assessing what skills a migrant has, and in addressing any inadequacies in their capabilities, can have severe consequences. As researcher Dr Birrell has commented:

44 Ms Karanastasis, Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 November 2005, pp. 27-28.

45 Ms Rice, Migrant Employment and Training Taskforce, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2005, p. 16.

46 Ms Maddrell, Migrant Network Services (Northern Sydney), *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2005, p. 33.

Migrants who cannot gain rapid entry to the labour market in their fields of training are likely to struggle to ever do so partly because their skills are soon likely to become obsolete. They may require significant retraining (including training to enter alternative fields). This is a serious matter because since 1996 the Australian Government has rarely provided financial assistance to migrants needing labour-market bridging programs, nor provided any other form of income support in the first two years of settlement.⁴⁷

- 7.54 The way in which individuals with skills, particularly those entering in the humanitarian stream, are identified appears to be by word of mouth, and not at all systematic:

We have to depend on volunteer groups who look after them in their first six months after arrival and the migrant resource centres to hear about the qualifications that they have.⁴⁸

- 7.55 The Committee believes it would assist in the settlement process if a skills report on each individual could be done at the same time as the rest of their documents were processed. This would not be to the level of a full skills assessment, but should at least list previous work experience and qualifications. This information should be provided, with the individual's consent, to those groups involved in the settlement process and the relevant state or territory OQU. The OQUs, in consultation with those providing settlement services, would then have a starting point in identifying individuals who would benefit from bridging or other courses to enable their more rapid movement into work.

Recommendation 48

- 7.56 **The Committee recommends that the settlement process for those who have not undergone a skills assessment prior to arrival should include a listing of their qualifications and previous work experience, and that, subject to the individual's agreement, this information be made available to those involved in provision of settlement services and to the relevant state or territory Overseas Qualifications Unit.**

47 Birrell et al, *Evaluation of the General Skilled Migration Categories*, p. 163.

48 Mrs Andersch, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, *Transcript of Evidence*, 27 February 2006, p. 4.

- 7.57 The Committee also received evidence on the value of professional mentoring programs⁴⁹ and notes the professional mentoring initiatives in place in Australia.⁵⁰
- 7.58 As discussed in Chapter 6, the Committee noted the innovative online mentoring program provided in Canada called Canadainfonet and sees potential value in an online occupation mentoring program providing industry and state specific guidance on skills recognition before a migrant has entered Australia. Such a service would assist in establishing a professional network for migrants prior to settlement and be a source of informal information on skills recognition and licensing issues in particular occupations.

Recommendation 49

- 7.59 **The Committee recommends that the Departments of Education, Science and Training, and Immigration and Multicultural Affairs undertake a scoping study on the potential of an online professional mentoring program targeting prospective skilled migrants in Australia. Such a program would recruit industry volunteers to provide general advice to prospective migrants on skills recognition, licensing, employment and related matters, based on the Canadainfonet model described in Chapter 6 of the report.**

Bridging courses

Bridging courses in professions

- 7.60 One of the Committee's terms of reference is to identify areas where Australia's procedures can be improved, including in the early identification of and response to persons needing skills upgrading, such as through bridging courses.
- 7.61 Skills stream migrants may have skills gaps, which can mean delays in employment and time and cost to gain the skills required. The Committee notes the importance here of providing improved

49 For example see Ms Howell, Migrant Employment and Training Taskforce, and Ms Rice, Migrant Employment and Training Taskforce, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2005, p. 26.

50 For example, the Department of Health and Ageing funds the mentoring of overseas trained general practitioners in rural and remote areas, *Submission No. 37*, p. 3.

information to skills stream migrants about their professions before they arrive in Australia, such as through the occupational information on the new ASRI site, so that they may be able to address skills gaps before migration or prepare better for undertaking the necessary training on arrival.

7.62 As the Department of Education, Science and Training commented, there is an important link here with recognition of prior learning:

More generally within Australia I think everyone is interested in looking at how you can more effectively assess people's existing competencies and therefore minimise the amount of extra training they need to get an Australian qualification. If you can mirror that with overseas migrants then obviously you can again minimise the amount of additional training they might need to come up to Australian standards. So RPL is a very important aspect of streamlining recognition. That is the easy part. Saying how you actually do it is more complicated.⁵¹

7.63 There is existing bridging study assistance for overseas trained professionals under FEE-HELP:

You may be eligible for a FEE-HELP loan to undertake a bridging course to enable you to meet the requirements for entry to your profession in Australia. The loan is for the payment of tuition fees for a bridging course. You will need to be a permanent resident of Australia in order to enrol in a bridging course for which FEE-HELP applies, and there are other eligibility criteria.⁵²

7.64 A bridging course for overseas trained professionals involves undertaking higher education studies that enable an individual to meet specific academic or professional requirements for entry to a professional occupation in Australia. These requirements must be specified in an assessment statement.

7.65 An assessment statement is a written statement which:

- lists the studies, examinations and/or tuition and training programmes that you need to undertake successfully to meet the requirements for entry to your profession

51 Dr Jarvie, DEST, *Transcript of Evidence*, 27 March 2006, p. 23.

52 DIMA website, <http://www.immi.gov.au/asri/fees-assist.htm> (accessed 4 July 2006).

- is issued by an assessing body for a listed professional occupation.⁵³
- 7.66 The assessment statement will specify a pathway for a person to qualify for entry into their profession in Australia. It may specify that they should undertake:
- individual subject units from existing university courses recommended by the relevant assessing authority
 - courses to prepare [for] professional examinations required for recognition of your overseas qualifications in Australia; or
 - tuition and training programmes.⁵⁴
- 7.67 It is not necessary to be enrolled in what is normally regarded as a 'course' to be undertaking a bridging course for overseas trained professionals. Courses must not lead to a higher education award or exceed the equivalent of one year of full-time study.
- 7.68 The different groups seeking overseas skills recognition may have varying needs for bridging courses. For example, some family migrants and humanitarian entrants with skills and qualifications gained overseas may experience greater difficulty in meeting Australia's registration and licensing requirements.
- 7.69 Similarly, as discussed earlier with regard to medical practitioners, some skills stream migrants may benefit from closely targeted, limited bridging courses that rapidly enable them to successfully complete assessment and registration processes. The Committee heard from a number of assessing authorities/professional bodies that offer bridging courses.⁵⁵

Bridging courses in trades

- 7.70 A number of submissions made the point that there are few or in some cases no bridging courses available to allow migrants with some trade experience to reach the level often required for licensing.⁵⁶

53 DEST website, <http://www.goingtouni.gov.au/Main/Quickfind/InternationalStudents/BridgingCoursesForOverseasTrainedProfessionals.htm> (accessed 4 July 2006).

54 DEST website, <http://www.goingtouni.gov.au/Main/Quickfind/InternationalStudents/BridgingCoursesForOverseasTrainedProfessionals.htm> (accessed 4 July 2006).

55 See, for example, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, *Submission No. 5*, p. 2; and Australian Dental Council, *Submission No. 42*, p. 4.

56 See, for example, Noel Hewitt Associates, *Submission No. 1*, p. 1; Tasmanian Government, *Submission No. 77*, p. 3; and Queensland Government, *Submission No. 83*, p. 24.

7.71 Some bridging and refresher courses are offered in some states. For example, TAFE NSW offer programs in vocational areas including engineering, accounting, electrical, automotive and hairdressing. The courses 'have been specifically developed for overseas-qualified professionals, paraprofessionals and trades people seeking registration, licensing and employment'.⁵⁷

7.72 While many individuals would be prepared to undertake bridging or other courses to address gaps in their skill levels, often cost is a significant disincentive:

... they just do not have the money to pay up-front. Often, they cannot study because they have to work to feed the family. Even if they could do it part-time and repay it through a similar system like HECS, that would be good. Not all of our clients are university educated; they may have trade qualifications, but even for trade qualifications there could be some system put into place whereby they could pay it back once they have a job.⁵⁸

7.73 Others called for:

... an audit and assessment of current bridging courses in order to examine the efficacy and availability in all states and territories.⁵⁹

7.74 While the Committee heard many comments about the importance of bridging courses, it received very little evidence about the range of courses available, particularly in the area of trades; the costs and timeframes involved in those courses; and the degree to which those bridging courses then led to successful overseas skills recognition.

Recommendation 50

7.75 **The Committee recommends that, given the lack of consolidated information on bridging courses around Australia, the Department of Education, Science and Training undertake a detailed audit of the availability of such courses, the costs and time commitments involved, the uptake rate of various courses and, most importantly, the success rates of bridging courses in enabling individuals with overseas**

57 NSW Government, *Submission No. 84*, p. 14.

58 Mr Lewinski, Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 November 2005, p. 39.

59 Ms Karanastasis, Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 November 2005, p. 28.

qualifications to gain successful skills recognition. The results of the audit should be made publicly available – for example, on the Australian Skills Recognition Information website.

7.76 While it can be argued that, for those migrants arriving under the GSM and ESM programs, the pre-migration process should be sufficiently rigorous that the migrant is quickly able to obtain the necessary registration or licensing (if required) and commence work without any additional training, this may not always be the case. The Committee was advised that ‘the cost of getting qualifications recognised is a significant impost for all of these groups but for Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants, these costs can constitute a major barrier’.⁶⁰ This is, however, not the only impediment:

Recognition of qualifications is only the first step for many migrants and refugees with trades’ qualifications. The next step for many trades is to satisfy the appropriate licensing and registration to practice their trade in Australia. Meeting licensing and registration requirement also incurs significant costs. For example, the cost of recognition of qualifications and meeting licensing and registration requirements for electricians is over \$1000.⁶¹

7.77 There is no Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) equivalent system for the TAFE system in Australia. The Committee was conscious of the equity arguments applying if a special arrangement was provided for all skilled migrants and not for the general Australian population. However, the Committee does believe that special assistance should be available to those arriving under the humanitarian and refugee program to maximise their potential to join the work force and integrate as fully as possible into Australian society.

7.78 The Committee therefore believes that a loan scheme should be available to those humanitarian entrants who need to upgrade their skills through TAFE bridging courses.

60 Adult Migrant Education Services, *Submission No. 9*, p. 2.

61 Adult Migrant Education Services, *Submission No. 9*, p. 2.

Recommendation 51

- 7.79 **The Committee recommends the creation of a Higher Education Contribution Scheme type system to allow humanitarian stream entrants with some level of trade qualifications to undertake appropriate courses to enable them to work in their trade occupations.**

Job Network and social security

- 7.80 Job Network is made up of government, community and private organisations contracted by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) to provide employment services. A number of Job Network providers specialise in providing assistance to migrants and humanitarian entrants.⁶² However, while humanitarian entrants may access the full range of Job Network services,⁶³ other recently arrived migrants only have access to a limited range of Job Network services.
- 7.81 Under the *Social Security Legislation Amendment (Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Periods and Other Measures) Act 1997*, newly arrived residents are required to wait for a period of two years before they are eligible to receive most social security benefits, including Newstart, sickness, youth training, widow, partner, parenting, mature age allowances and special benefit payments. Humanitarian entrants are exempt from this requirement.
- 7.82 DIMA provides the following warning to migrants in regard to social security payments:
- It is very important to understand that you should have enough money to support yourself (and your dependents) for at least your first two years in Australia. There is no alternative government support program for people who cannot get social security payments.⁶⁴
- 7.83 Access to full Job Network services is tied to a migrant's eligibility for Centrelink payments. The Committee was advised that:

62 The Committee understands this varies markedly across Australia. For example, the Committee was advised that Queensland does not have a migrant specific Job Network provider (see Ms Arrol, Queensland Department of Employment and Training, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 March 2006, p. 52).

63 Migrant Employment and Training Taskforce, *Submission No. 18*, p. 11.

64 DIMA, *General Skilled Migration*, March 2006, p. 41. This information is repeated across other DIMA migration booklets.

There are current services, such as the Job Network, for example; however, overseas skills are not taken into account and Job Network staff often actively discourage migrants and refugees from seeking work in their field of expertise. Emphasis is on any job rather than relevant jobs and staff do have specialist knowledge. The Job Network is not as effective as specialist programs that have existed in the past in New South Wales and currently exist in other states such as South Australia, Queensland and Victoria.⁶⁵

... the Job Network program in general is designed to assist people to find any job, regardless of their skills, as quickly as possible. Job Network staff are under pressure to achieve outcomes and there is no incentive, resources or training for them to assist people through the recognition process. Migrants in the first two years of arrival are only eligible for an automatic resume matching service and are offered no individualized service through the Job network anyway, so there is a greater need for stronger support there.⁶⁶

- 7.84 As discussed below, the Committee considers that the terms of service under Job Network contracts have a particular impact on humanitarian entrants. As one witness explained:

Humanitarian program people do not even appear on the radar in Job Network. Job Network assumes ... that people coming into the system are either coming out of school or coming from previous employment.⁶⁷

- 7.85 The Committee heard recommendations that 'the two-year waiting period should be waived and should not be tied to eligibility for Centrelink benefits in respect of assistance offered by Job Network agencies'.⁶⁸

- 7.86 The Refugee Council of Australia noted, in regard to refugee and humanitarian entrants that:

Job Network providers ... are not financially remunerated for placing long-term job seekers in skill recognition procedures,

65 Ms Dunlop, Migrant Employment and Training Taskforce, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2005, p. 15.

66 Ms Rice, Migrant Employment and Training Taskforce, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2005, p. 17.

67 Mr Liston, Australian Refugee Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 November 2005, p. 62.

68 Multicultural Development Association, *Submission No. 13*, p. 5.

as a client needs to be placed in employment before this remuneration is received from DEWR. This leads to Job Network providers being encouraged to place difficult job seekers in employment that is not necessarily commensurate with their skills and qualifications as the process of assisting them with skills recognition is not financially lucrative.⁶⁹

- 7.87 It was suggested to the Committee that Job Network contracts should focus on placing humanitarian entrants into retraining and skills assessment rather than just any form of employment. Figure 7.1 provides an example of how Job Network can neglect the potential of refugees.

Figure 7.1 Case study—skilled refugee from Sierra Leone

Albert, aged 34 years, is a refugee from Sierra Leone and arrived in Australia early 2002. Albert holds a degree in engineering and several post-graduate degrees in Environmental Sciences and Project Management. He has extensive working experience ...

Upon his arrival in Australia, he had his qualifications assessed and while his undergraduate degree was not considered equivalent to an Australian degree his post-graduate qualifications were considered equivalent to similar Australian post-graduate awards. Armed with these assessments, as well as his extensive work experience, he approached several job network agencies to seek assistance finding appropriate employment. He was told by several agencies that his was a very 'specialised' area of work and they could not offer him work in this field. However instead of referring him to an agency that may be able to better assist, they insisted he consider working in factories or as a manual labourer, remarking that he was "a strong and healthy young man, able to lift heavy boxes." Albert replied that he also had a brain!⁷⁰

Recommendation 52

- 7.88 **The Committee recommends Job Network contracts be revised to enable the agency to assist eligible overseas qualified job seekers pursue (through additional training, for example) occupations in which they have existing skills and experience, rather than immediately place them in any position available, including unskilled positions.**

69 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission No. 35*, p. 3.

70 Centre for Learning and Social Transformation, *Submission No. 21*, p. 5.

Impact of skills recognition processes on humanitarian entrants

- 7.89 Earlier chapters have covered the general skills recognition and licensing issues of those arriving under the skilled migration program. One group, however – those arriving under the humanitarian program – faces particular issues in the area of skills recognition.
- 7.90 Just over 13,000 visas were issued under the humanitarian program in 2004-05. A similar number has been allocated for 2005-06. Several submissions to the Committee detailed the particular challenges facing this group, and this was supported by data from DIMA's Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA).
- 7.91 Unlike those who enter Australia through other migration streams, humanitarian entrants:
- have generally not played a role in choosing to settle in Australia (this is determined by the UNHCR and the Australian Government);
 - are more likely to have a limited understanding of Australian society, having not done any research;
 - are more likely to have departed their home countries in haste, without personal documents such as proof of employment and educational qualifications;
 - are not required to meet educational or language proficiency requirements and are more likely to have poor English skills;
 - have often faced extended periods of transit with disrupted education; and
 - are more likely to have experienced instances of persecution and torture/trauma prior to entering Australia, resulting in mental health conditions impacting on their ability to settle smoothly into the community.⁷¹

71 These points were raised by a number of witnesses and in submissions from the Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission No. 35*, pp. 1-5; the Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Submission No. 23*, pp. 1-5; South Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, *Submission No. 99*, pp. 1-2; and Ms Karanastasis, Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 November 2005, p. 28.

- 7.92 As stated by the South Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, the burden of skills recognition processes compounds the stress of settlement for humanitarian entrants:

Settlement issues which consume humanitarian entrants' time, energy and money when they first arrive in Australia, include; attending English classes, family, health and housing issues, schooling of children, concern for relatives in the country of origin, the need to secure a job quickly to bring money in to send home to family members in their country of origin. To be burdened with complicated recognition issues increases the stress associated with settlement.⁷²

- 7.93 Employers are generally not aware of the difficulties faced by humanitarian entrants.⁷³
- 7.94 LSIA data shows that settlement outcomes for humanitarian entrants have weakened in the period between the arrival of the LSIA1 and LSIA2 cohorts. Humanitarian entrants in the second cohort have experienced lower levels of employment, lower workforce participation rates, lower levels of income and more health problems and psychological distress.⁷⁴
- 7.95 The poorer settlement outcomes of humanitarian entrants are against the trend of improved settlement outcomes for migrants of other streams at LSIA2, and a general fall in the national unemployment rate from around nine per cent to 6.5 per cent between LSIA1 and LSIA2. During this period there have also been changes to the social security framework excluding non-humanitarian migrants from benefits in their first two years of settlement and refinements to the selection of skilled migrants.⁷⁵
- 7.96 DIMA's 2003 review of settlement services noted that the poorer outcomes for humanitarian entrants appeared 'largely as a consequence of changes within source countries for the humanitarian program, with the more recent intake appearing to have experienced greater instability and disruption to their lives before migrating to

72 South Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, *Submission No. 99*, pp. 1-2.

73 *Exhibit No. 10*, p. 13.

74 DIMIA, *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*, pp. 61-86.

75 DIMIA, *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*, pp. 61-86.

Australia'.⁷⁶ The report recommended further research and targeting of humanitarian entrants for settlement services.⁷⁷

- 7.97 The composition of Australia's humanitarian intake responds to changing international circumstances across the globe. Between LSIA1 and LSIA2, there was a substantial increase in the level of humanitarian entrants from Balkan countries, particularly the former Yugoslavia and Croatia. More recently, in 2004-05, Australia has received more humanitarian entrants from African countries (73 per cent), particularly Sudan, Liberia and Sierra Leone.⁷⁸
- 7.98 Humanitarian entrants who arrived at the time of LSIA2 had a history of greater instability than those that arrived at LSIA1. The African dominated LSIA3 entrants face the additional difficulty of having lower average schooling than the humanitarian entrants from Europe, and are more likely to have spent a longer time in refugee camps than humanitarian entrants from Africa in previous years.⁷⁹

Support for humanitarian entrants

- 7.99 Australia considers itself to be a leader in providing settlement support programs for humanitarian entrants.⁸⁰ Permanent humanitarian entrants can access:
- The Australian Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO), which provides an introduction to Australian culture and society to humanitarian applicants overseas;
 - The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS), which provides initial intensive assessment covering:
 - ⇒ Initial information and orientation assistance;
 - ⇒ Accommodation support;
 - ⇒ Household formation support;
 - ⇒ Early health assessment and intervention; and
 - ⇒ Proposer support.

76 DIMIA, *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*, p. 61.

77 The recommendations for humanitarian entrants were funded and implemented through new contracts with service providers which began in October 2005.

78 DIMIA, *Australia's Support for Humanitarian Entrants*, p. 19.

79 DIMIA, *Australia's Support for Humanitarian Entrants*, p. 24.

80 DIMIA, *Refugee and Humanitarian Issues: Australia's Response*, p. 40.

- 7.100 AUSCO and IHSS are delivered through contracted service providers. Volunteers also play a significant role in the delivery of IHSS services.
- 7.101 Holders of temporary humanitarian visas have access to government services in recognition of their temporary stay. These services include certain Centrelink benefits, Medicare benefits, eligibility for torture and trauma counselling and access to the Early Health Assessment and Intervention Program.⁸¹
- 7.102 DEST provides two programs that assist non-skills stream migrants gain recognition of their qualifications and skills: FEE-HELP, discussed above, and the Assessment Subsidy for the Disadvantaged Overseas Trained (ASDOT) professionals. ASDOT is discussed below.

Suggestions for improvement

- 7.103 Submissions and witnesses to the inquiry identified the need for clearer communication and better access to information on skills recognition and licensing arrangements for humanitarian entrants. It was recommended that:
- the role of AEI-NOOSR be more widely promoted to those involved with assisting the settlement of humanitarian entrants and training organisations;⁸²
 - AUSCO provide a clearer explanation of the Australian labour market to provide humanitarian entrants more realistic expectations about their employment prospects;⁸³ and
 - consideration be given to ‘providing such communication through settlement services that specifically target humanitarian entrants in order to facilitate a more coordinated and seamless service approach and avoid multiple service points’.⁸⁴
- 7.104 The Committee made a number of recommendations in regard to communication and information provision in Chapter 3.
- 7.105 The Committee recognises that AEI-NOOSR has improved the level of information on qualifications from refugee source countries:

81 DIMA, ‘Temporary Protection Visas’, Fact sheet No. 64, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/64protection.htm> (accessed 10 July 2006).

82 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission No. 35*, p. 4.

83 Refugee Council of Australia, *Submission No. 35*, p. 5.

84 Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia, *Submission No. 32*, p. 2.

One of the areas where NOOSR has improved its services is in providing a wider range of information about institutions in the countries from which we are currently sourcing refugees. That has helped the process immensely. For example, previously, we had absolutely no information in Victoria about the level of assessment of the qualifications of people coming in from Sudan. People had to forward their qualifications to Canberra, which meant that they had to pay a fairly high fee to get that advice.⁸⁵

7.106 The prohibitive cost of examination and retraining was also commented on in hearings and submissions.⁸⁶ Figure 7.2 provides an example of the hurdles confronting a pharmacist from Sudan seeking to practice his profession.

Figure 7.2 Case study—pharmacist from Sudan

I will give an example of a pharmacist from the Sudan. ... he understood that he had to do a bridging course but that the costs involved in that process were prohibitive. Firstly, on top of that, he had to pay to have his existing qualifications from the Sudan assessed—it was a considerable sum; I think he said it was \$800. Thereafter, he had to repay the cost of his studies through the HECS system—that was acceptable—but he had to pay \$1,800 for each exam and he had to do four exams, in the end. A man coming here with 10 children just could not afford the costs associated with bridging courses. He explained to me that he had to work for the first few years in order to save some money and support his family. ... most of our clients have explained to me that the cost factor was a major issue—and maybe extra support. I know that Centrelink give \$800 towards training and that goes a little of the way, but the majority of our clients just do not have that sort of money.⁸⁷

7.107 The ASDOT funding program provided by DEST aims to assist overseas trained Australians pay for the cost of examinations. In some instances, the cost of having professional qualifications assessed may also be covered under ASDOT. Assistance is available for one attempt only at each examination stage or assessment.

85 Ms Weaver, Adult Multicultural Education Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 November 2005, p. 40.

86 See, for example, Adult Multicultural Education Services, *Submission No. 9*, p. 2; Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia, *Submission No. 32*, p. 3; and South Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, *Submission No. 99*, pp. 1-5.

87 Mr Lewinski, Community Participation, Employment and Training, *Transcript of Evidence*, 14 November 2005, p. 29.

- 7.108 It was suggested that humanitarian entrants should automatically qualify for access to ASDOT to cover examination and assessment fees. ASDOT is intended for those in financial difficulty and applicants must be registered with Centrelink. Therefore, humanitarian entrants who are in work (often not in their professional field) may not be eligible as the criteria for ASDOT is very limited. ASDOT does not cover licensing and registration fees, is limited to twelve prescribed examinations and is not available to temporary protection visa holders.

Recommendation 53

- 7.109 **The Committee recommends that the Department of Education, Science and Training conduct a review of the Assessment Fee Subsidy for Disadvantaged Overseas Trained Australians to determine how well it is meeting the needs of humanitarian entrants and what could be done to improve its operation in this area, in terms of communication, coverage of occupations and the criteria for eligibility.**
- 7.110 It was also suggested to the Committee that humanitarian entrants would benefit if 'early assessment and support services could be integrated into the suite of settlement services provided through the IHSS and General Settlement programs'.⁸⁸
- 7.111 As noted earlier in this chapter, the Committee heard that the provision of a maximum 510 hours of English tuition under the AMEP was not sufficient to meet the particular needs of humanitarian entrants. The Committee acknowledges that an additional 100 hours is available to refugees and humanitarian entrants through the Special Preparatory Program.⁸⁹ However, the Committee remains concerned that in some cases this will still be insufficient to allow for the full integration of humanitarian entrants into Australian society.

Recommendation 54

- 7.112 **The Committee recommends that the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs monitor the use of English language tuition by humanitarian entrants and review the Adult Migrant Education Program to ensure that it meets the needs of humanitarian entrants.**

88 Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia, *Submission No. 32*, p. 3.

89 For details, see DIMA, 'English Language Tuition for Adult Migrants', Fact sheet No. 94, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/94amep.htm> (accessed 24 July 2006).

- 7.113 The Committee also heard that mentoring programs are particularly valuable for humanitarian entrants.⁹⁰ *Given the Chance* is an example of such a mentoring program. The program is provided by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and includes a 12-week labour market course and work experience components.⁹¹
- 7.114 The Victorian Government, for example, provides funding to various not-for-profit organisations and community groups, through schemes such as Workplace Participation Partnerships, Community Enterprise Grants and the Community Support – Strengthening Communities program, to assist the employment of migrants and humanitarian entrants.⁹²
- 7.115 The Committee acknowledges the value of mentoring programs, particularly for humanitarian entrants, and commends state governments for funding these initiatives through various community grants schemes.⁹³ The Committee encourages governments to support employment related mentoring programs targeting humanitarian entrants.

Document and identity fraud

- 7.116 While a detailed examination of the extent to which there is document and identity fraud in the skilled migration program is beyond the scope of this report, the Committee did receive some evidence in this area. DIMA, for example, stated:

We do look out for fraud in this area very carefully. We do identify people who have put forward documents purporting that they have various skills which we do checks on and find they are not what they said they were. It does happen. I believe we are quite effective at identifying those, but that is

90 Ms Howell, Migrant Employment and Training Taskforce, and Ms Rice, Migrant Employment and Training Taskforce, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2005, p. 26.

91 Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Submission No. 23*, pp. 4-5. For an overview of other mentoring programs and related issues, see *Exhibit No. 53*.

92 See Department of Victorian Communities website, <http://www.grants.dvc.vic.gov.au> (accessed 17 July 2005).

93 The Committee is aware that DIMA is considering expanding its Settlement Grants program to include employment mentoring. See speech by Hon Andrew Robb, AO, MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *Change in Culture*, at the Victorian Immigration and Settlement Conference, Melbourne, 19 July 2006.

not to say a very small percentage may not be getting through in that way.⁹⁴

- 7.117 In terms of the capabilities of assessing authorities to detect fraud, DIMA also commented:

We do work with all assessing bodies to try and mitigate fraud in their part of the process, but we do not actually conduct the investigations generally for those agencies. The exception to that is VETASSESS: DIMA and VETASSESS have an agreement whereby VETASSESS can refer documents to the immigration department. We will have them checked through our posts overseas or through our mechanisms and provide them with advice. Since that process has been in place, they have only made 92 referrals to us, which have resulted in one non-genuine document and five that could not be verified, while 62 have so far been found to be genuine.⁹⁵

- 7.118 While the Committee notes these arrangements for VETASSESS and also is aware of the arrangements put in place by some assessment authorities such as the Australian Medical Council to prevent identity fraud,⁹⁶ it is concerned that other assessing bodies may not have the same capacity to implement fraud detection systems.

Recommendation 55

- 7.119 **The Committee recommends that the Departments of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and Education, Science and Training review the current processes followed by assessing authorities to determine if further steps need to be taken to combat document and identity fraud.**

Don Randall MP
Chair

94 Mr Rizvi, DIMA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 5 September 2005, p. 14.

95 Mr Stewart, DIMA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 27 March 2006, p. 36.

96 See Mr Frank, AMC, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2006, pp. 14-15.