

Senate Inquiry into Expatriate Australians

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Introduction

At 58 years old I have had a career in social work in the UK and Australia, I have run my own businesses and carried out academic research. Migrating to Australia with my husband and children I have had the privilege to become a nationalised Australian. We have been ex-pat Brits in Australia and are currently ex-pat Australians in the UK. Together with my husband we are now actively planning our re-entry program in to Sydney. Much of our experience relates to the inquiry but I focus this submission on repatriation as I have conducted and published research on this topic.

Personal Story

My brief personal history is as follows

Born UK 1946, graduate with social work diploma and MA in business studies.

Married 1966, two daughters.

Nine major location moves within the UK with four international relocations. (UK to Australia 1980, Australia to the UK 1983, UK to Australia 1983, Australia to the UK 1991.)

Took up privilege of nationalisation in 1984 and settled permanently in Sydney.

Established one of Australia premier relocation consultancies in 1988.

Husband offered a two-year posting in London in 1990.

Sold the consultancy in 1990.

Joined husband in London 1991 leaving house and children in Sydney.

About to return home permanently in 1993 when a business opportunity arose for husband.

Two daughters joined us in London in 1992 and 1998; both now permanently settled in London

Home rented out.

Plans crystallising for return to Sydney in 2005

Repatriation

Building on my experiences of running a relocation consultancy in Sydney I conducted research in London on the issue of repatriation in conjunction with the University of Westminster and the Confederation of British Industry. The thesis was published in 1993 and followed by a summary paper in July of that year. A copy is enclosed.

The points I would highlight for this inquiry are as follows:

There was a very wide sample base; the companies responding had over 700 returnees in the year in question and the number of individuals recorded overseas was over 1,400. Although based on UK companies the issues would be similar in Australia

There is extensive help given to expatriates

Help is almost non-existent for repatriates as it is assumed that "coming home" is easy

Employers reported biggest concerns were finding right job, education and housing

Employees though reported concerns on loss of autonomy, the need for debriefing (so it has not all been wasted), partner's adaptation and tax

Both reported concerns over re-integration

The negative in all this was that resignation levels are high over the two years following repatriation as individuals struggle with a non-job, lack of promised promotion and difficulties in settling back in.

Also attached is a copy of the concluding page in the thesis.

So what happens when expatriates return to Australia?

There is little or no help and little interest in their experiences gained and contacts made.

How many then stay for just two-three years and then move away again?

Does this matter?

Suggestions for Australia

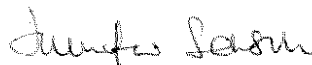
From the above I make a few professional suggestions,

1. Quantify the number of repatriates each year and measure their length of return.

2. If there is considerable "leakage" conduct research to establish the reasons; they are probably few in number.
3. Establish a pro-active contact network for ex-pat Australians with the aim to keep them involved in Australian matters. (They will inevitably 'go native' if there is no interest or regular contact made with them)
4. Ensure that any returning ex-pat has a welcoming re-entry program that is flexible enough to welcome any non-Australian partner.

From my own experiences, I make the following additional observations,

5. Whilst frequent visits have been made each year with the view to resettling back in Sydney in 2005, our links with Australia are weakened by the fact that both daughters consider themselves to be 'citizens of the world'. Perversely this is the consequence of their Australian upbringing and their ability to fit in anywhere.
6. As a result of point 5, there is strong likelihood that 'children' of the repatriate family will not return to help with their parents needs on retirement. Is this big enough to be a problem?


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15.02.04