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**RETRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT OF RECENT MIGRANTS AND
REFUGEES IN NEW ZEALAND: THE MYTH AND THE REALITY.**

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ABSTRACT

Changes in New Zealand immigration policy in 1986 and again in 1991 opened the immigration gate to a large number of professionals from the Third World and Eastern Europe. Coupled with the large refugee intake, the number of recent migrants and refugees in New Zealand from the Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe and Africa has increased exponentially in the past decade. The downturn in the economy in the past five years has had serious implications in the employment market for refugees and recent migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) with overseas qualifications (Henderson et al 1998, Smith 1994). This paper examines the prospects and problems associated with retraining as a strategy to enable overseas professionals from NESB to break into the professional employment market (Opara 1998). It posits the questions 'is retraining for professional employment reality or myth'?

RETRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT OF RECENT MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN NEW ZEALAND: THE MYTH AND THE REALITY.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The number of professional migrants from non-English speaking background (NESB) coming to New Zealand has continued to increase as the supply of skilled migrants from the traditional sources, particularly the United Kingdom and Australia, has declined in the recent past. Between 1995 and 1998 the percentage of migrants coming to New Zealand in the general skills category from these traditional sources has declined to less than 35 percent in 1998 compared to 53 percent in 1995 (New Zealand Immigration Service 1999B). The primary implication of this trend is that the average professional migrant requires some form of retraining to make the maximum contribution to the economy and also to realise their full potential. Recent studies have shown that NESB migrants have a 'substantially longer entry disadvantage' and a much lower income participation than their New Zealand born counterparts (Winklemann & Winklemann 1998, p48). Australian studies have come to similar conclusions (Birrell and Hawthorne 1997 pp 71-73).

Many professional migrants leave the safety and relative comfort of employment in their country to move to other countries on the presumption that their qualifications and experience will give them entry into their professions in the new destination. In New Zealand the non-recognition of professional qualifications by professional associations has serious implications for the realisation of the migrants' desire to make productive use of their qualifications and experience as well as the loss to the community of investment in recruiting professional migrants into the economy.

It has been suggested that the most effective way of realising the full benefits from professional migrants is to retrain them in their professional areas (Opara 1998, Department of Internal Affairs 1996). The presumption is that there are appropriate avenues for retraining and that retraining will necessarily provide the professional migrants entry into their professions in New Zealand. This paper questions these presumptions. It argues that there is discord between planning and delivery of retraining for both the professional migrants and the community. It suggests that to realise the full potential of professional immigrants there is the need to re-examine the nature of retraining for professional migrants and to access what is available and could be available, what is appropriate and will produce the best outcomes. The paper is divided into four main sections. Following this brief introduction, section two critically examines the nature of re-training programmes for professional migrants in New Zealand. Section three provides a brief summary of the methodology of the broader research, which this paper is part of, and examines the problems associated with retraining of professional migrants for professional employment. Section four provides a model of harmony and discord for the retraining of professional migrants. The conclusion provides some policy recommendations for maximising the outcomes of retraining professional migrants for both the individual migrant and the community.

2.0 THE NATURE OF RETRAINING OF PROFESSIONAL MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN NEW ZEALAND

The concept of who is a professional migrant has no universally accepted definition. In New Zealand different departments and ministries have different definitions of the concept. For example, Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) defines a professional migrant as any person with a tertiary qualification. The department of immigration on the other hand, avoids the concept of profession all together and awards points on the basis of tertiary qualifications that are comparable to a New Zealand qualification. However, in claiming points for a qualification in an occupation where New Zealand law requires professional registration the prospective migrant is required to have gained full provisional registration before points can be awarded. A clear definition is obviously the starting point for a clear policy for the retraining of professionals for employment. In the current flux of definitions, the design of retraining programmes by providers can at best be described as unclear and a non-level playing field both to those providing and those undertaking the retraining.

2.1 The Problems of retraining for professional employment

There are serious concerns as to what constitutes an equivalent qualification in the New Zealand context. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), the agency responsible for assessing overseas qualifications for all immigrants, often accepts qualifications as equivalent only for the professional organisations to turn around and refuse to accept the qualifications. There is therefore discord between the recommendations of the NZQA and the final outcome for the professional standing of the migrant.

For migrants undertaking retraining for professional employment, there is also the problem of cross credit for courses undertaken towards New Zealand qualifications. For example many English language courses in New Zealand that are offered to recent migrants are not credit bearing, and so ineligible for cross credit towards a qualification. Moreover, these courses are often site or institution specific, therefore not portable from one institution to another.

There is further tension between professional knowledge and communicative language skills. The professional migrant usually has a sound knowledge of their profession in the language and context of their study and training. They may have difficulty in communication in English language. The question is what proportion of the retraining should focus on the every day communicative language and on the language of the profession as used in New Zealand? For example is the every day communicative English sufficient for the professional practice in medicine or engineering? A New Zealand Herald report in September 1999 quoted the Medical Council thus:

“The council found that 10.6 per cent of the doctors were inadequate or poor in one or more of the assessment areas which included competence in English, medical knowledge, ethical standards, practical skills, initiative and judgement”. New Zealand Herald 14 September 1999, p6.

Considering the number of migrant medical professionals, 10.6 per cent is a relatively small number to constitute the national problem. What is required is for the medical council and such other professional bodies to dialogue with the training establishments for a co-ordinated system of retraining for the professional migrants to address the identified areas of deficiency.

The tension extends to the language skills required for effective negotiating at work, the nuances of language to communicate effectively with customers, work mates, the general public and professional colleagues. Access to employment requires the understanding of the networks with which the professional works. This enables the professional to access information, resources and people and establish contacts for their professional development.

2.2 What retraining programmes are available for professional migrants in New Zealand?

A survey of the professional organisations and the tertiary institutions shows that there is very little offered for the retraining of recent migrants with professional skills to enable them to bridge the skills gap between their previous professional training and experience, and the requirements of professional bodies in New Zealand. The majority of retraining courses offered are in English language skills. The courses range in duration from a few weeks to as long as six months. They range from casual language corners undertaken by members of the community at public parks, home tutoring, evening classes at high schools and adult classes, high schools and specialist language schools, to full fee paying students in both public and private tertiary provider establishments. In the Auckland region alone there are over 300 English language programmes (figures estimated by the authors from phone calls to CABs, November 1999).

On the other hand a survey of the professional organisations and the tertiary institutions shows that there is limited level of retraining offered in professional areas for recent migrants with professional skills. The majority of courses offered are not aimed at bridging the skill gaps (up-skilling) within the migrant's current professional area, but providing New Zealand qualifications. Migrants often have to change their professions. For example, the number of professional migrants enrolling in new courses outside their professional training in 1998 was 50 per cent. In 1999 for example, 90 per cent of migrants enrolling in

the UNITEC business computing courses had tertiary qualifications in their professional areas prior to migrating to New Zealand.

The lack of courses for skills bridging in the professional areas has serious implications for the settlement of professional migrants in New Zealand. It means that the professional migrant is less likely to make productive use of their professional training, which constituted the basis for their admission into the country in the first instance. Winkelmann and Winkelmann suggest that this leads to a low return on their university qualification, 33 per cent compared to 46 per cent for migrants from English speaking backgrounds (Winkelmann and Winkelmann 1998, p56).

The result is that professional migrants from NESB are forced into re-entering tertiary training for the same or similar qualifications for the same or similar lengths of time as they had achieved prior to migration. Their entry into employment in their area of professional training is therefore delayed. This is further complicated by changes in funding and education support policies. For example, recent changes in student allowances and student loans schemes have meant that migrants applying for student loans for tertiary studies require two years New Zealand residence (New Zealand Government 1998). Fully government subsidised English language courses for migrants with professional qualifications, funded through Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ), are also in decline. There is a huge disparity between the number of places and the demand for the courses. Another hurdle on the way of retraining is the requirement for the prospective re-trainee to have been registered unemployed with WINZ for a minimum of 18 weeks before they can access free English language training. The combined effect of these policies is the decline in the availability of English language courses. In the School of Languages at UNITEC for example the enrolment of migrants into the certificates and diplomas of English language dropped substantially in 1999 as a result of the new policy.

Skills New Zealand also subsidizes training in English language and a range of mainstream subjects such as computing, business and tourism. These courses are aimed at non-professional migrants as they explicitly exclude migrants with tertiary level qualifications.

The general conclusion from this survey is that there is very little discourse between the professional organisations that will ultimately register the migrant professionals, the retraining providers and the re-trainees. Invariably the needs of none of the primary actors in the retraining process are met. Consequently reports of highly skilled professional migrants unable to practice their skills in New Zealand have become quite a serious community issue (see for example New Zealand Herald 19th and 20th November 1999). Friendship House in Manakau City reported in August 1999 that there were a number of professional migrants including those with:

‘PhDs unable to find a job who have ended up washing dishes for use in the center’s kitchen so they can feel productive. We have seen a number of immigrants who are suicidal over the situation they have found themselves’ (Crosslink Aug 1999).

Similarly, the Race Relations Conciliator is reported to estimate that there are nearly 500 immigrants with medical qualifications who are unable to gain professional employment in New Zealand. The result is that a large number of professional migrants are working in low skilled jobs or remain unemployed for long periods of time (The Jobs Letter, 13 August 1999).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research that provides the framework for this paper is a longitudinal study using questionnaires, interviews and ethnographic qualitative data from both professional and non-professional migrants and refugees. The sample is taken from the group of migrants and refugees undertaking the certificate course in ‘Employment Skills English’ in the School of Languages, UNITEC. The group consists of fully funded training by WINZ for migrants with professional qualifications, fully funded training for long term unemployed under the Skills New Zealand programme, and private full fee paying students. The courses run for six months. Students that graduate from these courses are expected to have acquired sufficient language skills to enter full time employment in their professional areas.

Ten cohorts of students are to be studied over a period of ten years. Each actual cohort sample size is set to vary between 30 and 45 students. This sample size is set to account for the fluctuations in numbers on courses, and to insure an adequate sample size over the ten-year period (300 to 450 students). Each cohort receives an initial questionnaire, which is administered at the end of the course. It then receives a follow up questionnaire six months after graduation, and then every six months thereafter for five years. A 20 per cent sample from each cohort is selected for intensive personal interview every six months to explore amongst other things access to employment, experiences in the workforce, further training needs and career progress.

A total of 163 participants in the first four cohorts have completed the initial questionnaire. Questions relate to biographical information, family circumstances, and educational and professional background both in their home country and other countries before immigrating to New Zealand, technology skills and a self-assessment of their English language proficiency. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample by level of professional qualification.

Table 1: Distribution of English for Employment course participants by level of professional Qualification.

Year	Non- Professionally Qualified	Professionally Qualified	Total sample size
1998	46	38	84
1999	53	26	79
Total	99	64	163

Source: Questionnaire returns and personal interviews.

3.1 RESULTS

The current study reveals that there is discord between policy and desired outcomes in the re-training of professional migrants for employment. Initial results from the questionnaires and interviews show that only a small proportion of those who graduate from these English language programmes go on to get jobs in their professional areas. This is illustrated in table 2 below.

Table 2: Employment Outcomes for 'English for Employment' course graduates 1998-1999.

Year	Total number of students employed after course	Non- professional Qualified employed	Professionally Qualified employed	Total sample	Total into work as % of those that attended course
1998	29	27	2	84	35.71 %
1999	9	4	5	79	07.11 %
Total	38	31	7	163	23.31 %

Source: Questionnaire returns and personal interviews.

A total of 36 graduates from the sample of 163 over the two years have gone to full-time or part-time employment. The employment outcomes for the non-professional migrants appear to be more positive than for the professional migrants. Of the professional migrants in the sample, only five graduates who were professionally qualified went on to full-time or part time employment in their professional areas. Two went on to voluntary employment in their professional areas and six to full time study in their professional

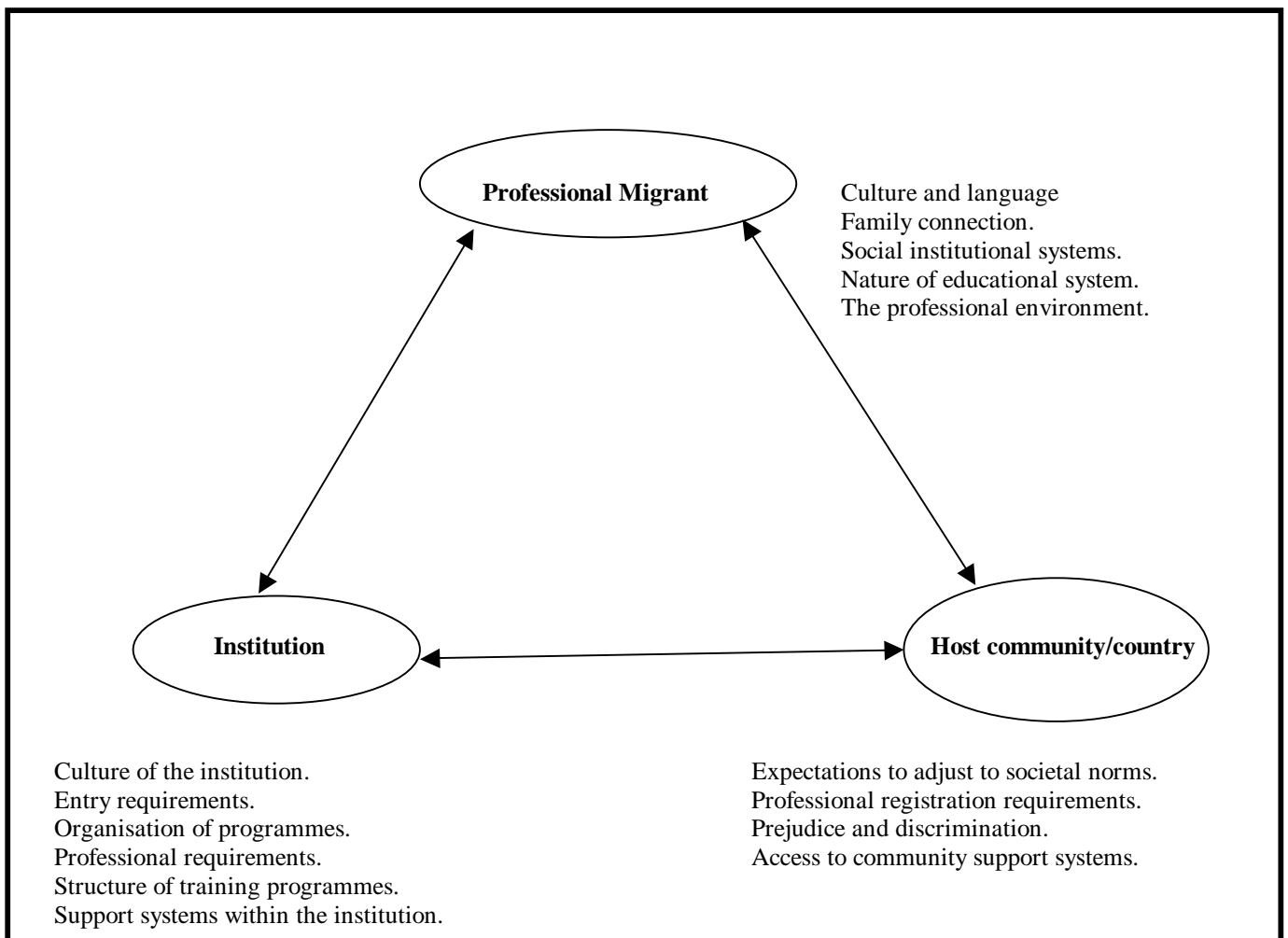
areas. The six that went on to full time study in their professional areas started all over because it was easier for them to complete a New Zealand qualification even at a lower level in order to gain employment in their chosen professions.

This finding is collaborated by a study commissioned by the then New Zealand Employment Service (NZES) in 1998 now part of WINZ. The study evaluates the English language programme for professional migrants (ESOL for Professionals) for the two years 1996/97 and 1997/98. A total of 36 courses were conducted for 504 students. Each course duration was 18 weeks (NZES 1998, p3). Of the 424 ESOL participants only 4 per cent went on to full-time employment and another 15 per cent into training (NZES 1998, p24). The report does not say if the employment gained was in the areas of the trainees' professional training. For a course that costs between \$4,300 to \$4,500 per student this is a huge investment.

4.0 MODEL OF HARMONY AND DISCORD

The study has attempted to analyse the forces of harmony and discord in the retraining of professional migrants to provide a framework for understanding the environment that impacts on the employment outcomes for migrants and refugees. The present analysis reveals that the stresses and strains may take place at least on three levels, namely: at the level of the recent migrant and refugee vis-à-vis the institution, the institution and the host community / country, and at the migrant and refugee versus the host community / country level. This is illustrated in the diagram in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Areas of discord-harmony



At the professional migrants' level the discord-harmony stresses and strains that may impact on the settlement and effective integration of migrants and refugees, include the culture and language of their socialisation, and the socio-economic and political factors that precipitated their migration. The nature of the institutional framework in their home country for example, the nature of the education system, including access to and cost of tertiary study. At the level of the educational institution, discord-harmony forces may include the culture of the institution that determines the structure of programmes and the way students are able to package their study programme to suit their individual needs. For example, how is English language study for NESB students related to core programmes? What support services are available and what level of multilingual training does the institution provide? What are an institution's understanding of the level of academic and professional background of countries the immigrants come from? These directly impact on the outcomes of the students and also influence the level of preparation that the migrants and refugees receive for integration into the host community. The level of integration has direct consequences for employment outcomes for the migrant and refugee community.

The host community both at the macro level and at the micro level also generate discord-harmony forces. There is the expectation that professional migrants would contribute to the community through employment and their fair share of the tax take. Hence the expectation of working in paid employment rather than voluntary or home-based work. At the same time the community demands a certain level of training from its professionals, which are imposed through the professional bodies. This has both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand it serves to regulate entry into the professions and ensure that only those with appropriate personal and professional skills enter the professions. On the other hand, it often may be based on community prejudice resulting from fear and ignorance. This is particularly the case where there is a general lack of understanding in the community of the educational and professional background of the migrants' home country. For example what does a Sri Lankan doctor's training and qualification that has been deemed as equivalent to New Zealand qualification really mean to the ordinary person in the community? Without the identification of gaps in the areas of professional and academic training the community is left without any choice but to question the professional competence of the NESB professional migrant based on their prejudices and fears. To attain the most desired outcomes of effective integration of recent migrants and refugees into the employment market, the retraining programmes must address the fundamental stresses and strains outlined above. The next section outlines two sets of models that attempt to provide better employment outcomes through retraining of professional migrants and refugees.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preliminary results from our study indicate that there are a number of stresses and strains in the retraining of professional migrants within their professional areas. The return on community investment in recruiting professional migrants and the individual migrant's investment in their professional training is very low. Policy responses to retraining professional immigrants into professional employment have failed. There seems to be very little discourse between the professional migrants and the respective professional bodies in identifying the skills gap that require to be filled. As the gap in skills has not been identified, the re-training of professional migrants appears to be largely based on the presumption that a few weeks of English language training will fix it. The results from our study and the NZES's study demonstrate that this presumption is incorrect. There is therefore the urgent need for training institutions to identify the skill levels of professional migrants and match them with the professional requirements of the respective professional bodies in New Zealand to enable them design appropriate retraining programmes for professional migrants.

This requires collaboration between the professional bodies, the training institutions and the NZQA. The NZQA has a database of universities from the contributing countries to New Zealand professional immigrants that enables them to assess overseas qualifications. This should provide a starting point for dialogue between the training institutions and the professional bodies to identify the skill gaps in the

training of professionals from these countries. Immigrants from certain contributing countries may require greater levels of intervention than others. The clear identification of skill gaps for the professions will create a level playing field for everyone and will also dispel any doubts in the mind of the community as to the credibility of overseas-qualified professionals. Re-training programmes should then be designed for the respective professions to capture the range of re-training requirements.

There is a wide range of professions that require mandatory registration to practice in New Zealand (New Zealand Immigration Services, 1999A). Dialogue between professional bodies and training institutions should create a system whereby designated institutions become nests for retraining in specific professional areas. For example, one of the medical or health sciences schools could be designated as the re-training institution for the medical and para-medical professions, while other training providers could be designated re-training nests for professional engineers, etcetera. The re-training nests could operate from a number of models. One such model combines specialist professional re-training with English language in what is referred to as 'English for Specific Purpose' (e.g. English for Computing, English for Engineers, English for Medicine) where the students study language that is focused around the content of their profession. These would be designed collaboratively between the professional bodies and institutions that deliver the content. In this model English language proficiency is developed concurrently for general communication and profession-specific language. A second model is the 'language support model' where the NESB professionals retraining and/or enrolled in mainstream programmes are given follow-up tuition and the language of the course content is taught and revised by trained second language teachers who are also subject specialists.

Both models require intensive collaboration between the professional bodies, the re-training institutions and the course participants. Both models have the potential to be resource intensive. Given the low level of attainment of the employment outcomes from the programmes outlined in this study, the resource input required by these two models may be investment well made if the community is to realise the full social and economic potential from professional migrants.

Another area that may make a useful contribution is professional mentoring. This is a system of pairing up recent migrants with established professional people. After a period of retraining, the professional recent migrant works in their professional area under the supervision of a registered senior colleague for a period of time. In some Australian states that operate similar programmes, the mentoring period varies depending on the registration requirements of the professional body. For example medical practitioners in Victoria go through a six-to twelve-month training programme. They are then paired with colleagues for a period of three – to – five years during which period they must sit and pass all the examinations required for full registration with the professional organisation. The remuneration arrangements vary from case to case. A variation of the mentoring programme is where a senior colleague is allocated a group of recent migrant professionals to supervise. The workload for supervisors varies proportional to the time required for supervision. In two Victorian hospitals for example two senior doctors have been appointed specifically for this position to supervise a number of new migrant doctors.

The evidence provided by the first phase of this study collaborates the findings of previous studies, that current retraining programmes do not provide a pathway to the employment of professional migrants in their areas of professional training and qualification. Only 11 per cent of our sample went on to employment (7.8 per cent in paid employment) in their areas of professional training. In this context therefore the conclusion is that retraining for professional employment is a myth. In the case of non-professional migrants and refugees, the results show much better outcomes from the retraining programmes. 31.3 per cent of non-professional migrants and refugees gained employment after graduating from the English language courses. For this group therefore retraining is a pathway to employment. Further work needs to be done to understand the reasons that account for the poor professional employment outcomes for the professional migrants. Evidence from these preliminary returns points to the lack of fit between the content of the retraining programmes and requirements of the professional employment market. To attain the desired outcomes for both the community and the professional migrants, the retraining institutions and the professional associations must design retraining programmes that address

identified skill gaps. This must be a collaborative process between the NZQA, the professional associations, the professional migrants and the retraining institutions.

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