

Successful transitions into the labour market for equity groups

Abstract

For many groups entry into the labour market is marred by cumulative barriers however, labour market programs for those disadvantaged in the labour market are funded and designed to combat these barriers. This paper presents data from successful labour market programs (Certificate III in Hospitality and Certificate II Security Operations) conducted by a regional volunteer-based multicultural organisation in central Queensland. Findings from these programs are explored in terms of outcomes for equity groups with a focus on gender, age, education level, non English speaking background (NESB), Indigenous status and length of unemployment prior to the program. Data was collected for a total of 80 participants from across five programs. Of these participants, 94% (n=75) were female, 29% (n=23) were considered mature aged (45 years of age or over), 5% (n=4) of participants' highest level of education was below Year 10, 74% (n=59) of all participants were from non English speaking backgrounds (NESB), 8 participants (10%) were Indigenous Australians, and all participants were unemployed before the commencement of the programs with 29% (n=23) having been long term unemployed prior to commencement of the labour market programs. The programs were relatively short in nature; however, the employment outcomes were significant and are testament to the success of community-based labour market programs conducted by organisations with sound working knowledge of issues facing equity groups.

Key words: skilled migrants, labour market programs, transitions, equity groups

Introduction

Labour market programs enable and support access to further education for equity groups. Key determinants to the demographics of equity groups include characteristics such as: gender, age, education level, non English speaking background, Indigenous status and length of unemployment. In addition, people with a disability, those living in rural and remote parts of Australia, people with poor language and literacy skills, and people in prisons are also included in equity demographics (Bowman, 2004).

Shah et. al., (2012) conducted a three-year program of work on the geographical dimensions of social inclusion and VET in Australia. They discovered that a single strategy for dealing with inclusion of equity groups would not be successful but at the same time dealing with equity groups separately does not allow for overlapping experiences. Therefore, Shah et. al., (2012) conclude that it is important to conduct research into equity groups from various perspectives (Shah et. al., 2012).

This paper reports the findings from a set of labour market programs that were conducted in central Queensland by a not-for-profit, volunteer based community group in Gladstone. Gladstone is a resource rich region in Central Queensland and the site of existing large resource-based employers and the development of three new coal seam gas and liquefied natural gas (CSG/LNG) projects. Gladstone has a diverse population and people are attracted to the area due to the employment opportunities offered. The Gladstone Multicultural Association Inc. (GMAI) was funded in 2012 by the

Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment to conduct a training and employment program under the *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* Scheme.

The GMAI was given this funding in order to try and improve the employment outcomes for a group of unemployed local people. According to Census 2011 (ABS, 2011) the two largest industries of employment in the Gladstone region were the manufacturing industry (17%) followed by the construction industry (13.8%). The large numbers of workers in these industries and the construction work occurring on large projects in the Gladstone region has led to an increased population in the town, increased housing affordability and has increased the likelihood of workers from equity groups finding jobs in local businesses such as fast food outlets where businesses have experienced increased growth alongside a decrease in finding employees as many have gone to Curtis Island where the large construction of Gas plants occurred. There is an increase in both full time and part time work in many industries, including an increased demand in hospitality, security services, retail and administration.

In addition to the competencies covered in the content of the Certificate III in Hospitality and Certificate II Security Operations, the labour market programs reported in this study included conversational English, mock interviews, and direct contact with employers. Over 20% of participants (n=18) were employed by a local McDonalds restaurant. The employer of this restaurant came to visit the participants in person. The labour market programs also provided facilities to cater for children in the class as well as providing guest speakers from other potential employers, guest speakers from Indigenous Traditional Owners, and a graduation ceremony at the conclusion of the course (Butler et. al., 2013).

Equity groups have faced a multitude of barriers to employment. Certificate III in Hospitality and Certificate II Security Operations provide training to low sector entry fields with a broad range of jobs. Equity groups are more likely to experience successful transition to employment and enter the job sector more easily in these fields and hence these Certificates were offered.

This paper reports on the findings of an analysis of the secondary data which was recorded by GMAI on the demographics and outcomes from the labour market programs they conducted in 2012. The aim of this paper is to report the outcomes of community based LMPs for the equity group members who undertook them within a regional area of Australia. Equity group members tend to face a multitude of employment barriers and the successful outcomes from these programs can have wide reaching implications for the future economic and social participation of equity groups within regional areas. The theoretical underpinnings of the study are grounded in equity and social inclusion studies. The paper firstly overviews the equity literature in relation to gender, age, education level, non English speaking background, Indigenous status and length of unemployment, then presents the data and findings from the labour market programs, before concluding with key findings and areas for future research.

Literature Review

Disadvantaged social groups emerged during the mid 1970s and since then equity groups have evolved and can be defined in a number of ways. According to the

University of Melbourne (2008), equity groups are: people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, people from rural and isolated areas, people with a disability, people from non English speaking backgrounds, women and Indigenous people. In comparison, there are four equity groups defined under equal opportunity legislation (in terms of access to employment): women, Indigenous Australians, people from non English speaking backgrounds and people with a disability (University of Canberra, 2014).

This paper overviews the equity literature in relation to gender, age, education level, non English speaking background, Indigenous status and length of unemployment.

Gender

Labour market outcomes differ for different equity groups. Coelli et. al., (2012) reports on a study of mature age workers undertaking further study using data from the Households, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA) and the Survey of Education and Training (SET), and found that there are gender differences in the reasons for continuing with education. For males, the main reason for continuing education was to gain a promotion or a better job whereas for females, the reasons for continuing education were simply to gain employment. For women, completing a training course increased their chances of finding employment by one-third (Coelli et. al., 2012). In terms of participation rates in vocational education and training, women have higher pass rates and obtain higher qualifications than men; however, more men are employed after completion of their course than women (Dickie & Fitzgerald, 2012). In addition, women are more likely to be employed on a casual basis than men (Dickie & Fitzgerald, 2012).

Age

Older workers are defined as people aged 45 or more who are able-bodied, in the civilian population, and either in paid employment or willing to work (Cully, 2004). Workers aged 45 years or more are disadvantaged in the labour market more than workers aged 25 to 44 years, who are considered to be prime age workers. Older workers themselves fall in to different groups. There are those older workers who have been displaced from work in the labour market and need to undertake further training in order to gain skills to make them more competitive against their younger counterparts. On the other hand, there are those older workers who undertake further training in order to remain competitive in the labour market (Cully, 2004). The former group are those who, as an equity group, need appropriate access to labour market programs in order to be able to re-enter the workforce.

Figgis (2012) describes the concept of “encore” careers for older workers in Australia. Due to the increased life expectancy of Australians, older workers need to be encouraged to remain in the workforce either by re-skilling in a different area as an alternative to retirement or to stay in their current employment until a later age.

Education level

One in four Australians leaves school before completing their senior secondary certificate (Teese, 2012). The impact of this has been reduced through the introduction of vocational education and training into schools. The main reasons young Australians

are leaving school early are to earn an income, and due to a lack of interest in schoolwork. Teese (2012) found large variations in the proportions of young Australians leaving school across states as well as gender differences. Teese (2012) found one in five girls leave school early while only one in three boys do not complete secondary education.

Vocational education and training is not just undertaken by those who are mature aged or early school leavers. There has been an increase in people who already have tertiary vocational training or academic qualifications taking up further training (Lian Sim & Zinopoulos, 2004). For those people from non English speaking backgrounds, almost five times more males had completed a bachelor degree or higher and nearly three times as many females had completed a bachelor degree or higher who were enrolled in a training course (Lian Sim & Zinopoulos, 2004).

The increased participation rate in labour market programs of people with a high level of education may indicate the employment-based training opportunities that these programs provide to people from non English speaking backgrounds assists with the transition into the Australian labour market. Canada and Australia have both experienced an increase in more highly educated immigrants. In Australia, the percentage of new immigrants with a university degree was just over 49% for 2001 – 2005 census (Clarke & Skuterud, 2012, p. 21).

NESB

Australia's Migration Program has changed over the past two decades from a focus on attracting migrants to increase Australia's population, to an emphasis on attracting skilled migrants in order to meet Australia's labour needs (Phillips & Spinks, 2012). The goal of immigration, settlement and citizenship policy is not about increasing the population of the country. It is a complex system that involves the production of programs that allow for settlement of people into Australia, while optimising their economic and social impact in the national interest (Phillips & Spinks, 2012).

Australia has had a long history of using migrants to fill skill gaps and labour shortages, and continues to target skilled foreign workers for permanent and temporary migration (Misko, 2012, p.37)

Although people from non English speaking backgrounds have pass rates slightly below the average for vocational training courses, their employment outcomes are very poor (Dumbrell et. al., 2004). Transitions into the labour market for this equity group involve improving their employment outcomes in addition to passing training courses.

Indigenous

In the 2011 census, 2.5% of the Australian population identified as Indigenous Australians (ABS, 2013) and of those, 46% (who were over 15 years) were classified as employed (ABS, 2013). In 2008, COAG agreed to six targets for closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across urban, rural and remote areas. One of these outcomes was to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians within a decade (COAG, 2013).

In general, participation in education and training is low for Indigenous Australians. Biddle and Cameron (2012) used previous research and a number of datasets: the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, the Census of Population and Housing, the Australian Early Development Index and the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth to explore the educational participation of Indigenous Australians. They found that, in general Indigenous Australians were happier at school than other Australians, suggesting that a low level of happiness is not the main reason for low completion rates. They also found that the lower participation rate of Indigenous Australians compared to other Australians remains after controlling for remoteness and socio economic status.

In terms of Australian educational systems, the VET sector has the highest participation rate among Indigenous Australians compared with school, higher education and adult community education. Indigenous Australians may tend to opt for VET courses over community-based training courses for a variety of reasons, including Centrelink requirements, remote access to other types of education, or due to entry standards at tertiary institutions being too high (Boughton & Durnan, 2004).

Length of unemployment

Long term unemployment has risen to an 11 year high (Sky News, 2013). In October 2013 the long-term unemployment rate in Australia was 1.2% and had not been at this level since September 2004 (Sky News, 2013). The long-term unemployed are defined as those who have been unemployed for greater than 12 months. Those who are long-term unemployed are considered an equity group and face barriers to entering the labour market such as poor physical and mental health (O'Hara, 2008).

Method

The authors partnered with GMAI in a process of community engaged research to analyse the data from the labour market programs. The purpose being to assist GMAI with future applications for labour market program funding.

The methodology employed for this research was the quantitative analysis of secondary data from five cohorts of labour market program participants. The labour market programs were conducted by The Gladstone Multicultural Association Inc (GMAI) who was funded in 2012 by the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment to conduct a training and employment program under the *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* Scheme. The courses offered were Certificate III in Hospitality Accommodation Services (four cohorts across two locations) and Certificate II Security Operations (one cohort). The sample of participants (n=80) were involved across five programs, four of which were conducted in Gladstone and one in Rockhampton. The programs ran for a period of three weeks and were available to job seekers who were unemployed. Table 1 displays a breakdown of participants in the program courses.

Table 1: Program Courses

Course Code	Course name	Duration	Location	Participants
K1G	SIT30707 Certificate III in Hospitality (Accommodation Services)	3 weeks	Gladstone	19
KSEC	CPP20211 Certificate II in Security Operations	2 weeks	Gladstone	5
K2G	SIT30707 Certificate III in Hospitality (Accommodation Services)	3 weeks	Gladstone	19
K3G	SIT30707 Certificate III in Hospitality (Accommodation Services)	3 weeks	Gladstone	24
K1R	SIT30707 Certificate III in Hospitality (Accommodation Services)	3 weeks	Rockhampton	13

Quantitative analysis of de-identified secondary data from the five cohorts of the labour market programs was undertaken with the use of SPSS version 19 and descriptive statistics generated. GMAI conducted a routine 6 monthly follow-up of all participants by contacting them to obtain data regarding their employment 6 months after completing the course.

Findings and discussion

The findings are presented in terms of participants' employment status and industry of employment 6 months after course completion for each of the following key equity group demographics: age, education level, non English speaking background (NESB), Indigenous status, and length of unemployment prior to completing the program.

Of the 80 participants, 94% (n=75) were female; 71% (n=47) were aged between 25 and 44 years of age, with 29% (n=23) considered mature aged (45 years or over); 19% (n=15) of participants had a bachelor degree or higher while 5% (n=4) of participants' highest level of education was below Year 10; 74% (n=59) of all participants were from non English speaking backgrounds (NESB); 10% of participants (n=8) were Indigenous Australians; and all participants were unemployed before the commencement of the programs.

The largest equity group in this study were females. The aspects of the labour market program offered which support this equity group include having access to childcare during the course as well as the large variety of work available in the hospitality industry. There tends to be opportunities for part-time work in the hospitality industry. With a large amount of heavy industry work in the Gladstone area, many partners are seeking part time work. The Hospitality industry provides for equity groups such as women to move more easily into part time work.

Length of unemployment prior to commencement of the programs was broken down into three periods: <12 months, 12–24 months, and >24 months. The majority of the participants (71.3%) had been unemployed for <12 months, followed by 23.8% for >24 months prior to joining the program. When combined those who had been unemployed for more than a year prior to the program represented 28.8% of all participants.

The specific occupations that participants were engaged in 6 months after the course completion were mainly in the hospitality industry. The largest single employer from the group was McDonalds family restaurant (n=18). Other occupations included local

restaurants, local security companies, retail (Fish Market), receptionist work and one participant found employment with local council as a meter reader.

Age and employment status 6 months after course completion

Data for employment status 6 months after the course completion was broken down into three categories: Not employed (NE), Employed <25 hours per week, and Employed >25 hours per week. A cross tabulation of age and employment status 6 months after the course completion is shown in Table 2 below. The greatest number of participants working 6 months after the course completion were in the 40 – 44 year age range and were Employed <25 hours per week after the course completion. This was followed by those in the 30 – 34 year age range who were also Employed <25 hours per week.

Table 2: Age and employment status 6 months after course completion

		Employment status 6 months after completion			Total	Percent
		NE	<25hrs	>25hrs		
Age	15-19	0	7	1	8	10
	20-24	0	1	1	2	3
	25-29	0	4	1	5	6
	30-34	1	10	4	15	18
	35-39	1	5	2	8	10
	40-44	1	15	3	19	24
	45-49	2	8	1	11	14
	50-54	0	3	1	4	5
	55-59	0	4	2	6	8
	60-64	0	1	0	1	1
	65andover	0	1	0	1	1
Total		5	59	16	80	100

Age and industry employed in 6 months after course completion

The courses conducted were Certificate III in Hospitality (Accommodation Services) and Certificate II in Security Operations. The industries that participants were employed in 6 months after course completion were: Accommodation, cafes and restaurants (30%), then Personal and other services (26%), followed by Retail trade (5%) and then Health and community services (4%). In terms of these participants considered mature aged (45 years and over) as an equity group, the industry with the largest number of participants aged over 45 years was Personal and other services (30%), followed by Accommodation, cafes and restaurants (26%), then Health and community services (13%), and then the Retail trade (9%).

Table 3: Age and industry employed in 6 months after course completion

Industry	Age											Total	%
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65 & over		
Mining	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Manufacturing	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Retail trade	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	5	6
Accom, cafes & restaurants	3	2	3	5	2	9	2	2	0	1	1	30	38
Communications Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Govt admin &	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1

Defence														
Education	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	4	
Health & community services	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	4	5	
Personal & other services	2	0	1	5	4	7	4	1	2	0	0	26	33	
Not Employed	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	5	6	
Child raising	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	
Total	8	2	5	15	8	19	11	4	6	1	1	80		

Education level and employment status 6 months after course completion

A cross tabulation of education level and employment status 6 months after the course completion can be seen in Figure 1. Participants with a Bachelor degree or higher (n=11) followed by a Diploma (n=10) and Year 12 (n=10) as the highest level of education, were the largest groups Employed for <25 hours per week 6 months after the course completion. The highest levels of education for those Employed >25 hours per week 6 months after the course completion were Year 12 (n=4) and Bachelor degree or higher (n=4).

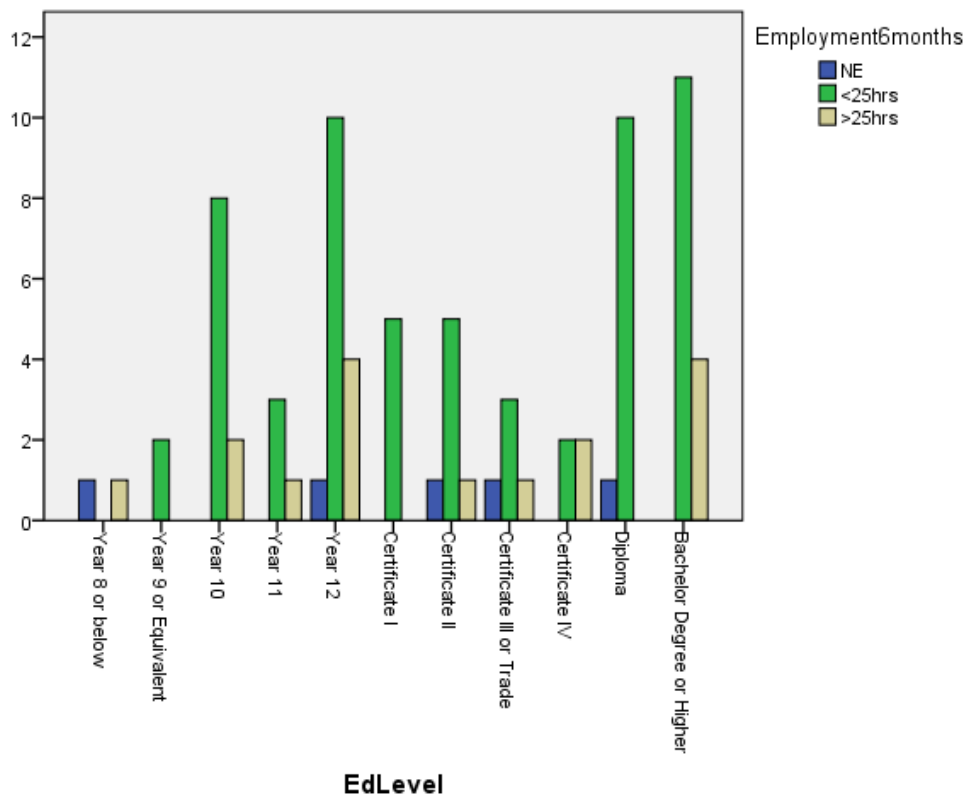


Figure 1 Education level and employment status 6 months after the course completion

Education level and industry employed in 6 months after course completion

In terms of education level and industry employed in 6 months after course completion, participants with an education level below Year 10 (n=4) were employed in Personal and other services (n=2) followed by Government administration and Defence (n=1) and then Unemployed (n=1) 6 months after completion of the course.

Table 4 Education level and industry employed in 6 months after course completion

Industry	Education Level											Total
	Y8 or <	Y9 or =	Y10	Y1 1	Y12	Cert I	Cert I	Cert III or trade	Cert V	Dip	Ba or high	
Mining	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Manufact-uring	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Retail trade	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	5
Accom, cafes & restaurants	0	0	6	1	6	2	2	2	0	5	6	30
Commun- ications Services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Govt admin & Defence	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Education	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	3
Health & community services	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	4
Personal & other services	1	1	1	2	6	1	2	0	2	5	5	26
Not Employed	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	5
Child raising	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	3
Total	2	2	10	4	15	5	7	5	4	11	15	80

Non English speaking background (NESB) and employment status 6 months after course completion

The comparison between employment status 6 months after the course completion and NESB status shows that the highest number of participants in both NESB and ESB were Employed <25 hours per week 6 months after the course completion. Those participants from NESB had the highest number Employed >25 hours per week as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5 Non English speaking background (NESB) and employment status 6 months after course completion

		Employment status 6 months			Total
		NE	<25hrs	>25hrs	
NESB	NESB	3	43	14	59
	ESB	4	16	2	21
Total		5	59	16	80

Non English speaking background (NESB) and industry employed in 6 months after course completion

Those participants from NESB (n=59) had the greatest employment in the Accommodation, cafes and restaurants (n=24) industry, followed by Personal and other services (n=21).

Indigenous status and employment status 6 months after course completion

The comparison between Indigenous status and employment status 6 months after the course completion shows that the majority of Indigenous participants (n=7) were Employed <25 hours per week 6 months after completion of the course.

Table 6 Indigenous status and employment status 6 months after the course completion

		Employment status 6 months after completion			
		NE	<25hrs	>25hrs	Total
Indigenous status	Indig	1	7	0	8
	Non Indig	4	52	16	72
Total		5	59	16	80

Indigenous status and industry employed in 6 months after course completion

When comparing Indigenous status and industry employed in 6 months after course completion it can be seen in Figure 2 that Personal and other services as well as Accommodation, cafes and restaurants are the two highest industries of employment status 6 months after course completion for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants.

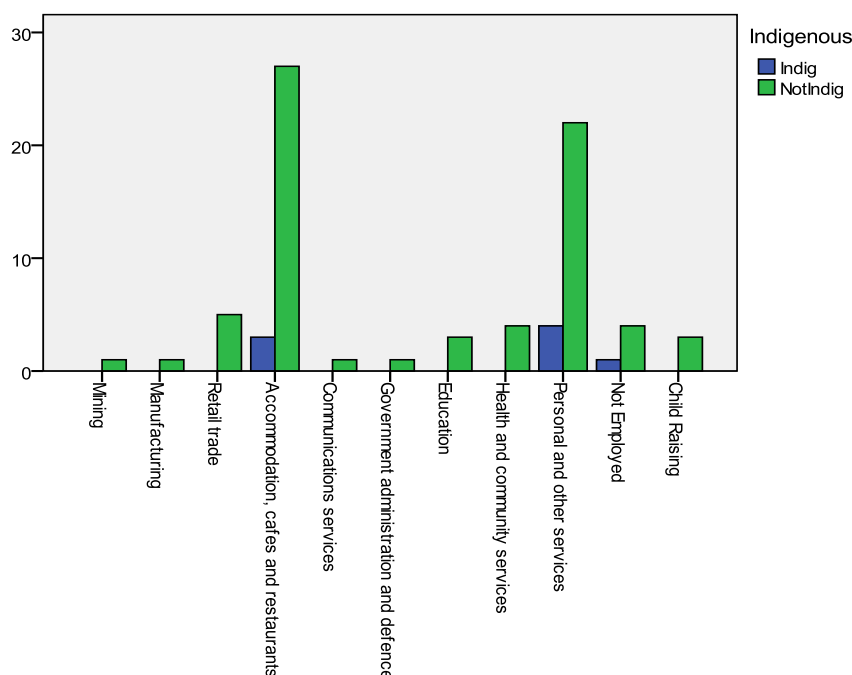


Figure 2 Indigenous status and industry employed in 6 months after the course completion

Length of unemployment and employment status 6 months after course completion

Table 7 displays the length of unemployment of participants prior to completing the course compared with employment status 6 months post course. Those who had been unemployed for over 24 months prior to joining the course were more likely to be Employed <25 hours per week (n=13) followed by being Employed >25 hours per week (n=5). Those who had been unemployed for less than 12 months prior to the joining the course were also most likely to be Employed <25 hours per week 6 months after the course completion (n=42), followed by being Employed for >25 hours per week (n=11).

Table 7 Length of Unemployment prior to joining the course and employment status 6 months after the course completion

		Employment status 6 months after completion			Total
		NE	<25hrs	>25hrs	
Length of Unemployment prior to joining the course	<12 months	4	42	11	57
	12-24 months	0	4	0	4
	>24 months	1	13	5	19
Total		5	59	16	80

Length of unemployment and industry employed in 6 months after course completion

It can be seen from Figure 3 that Personal and other services as well as Accommodation, cafes and restaurants were the top two industries of employment for participants post course.

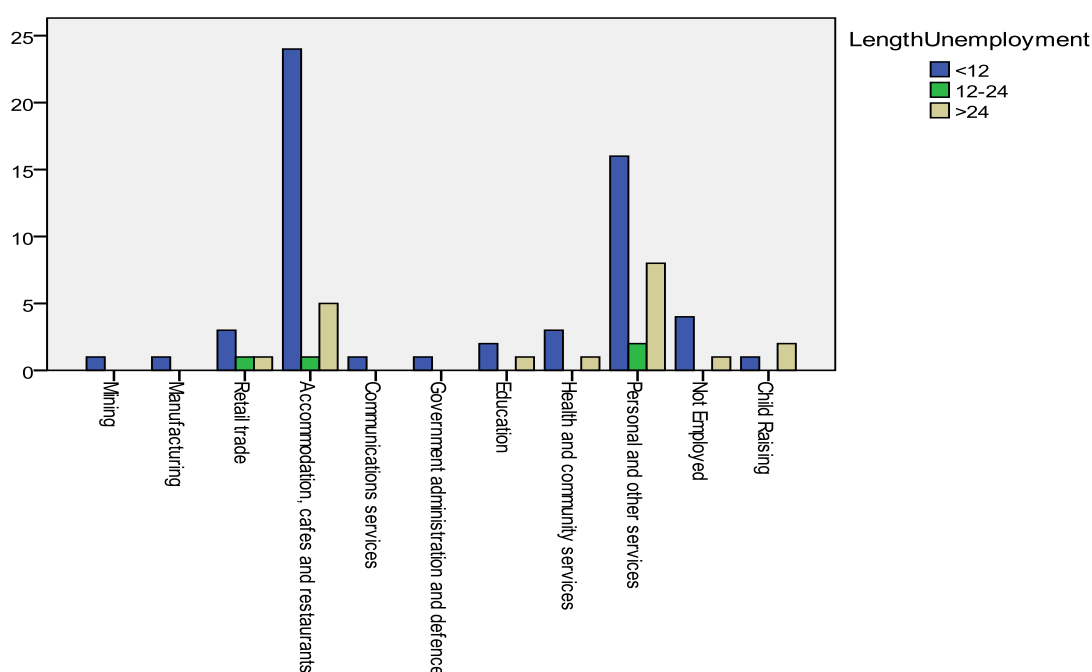


Figure 3 Length of unemployment and industry employed in 6 months after course completion

Of those participants who had been unemployed for over 24 months prior to joining the course (n=19), five had a Bachelor degree or higher. These 5 participants were either employed (n=4) or child raising (n=1) 6 months after completing the course.

Table 8 Participants with a Bachelor degree or higher Unemployed for >24 months

Participant	Gender	Age	Country of Birth	Employment status 6 months after completion
1	F	29	China	<25 hrs p/w Accom, cafes & rest
2	F	48	Thailand	<25 hrs p/w Accom, cafes & rest
3	F	56	Congo	<25 hrs p/w Health & comm.
4	F	46	Sri Lanka	<25 hrs p/w Education
5	F	29	China	>25 hrs p/w Child raising

Conclusions

This paper has presented the findings from a study which has explored the outcomes of a cohort of labour market program participants from central Queensland. Findings from these programs were analysed in terms of equity groups with a focus on the following equity dimensions: age, education level, non English speaking background, Indigenous status and length of unemployment prior to the program. We found the largest industry sector for employment for participants 6 months after completion of the course was the Accommodation, cafes and restaurants (37.5%) industry followed by the Personal and other services (32.5%) industry. This would be expected as the labour market programs conducted by the volunteer-based multicultural organisation were based on a Certificate III in Hospitality and a Certificate II in Security Operations. Most striking is the employment outcomes for participants. Six months after the course completion 93.8% of participants were employed. 73.8% of participants were employed at <25 hours per week, 20% were employed for more than 25 hours per week and 6.3% were unemployed. The 40-44 year age range (which constituted 24% of all participants) had the greatest number of participants employed 6 months after completion of the course at less than 25 hours per week.

Those who had been unemployed for over 24 months prior to joining the course were more likely to be employed <25 hours per week (n=13) 6 months after the course completion. Those who had been unemployed for less than 12 months prior to the joining the course were also most likely to be employed <25 hours per week 6 months after the course completion (n=42).

Overall the employment outcomes for the Industry Services Training 2012 with GMAI have been very successful.

Outcomes obtained, both tangible and intangible, illustrate the benefits to a community of engaging positively with their under-utilised migrant resources. These benefits accrue not only to the migrants and their families but also to their employers, the broader business community, Government and service providers (Butler et. al., 2013 p.44)

Due to the majority of participants being from non English Speaking Backgrounds, it is important to consider this equity group. Migrants are often under employed (Shah et al., 2012) and face challenges in finding employments such as social exclusion.

Migration is an important source of population growth and labour supply in regional Australia. Migrants, permanent and temporary, often come with spouses and partners. For those who are sponsored by an employer, the offer of work does not extend to dependent migrants, who are frequently women. In regional areas, where labour markets are thin, this can lead to underutilisation of skills (Shah et. al., 2012, p. 6)

Equity group members face multiple disadvantages in the labour market. For example the majority of participants in the LMPs reported in this paper were female migrants of Non English speaking backgrounds living in regional Australia. The successful outcomes from LMPs have wide reaching implications for the future economic and

social participation of equity groups within regional areas as well as for the regions themselves in terms of widening participation in the local labour market and retaining diverse populations in Australia's regions. The role of the GMAI in providing LMP programs in the region, and the relationships forged between GMAI and local employers to assist employment for equity groups has been a defining feature and contributor to the success of the GMAI LMPs. The civic capital of community based groups is key to creating interconnectedness between the wider and diverse community and local employers.

Future research needs to be conducted to explore what the key characteristics are of successful labour market programs so as to inform the future funding. The labour market programs reported in this study included conversational English, mock interviews, direct contact with employers as guest speakers, guest speakers from Indigenous Traditional Owners, subsidised childcare and facilities to bring young children to class, and a graduation ceremony with food provided by participants from their own country's cuisine (Butler et. al., 2013). The findings from this study point to a key factor being that the programs were conducted by a community based organisation with a sound working knowledge of the issues facing these equity groups and in tune with the general community and employers.

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