

SKILL SHORTAGES IN NSW

Organisation: Dubbo City Council
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Mr David Elliot MP
Chair
Legislative Assembly
Committee on Economic Development
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Elliot,

DUBBO CITY COUNCIL: REGIONAL SKILLED MIGRATION INQUIRY

Dubbo City Council, through its New Resident Attraction Program has played a significant support role to several of the Regional Skilled Migration Programs and sub-class Migration Visas facilitated through the Department of Immigration and Regional Development Australia – Orana Division.

Through the New Resident Program Council provides potential new residents to the City with a pack prior to their arrival with information on moving to Dubbo and an additional information pack once the new resident has actually moved to the City, which includes City services information and an invitation to the quarterly New Resident Welcome Night event. Through this Program Council has met with many people who have moved to the City under the Regional Skilled Migration Program. Council's New Resident Program is not resourced to support the level of assistance that some of these migrants require. It has been designed as an information resource only, and a central point for connection to other services such as the Dubbo Neighbourhood Centre, RDA Orana and local real estate agents etc. Many of the new residents attracted to the area through the Regional Migration Programs expect a higher level of assistance to find a job and suitable accommodation. This is not something that Council currently provides, or is looking to provide as a service in the future.

It has been Council's experience that many of the successful visa applicants are highly skilled, professional people looking to make the change to live and work in Australia. Since the visa program has been introduced, Council's Human Resources Department has received on average approximately 120 applications a year for a variety of jobs from people already in the City or looking to relocate to the City on a migrant visa. These applications are most often received for jobs which the migrant applicant is not qualified to fulfil – such as chemical engineers applying for customer service, or administration positions. Council has not employed any full time staff from the Regional Skills Migration Program.

Council particularly noticed the excessive numbers of engineering and technical workers moving into the City, beginning quite soon after engineering was made available on the RDA sponsored jobs list.

All communications to:

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Unfortunately, the demand for these high level technical positions is not enough to sustain such an influx of workers in this field. Council's Director Technical Services was inundated with sponsored visa applicants looking for work as technical engineers. Unfortunately Council itself does not have the demand to support the influx. Council provided support through the engagement of Engineers Australia to provide seminars in the City aimed at the migrant audience to help better equip them for working in Australia and try and provide connections to engineering jobs.

It is Council's understanding that these migration visas require local work specific to the sponsored migrants' specialisation within the three year regional placement period. Council staff, particularly Council's Director Technical Services and the front-of-house team at the Visitor Information Centre, met with many of these visa sponsored migrants. During these meetings the migrants expressed their concerns about obtaining appropriate work, many were still looking for work or had found work in lower level technical positions or labouring jobs in the City – but were desperate to find local work in their field to secure their visas.

Overall many of the applicants found the City to be very accommodating culturally and socially but were met with barriers to finding employment. From Dubbo City Council's point of view as an employer these include:

- Proficiency in English and language barriers
- Lack of local experience
- Lack of Local Government experience
- Lack of demand for the skills presented by the applicants

Dubbo City Council has a good working relationship with the local Regional Development Australia Office, and has identified with them the potential back filling opportunities that may be available to skilled migrant workers in the coming years in Dubbo and the Region. Council in discussions with local industry has identified that trade based skills and lower paid industries will feel the effects of the upcoming mining developments in the Region. As existing skilled trade workers leave their workshop positions and lower paid tradespeople leave their trades to take on mining jobs in the region over the next few years, gaps will become present that will need backfilling. Workshop trades such as Boilermakers, Electricians, Heavy Vehicle Diesel Mechanics and Diesel Fitter/Machinists will need to be replaced as local workers move onto mining site jobs. Lower paid trades, the agricultural sector, and worksite labourers will also feel the pressure as people leave these local industries and pursue higher paid jobs in the developing mining sector.

Typical of most regional areas of Australia, Dubbo is also looking to continue to develop its medical and specialist workforce to service the growing population of the City. Dubbo provides healthcare and social assistance to a regional population of over 120,000 people and a geographic area one third of NSW. To continue to provide this important service to this vast area the industry will need continued support from a strong and qualified workforce.

The value and contribution of the exiting skills attraction program has seen very limited results for Dubbo City. Whilst Council can see the merit in the Regional Skilled Migration Visa, in terms of development in Dubbo Council would prefer to see a broader approach to skills attraction to regional centres.

For the continued economic growth and development of Dubbo and the Orana Region, a stable and effective workforce is paramount. Whilst the Regional Skilled Migration Program has potential to fulfil the skills requirements of regional areas such as Dubbo, this will only be achieved if the sponsored jobs are correctly allocated to the regions needs. In addition to the Program and the need to attract skills to regional areas, Council has engaged in other programs that could be further developed to complement the Regional Skills Migration Program and better fulfil the actual needs of the City and the Region.

Dubbo City Council through its participation in the Evocities Program and its own New Resident Program focuses on attracting professionals and trades people and their families to the City from other more densely populated areas of Australia, including metropolitan areas. As part of these Programs Council has promoted and provided feedback on Government incentives including the Regional Relocation Grant. Council would like to see more development of these types of incentives that look to promote the benefits of regional relocation, including employment and investment, to highly populated areas of Australia.

Whilst Council understands the importance of the skilled migrant workforce in Australia, and Regional Australia through this Program, it is more important for the development of Dubbo that the needs of the City in terms of skills development and workforce retention are at the forefront of any incentive relocation and employment programs.

Yours faithfully



Mark Riley
General Manager