



## Overseas Qualified Professionals (OQP) Project

*Connecting Communities  
Strengthening Democracy*

### Background

The VLGA ran two Overseas Qualified Engineers projects during 2006-07, placing 15 and 16 engineers into local government placements. As a result of the success of these two projects the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (DIIRD) funded the Overseas Qualified Professionals (OQP) project, which ran from January 2008 to June 2009, through the Workforce Participation Partnerships initiative.

The two key focuses for the VLGA to run the OQE and OQP projects were:

1. to address skills-shortages in local government (and industry); and
2. to assist qualified, skilled migrants to gain genuine employment in their professional fields here in Victoria.

### OQP Project 2008-09

The OQP project was initially funded to place 20 participants into 16-week placements in local governments and industry, the targeted professions being engineering, IT, planning and accounting. Following the successful placement of those 20 participants, in June 2008 DIIRD requested that the VLGA extend the timeframe of the project and place a further 10 participants, resulting in 30 project placements in total.

Project partners included representatives from Engineers Australia, LGPro, Planning Institute Australia (Vic), and CPA Australia. Holmesglen Institute provided a week of pre-placement Australian Workplace Cultural Training as well as three separate days of support and further training at intervals during the 16-week placement.

Each participant was matched with a mentor for the duration of the placement (LGPro facilitated this process for the local government participants). The OQP project officer performed case management duties for each participant before, during and after the placements, including a placement visit to each workplace to meet with both the participants and their supervisors or managers.

The greatest interest from employers was for engineers, with 21 of the 30 placed participants being engineers – predominantly civil engineers in local government, with four electrical engineers placed in private industry. Six IT professionals were placed – four in local government and two in private industry; and three planning professionals were placed in local government. Unfortunately there was no genuine interest from employers to offer placements to accounting professionals.

Applicants were recruited with the help of the Overseas Qualifications Unit (within Workforce Participation at DIIRD), and also by word of mouth. Project partners Engineers Australia and CPA Australia assisted with the initial application screening and short-listing process; and relevant short-listed applicants attended interviews with prospective host-employers for final matching and selection.

Despite a great deal of initial interest from rural/regional local governments, only two were able to give final commitment to be involved in the program. One hosted two engineers; the other hosted an IT professional and an engineer. The other 26 participants were all placed in metropolitan Melbourne (and one interface) local governments and companies.

Participating employers were:

Banyule City Council (1)	Manningham City Council (1)
Greater Dandenong City Council (4)	Maribyrnong City Council (1)
Envision IT (2)	Melbourne City Council (3)
Gannawarra Shire Council (2)	NHP Electrical Engineering (4)
Glen Eira City Council (4)	Port Phillip City Council (3)
Hindmarsh Shire Council (2)	Wyndham City Council (1)
Kingston City Council (1)	Yarra Ranges Shire Council (1)

(Note: numbers in brackets denote the number of participants placed with that employer)

Of the 30 participants, 22 were offered continuing employment by their host employers at (or before) the end of their 16-week placements. Most of the other eight moved on to relevant professional positions with other employers.

One of the greatest barriers to employment for nearly all of the 200+ initial applicants to the program was their 'lack of local experience'; and this was also one of the major factors encountered when arranging and negotiating placements. Similarly, concern about language skills was offered by several potential employers as one of the reasons they would not consider taking part in the program, despite the fact that applications were invited only from people with high IELTS/ISLPR language levels.

It was therefore very pleasing to receive feedback from employers during and following placements recognising the value of the transferable skills the participants had brought to their work. The ability of participants to gain employment in their fields following their placements is testament to fact that even a short term of local experience is a great advantage to skilled migrant job-seekers.

**For further information, please contact:**

**Sarah Colgan** (former OQP Project Officer)

**E:** [sarah@vlqa.org.au](mailto:sarah@vlqa.org.au)

**Ph:** (03) 9349 7983