English Language Proficiency and the Recruitment and Employment of Professional Immigrants in New Zealand

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a study on English language proficiency and the recruitment and employment of skilled immigrants in selected professions. Conducted during the period March to August 2003, the study involved a mail questionnaire of four groups of organisations involved in the recruitment and/or employment of professional engineers, computing personnel and medical professionals.

- Of the original 917 questionnaires posted out, 488 were returned. Within these returns, 295 organisations reported that they recruited or employed professionals in the fields of engineering, computing and/or medicine, and completed the questionnaire. The data for the survey came from these 295 responses, representing 87 employment agencies, 112 engineering firms, 47 computing firms, and 49 local and territorial authorities.

Background Information on Participating Organisations and Respondents

- Apart from local and territorial authorities, the organisations represented in the survey were predominantly private in nature (over 90 per cent in each group).

- While most organisations identified their main functions as anticipated (i.e. recruitment, professional engineering, computing services/IT/IS, or local government functions), some employment agencies reported other main functions (including 13.8 per cent health providers, in the form of nursing bureaux, and 6.9 per cent government employment agencies) and a number of computing firms identified their main function as engineering (40.4 per cent) or "other" including retail and educational (25.6 per cent).

- While most of the participating organisations were located in the North Island and in main centres, the majority of local and territorial authorities represented smaller centres with over a quarter from the South Island.

- The organisations overall were more likely to operate at a local rather than at a national or international level. However, around half of all employment agencies, engineering firms and computing firms operated at a national or, less often, an international level.

- Apart from local and territorial authorities, of which over half employed 100+ equivalent full-time staff members, the participating organisations were most
often either micro operations (with 1-5 employees) or small to medium operations (with 10-49 employees). There was no clear relationship between numbers of staff and level of operation.

- Most respondents were either: (a) owners or principals or (b) general managers, CEOs or directors, except in (c) local and territorial authorities, where they were usually human resource personnel.

- Nearly a quarter of the respondents were immigrants to New Zealand, usually from the United Kingdom or Ireland. Only a very small number (4.4 per cent) reported speaking a language other than English.

**Opinions**

- As expected, the general consensus was that English language proficiency was an important factor affecting the recruitment and employment prospects of at least some, if not all professional immigrants. Over half (53.5 per cent) identified English language proficiency as an important issue for all immigrants while a further quarter (25.8 per cent) identified it as an important issue for immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESBs).

- The levels of English language proficiency required for professional positions varied according to the level of the position with most choosing a near-native speaker level or higher for senior positions.

- Local and territorial authorities were the most likely to accept lower levels of proficiency, and employment agencies were the most likely to require the highest levels of proficiency.

- A modest (IELTS 5) level was rarely considered adequate for a professional position.

- Around 10-20 per cent of organisations required not only native-speaker fluency but also a New Zealand accent for a senior position in engineering or computing. For medical professionals the percentage with such requirements was higher. This may be seen as discriminating against NESB immigrant professionals, since a New Zealand accent is unattainable for virtually all adult immigrants (including those from an English-speaking background) and is not required for the attainment of native-speaker proficiency.
• When asked to rank the importance of English language proficiency alongside other factors influencing the employment of immigrant professionals, some respondents indicated a reluctance to rank the factors.

• While individual rankings varied considerably, a number of trends emerged: (a) English language proficiency consistently ranked within the top two places for all groups except local and territorial authorities, where it was placed below New Zealand qualifications and work experience; (b) New Zealand work experience and New Zealand qualifications tended to operate as a pair, as did overseas qualifications and overseas work experience, and (except where engineers and computing personnel were ranking each others' factors) New Zealand experience and qualifications were consistently favoured over overseas experience and qualifications; and (c) with the exception of local and territorial authority rankings, New Zealand work experience was also generally ranked ahead of New Zealand qualifications, creating a further barrier to employment for NESB immigrants.

Practices

• Nearly three-quarters of all participating organisations reported that they did use specific procedures to assess the level of English language proficiency of immigrant job applicants as part of the recruitment process.

• The most common method of language assessment was the face-to-face interview, frequently used in tandem with telephone communication, particularly by larger firms.

• Telephone interviewing or screening was a common practice used by nearly three-quarters of employment agencies.

• Apart from face-to-face interviews and the use of telephone contact to assess English language proficiency, a wide variety of assessment procedures prevailed but specific tests designed to measure the language proficiency of those for whom English is a second language were rarely mentioned.

• While most respondents felt that they did not place more weight on particular language skills in recruitment or that they placed equal weight on all four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), a minority did stress particular skills – most often speaking and listening, followed by writing (important for report writing, communicating with clients, etc).
• Over half of all responding organisations reported that they employed NESB immigrants at the time of the survey, with local and territorial authorities considerably more likely than any of the other groups to employ such staff.

• An analysis of the data showed no clear increase in reportage of NESB staff in employment agencies if they had national or international linkages. However, in engineering firms, there was a greater likelihood of NESB immigrant staff in firms with international connections and this pattern was repeated more clearly in computing firms, where international organisations were much more likely to employ NESB immigrant staff members (85.7 per cent) than those operating at a national level (52.9 per cent) or at a local level (43.5 per cent).

• More than half (59.5 per cent) of all respondents in organisations employing NESB immigrants at the time of the survey reported that they knew of work-related problems related to English language proficiency associated with the employment of such staff.

• Local and territorial authorities (the most likely to employ NESB immigrants and the least likely to expect professional applicants to have native speaker fluency and a New Zealand accent) were the least likely to report English language-related issues.

• No particular immigrant source was dominant overall in terms of reported problems.

• Although language-related issues were associated with immigrants from a wide variety of sources, there was considerable agreement among respondents regarding the types of problems most likely to be experienced. More specifically, it was found that: (a) dealing with clients/customers face-to-face and on the telephone plus work-related communication with colleagues clearly occupied the first three positions overall (mentioned by 87.9, 82.2 and 80.4 per cent, respectively) and across each of the four groups; (b) there was a substantial accord across the groups on the position of literacy-related activities, with the writing of technical reports ranked fourth in each group and overall (at 56.1 per cent), and ahead of reading activities; and (c) work-related communication was at least twice as likely as social communication to be reported as an issue.

• A little under two-thirds of all organisations which reported English language-related problems had done anything (as far as the respondents were aware) to solve the language-related problem(s) encountered in the workplace. Local and territorial authorities were the most likely to have taken action and the most likely to have involved not only the immigrants but also members of the wider workforce in moves to solve the problems encountered.
Government Policy

- Views on recent changes in New Zealand immigration policy with respect to language requirements were very varied. Of those who expressed an opinion, about equal numbers felt that recent policy changes were helpful and unhelpful, with comments very mixed. Large numbers reported that they were either not familiar with recent changes affecting immigrants in the professions (29.1 per cent) or were not sure whether the changes were helpful or not (28.8 per cent). Those in engineering and computing firms were more likely to state that they were unfamiliar with the changes (43.7 and 38.3 per cent, respectively) than employment agencies (17.3 per cent) or local and territorial authorities (8.2 per cent).

- Overall, large numbers of respondents were less than happy with the outcomes of immigration policy targeting skilled migrants. Many commented on the frustrations they experienced with regard to NESB immigrant job seekers who lacked adequate English language proficiency and/or other skills required for employment in their professions. Others commented on aspects of discrimination within the professions which contributed to high levels of unemployment.

The report concludes with comments on: (a) the unrealistic and discriminatory expectation of native-speaker fluency with a New Zealand accent; (b) the non-ESOL specific and often arbitrary assessment techniques used to measure English language proficiency; (c) the nature of reported language-related issues in the workplace and responses to them; and (d) the concerning lack of knowledge regarding immigration policy among many of those surveyed. Recommendations are offered to deal with these issues.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile of Organisations and Respondents</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions, Practices and Policy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary and Discussion</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1 Postal questionnaire</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2 IELTS band descriptors</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected New Settlers Programme Publications (to November 2005)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

This study forms part of the New Settlers Programme, a multidisciplinary research project based at Massey University (Trlin et al., 1998a). In its examination (from an employment agency and employers’ perspective) of English language-related factors in the recruitment and employment in New Zealand of professional immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESBs), the study investigates aspects of the host society context. In particular, it addresses the vexing issue of what constitutes an adequate English language proficiency level for the employment of skilled immigrants in the professions. Attention is, accordingly, focused upon: the expectations of recruitment agents and employers; English language needs vis à vis other factors influencing the recruitment and employment of immigrant job applicants; language-proficiency assessment practices; and language-related problems associated with the employment of NESB staff. Views on immigration policy changes affecting skilled immigration are also investigated.

Before turning to an examination of the study’s findings, a brief overview will be provided of key issues related to English language proficiency and the employment of skilled immigrants. These issues include immigration policy relevant to skilled migration to New Zealand, research on the employment of skilled immigrants, changing English language requirements in immigration, and issues related to accents and the assessment of English language proficiency.

Immigration Policies to Attract Skills

With globalisation, international migration has increasingly involved the movement of social and human capital between nations (Castles and Miller, 1998). The “quest for skills” (Freeman, 1999) has become a major feature of immigration policies, not only for the main countries of settlement (Canada, the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand) but also for countries better known in the past for emigration (for example, Ireland, Great Britain and Germany). The trend towards large-scale migration of skilled professionals from non-traditional sources (notably Asia, and Eastern Europe including the former Soviet Union) has contributed to greater diversity within immigrant populations and to major challenges for receiving countries.

From the closing decades of the twentieth century, New Zealand has been heavily involved in the move to recruit skilled immigrants in the international marketplace. Changes in immigration policy reflect this involvement and the challenges it has entailed. In 1986 restrictions on immigration from non-traditional source countries
were lifted (Burke, 1986). This change initially had little effect on the number of skilled immigrants entering New Zealand, since the Occupational Priority List remained in place, but when it was coupled with the points system introduced in 1991, the effects were significant. With an emphasis on economic immigration and generic human capital, the General Category targeted professionals for settlement through a policy which rewarded working-aged applicants for their educational qualifications and experience in their professions. The doors were opened to large numbers of skilled immigrants, including those from non-English speaking backgrounds (Trlin, 1997). With an “autopass” system operating, the numbers of approvals in this General Category burgeoned (from 16,852 in 1992-93 to over 35,500 in 1994-95). Arrivals, however, were not always translated into workforce positions and settlement issues multiplied. Large numbers of skilled immigrants remained unemployed or underemployed through lack of statutory professional registration (which particularly affected doctors), lack of New Zealand qualifications and experience, and/or other factors that included inadequate English language proficiency (see, for example, Barnard, 1996; Boyer, 1996; Ethnic Affairs Service, 1996). Many, particularly those with the highest qualifications, struggled to find any employment at all, let alone positions which utilised their skills. Difficulties finding employment or establishing businesses led to social issues, in some cases associated with “astronauting” where spouses left families in New Zealand while returning to Asia to work (Beal and Sos, 1999; Boyer, 1996; Ho, 2003; Ho and Lidgard, 1997; Ho et al., 1998; Ip, 2003). While overall Asian net migration was no greater than that from white source countries, the conspicuousness of the Asian arrivals outweighed their numbers and provided a further catalyst for policy changes (see Bedford, 1996; Bedford and Lidgard, 1997; Trlin et al., 1998b).

The October 1995 review of immigration policy (New Zealand Immigration Service [NZIS], 1995a, 1995b) led to a greater emphasis being placed on employment-related factors. Not only was there to be a clearer separation between human and financial capital, more stringent residency taxation requirements, points for New Zealand work experience and statutory professional registration requirements, but a language requirement of at least a “modest” level of English – Band 5 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) – was introduced for all NESB applicants. With the introduction of these new requirements, skilled immigrant approval numbers fell (to 17,017) in 1996-97, and again (to 13,029) in 1997-98. Approval numbers for immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan were particularly hard hit with potential migrants no longer able to gain access under a General Investment Category (GIC) skills option and many unable to meet the more stringent English language, investment and residency requirements.

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1 See Appendix 2 for IELTS band score descriptors.
The 1995 policy changes had a less marked and relatively temporary effect, however, on overall approval numbers and skilled immigration from other parts of Asia. Figures for skilled approvals rebounded to 31,359 in 2001-02 (NZIS, 2002) and the usually resident Asian population in New Zealand had risen to nearly a quarter of a million people (238,179) by the time of the 2001 census, including some 100,680 ethnic Chinese and over 60,000 Indians. Not all in these ethnic groups were immigrants or skilled but, judging from the large numbers with tertiary qualifications (Statistics New Zealand, 2002) and from approval figures supplied by the New Zealand Immigration Service for skilled applicants (NZIS, 2002, 2003), many were. There was obviously a large pool of potential immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds who could still meet the requirements for permanent residence under the more restrictive General Skills Category (GSC).

The emphasis on and perceived value of attracting large numbers of skilled and business migrants, while not without its critics, continued to be reflected in immigration policies. The New Zealand Immigration Programme (NZIP), introduced in October 2001, set an annual target of 60 per cent for skilled and business category (SB) approvals, and the net immigration flows were seen to fuel economic growth, contribute to an expanded workforce and offer opportunities for the enhancement of the skilled labour force and growth of the economy (BERL, 2002; Department of Labour, 2002). Some efforts were made to assist immigrants’ post-arrival settlement via a number of pilot programmes as a precursor to the introduction of more formal settlement policies under an enlarged settlement package (Asia: NZ, 2002; NZIS, 2002), but the main focus remained on immigrant entry criteria. November 2002 saw the introduction of a more stringent English language requirement for skilled immigrants, with the bar for principal applicants raised to IELTS 6.5 (the level required for entry to most postgraduate courses of study in New Zealand universities). This was followed in July 2003 by a Prioritised Occupations List (POL) in the more restrictive Interim General Skills Category, which limited skilled immigration to those with a job or job offer in New Zealand until the end of 2003 when the 1995 General Skills Category was replaced by a new Skilled Migrant Category (SMC). The SMC included a much revised points system, with a greater weighting of points for a job offer or employment in an actual position in New Zealand. With the initial (February 2004) pool selection point of 195 and planned benchmark of 180 points (out of a possible 220-plus points), a professional applicant could not gain sufficient points in an expression of interest (EOI) to lead to a formal invitation to apply for permanent resident status without having a long-term job offer or existing employment in a relevant skilled position in New Zealand. However, as the number of Expressions of Interest (EOIs) dropped, the entry level for the SMC pool selection dropped progressively to 100 points by September 2004. This low benchmark and the introduction, in December 2004, of points “enhancements” to “give skilled and talented potential migrants a greater chance of their skills being recognised” (NZIS, 2004) again made it possible for skilled
applicants to gain permanent residence without a job or job offer so long as they were from “comparable labour markets”\(^2\) and met other requirements (including English language proficiency).

**Employment Issues**

The 1991 shift to an active policy of recruiting skilled and entrepreneurial immigrants on a non-preferential merit basis would, it was believed, increase the levels of human capital in New Zealand and thus contribute to the wealth and prosperity of the country. It was assumed new arrivals would be able to find suitable work for themselves if they tried. The high profile issue of doctors and large numbers of other professionals who remained unemployed or underemployed (Barnard, 1996; Ethnic Affairs Service, 1996; North et al., 1999; Selvarajah, 1998) undermined this belief. Despite the introduction of statutory registration requirements, a formal (if modest) IELTS 5 language bar, and other requirements in 1995, large numbers of skilled professionals continued to struggle to find employment (Basnayake, 1999; Benson-Rea et al., 2000; EEO Trust, 2000; Friesen and Ip, 1997; Henderson et al., 2001; Henderson, 2002; Ho et al., 2000; Winkelmann and Winkelmann, 1998; Winkelmann, 2000).

Lack of English language proficiency was only one of the reasons identified for this problem of immigrant employment; the non-recognition of overseas qualifications and experience, a preference among many employers for “local” qualifications and work experience (see North and Higgins, 1999) and discrimination – also issues in Australia (see Castles et al., 1998; Hawthorne, 1997; VandenHeuvel and Wooden, 1999) – were other reasons. For example, while Boyer (1996) noted that the greatest barrier to employment for her Taiwanese subjects was language difficulties, Winkelmann and Winkelmann (1998) concluded that English language proficiency was a likely predictor of labour market outcomes but acknowledged that other factors could be involved since NESB immigrants from European countries fared

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\(^2\) In the 8 June 2005 selection from the SMC’s EOI pool, only 57.3 per cent had either points for employment (38 per cent) or a job offer (19 per cent), barely more than the 57 per cent of GSC migrants identified as having relevant job offers in the 2002-03 year (NZIS July 2003 “Announcement of IGSC Policy changes: Questions and Answers”). An important difference was that, in the SMC, only those from countries considered “comparable labour markets” were able to claim points for overseas work experience if they did not already have a skilled job or job offer in New Zealand. This ruling meant that without at least an offer of skilled employment in New Zealand, those from non-comparable labour markets (including India and China, previously two of the main sources of skilled migrants) struggled to reach the 100-point threshold to submit an EOI. (“Comparable labour markets” [at 16/6/05] were: Australia, Austria, Belgium-Luxembourg, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Portugal, South Korea, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, South Africa, the UK, and the USA.)
better than their counterparts from Asia. ESOL courses with a work experience component targeted at unemployed professional immigrants reported limited success in placing those who took the courses into employment rather than further study (Market Research and Evaluation Team, 1998). Only workplace-based employment experience programmes designed for registered, long-term unemployed skilled immigrants reported considerable success in securing participants permanent positions in the professional workforce (Fisk, 2003).

While lack of English language proficiency was widely identified as a barrier to employment, other linguistic factors were also proving to be barriers. The 1996 High Hopes study touched on the issue of discrimination, with fluent English speakers reporting that they were unable to find work “because New Zealand employers did not accept their foreign accents” (Ethnic Affairs Service, 1996: 37). This finding was echoed in the New Zealand Employment Service report on ESOL courses for professional migrants, which stated that “[t]he greatest concern that participating employers had in taking on tertiary qualified immigrant job seekers was the students’ ability to speak New Zealand English” (Market Research and Evaluation Group, 1998: 11; emphasis added). It was also a finding supported by other researchers who found that visibly different immigrants were experiencing difficulty in securing jobs for which they were qualified, even when they had a high level of English language proficiency and often New Zealand qualifications (Basnayake, 1999; EEO Trust, 2000; Henderson, 2003; Henderson et al., 2001). Discrimination based on accents and ethnicity, already identified as an issue in the 1980s (see Singer and Eder, 1987, 1989), remained an important hurdle to employment, particularly in the professions.

**Issues Related to English Language Proficiency Assessment**

It is clear that a degree of proficiency in the language of the host society is an important factor in the successful settlement of immigrants and a prerequisite for socio-economic participation in the wider community (see, for example, Beiser, 1999; Boyd et al., 1994; Clyne, 1994; Fletcher, 1999; Ho et al., 2000). And a lack of language skills is seen to impose a cost on New Zealand “by impeding immigrant settlement and socio-economic participation, and thereby their net contribution to the host society and economy” (NZIS, 1995b: 10). This said, an important question remains: what level of English language proficiency is required for successful settlement and socio-economic integration?

**Language requirements in immigration policy**

“Adequate English language skills” were identified in 1986 as important for immigrants “to make their place in their new homeland … [and to] be able to
communicate with the wider New Zealand community” (Burke, 1986: 16), and all family members in any residence application made in the occupational category were to be interviewed. Nine years later, English was identified as “a key to successful settlement” (NZIS, 1995b: 10), but only economic (i.e. skilled and business) migrants were to be required to meet the new IELTS 5 benchmark. Another three years later, the requirement was effectively dropped for business immigrants, who could enter New Zealand with little or no English so long as they pre-purchased English tuition. Further changes in 2002 saw the reinstatement of a compulsory IELTS requirement for principal applicants (PAs) in the Business categories and the raising of the General Skills Category PA requirement to IELTS 6.5. Family Category approvals, however, have not been required to meet an English language requirement since the late 1980s.

These differences point to an official view that some immigrants need a greater degree of competency in the target language for successful settlement than others. Moreover, the language requirement, where it has been applied, has been neither clear-cut nor stable. The 1986 “adequate English language skills” required of all applicants for occupational entry was to be measured in a face-to-face interview. This requirement was superseded in 1991 by “a minimum level of English language” (NZIS, 1991: 14) which was to be required of only one family member over the age of 17 in the Business Investment Category and of only the PA in the General Category. Again it was to be assessed by interview, and, if an applicant was borderline, by the administering of an NZIS test measuring the English language level equivalent to that of an 11-year-old native-speaker. The language bar was raised in 1995 with the introduction of a mandatory IELTS 5 pass (in each of the four skills) or “proof” of its equivalent for PAs within the General Skills and the Business Investor Categories. Dependants over the age of 15 were to meet the same “modest” IELTS 5 level of English or pay a $20,000 fee/bond, with the possibility of a refund – “an incentive for a person to rapidly acquire basic English language skills” (NZIS, 1995b: 10) – if the required level was reached within twelve months. Criticisms regarding the discriminatory nature of the bond ensued (Forsyte Research, 1998; Hoffman, 1998; Shackleford, 1997). These criticisms, along with issues regarding the bond’s administration and legality (retrospectively resolved via legislation in 1998), contributed to its replacement, in November 1998, with a system whereby those dependants not meeting the required level of proficiency could pre-purchase English language tuition. At the same time the English language requirement for business applicants (already relaxed to IELTS 4 in December 1997) and for some employed on-shore General Skills Category applicants was waived if English language tuition was pre-purchased. This waiver undermined the argument for any specific minimum level of English language proficiency for employment by “remov[ing] the need for people who are clearly employable in New Zealand to pass an English language requirement to gain residence” (NZIS, 1998: 2). Further changes in February 2001 included the easing of IELTS requirements from the achievement of
the minimum level in each of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing) to an average over all four skills, in order to make New Zealand a more attractive destination for less fluent applicants with other attributes such as occupational skills (Clark, 2001). The English level adjustments continued in 2002, with the raising of the requirements for skilled and business PAs to IELTS 6.5 and IELTS 5, respectively. The dependants’ option of pre-purchasing ESOL tuition if they did not meet the required level remained, but would later lead to concerns regarding the uptake of tuition (Department of Labour Workforce Group – Immigration Service, 2005).

Through all of the above changes, the English language proficiency requirement has applied only to those in the business and skilled categories. Clearly, although English may be a necessary requisite for successful settlement and socio-economic integration, language requirements in immigration policy have tended to be selective, reactive, and used to control the flow of immigrants in a particular category (see Henderson, 1998, 2002; Henderson et al., 1997). They tell us little (if anything) about the level of English language proficiency actually required for the successful entry and integration of skilled arrivals into the workforce.

Language assessment as a social activity

One of a person’s most distinctive characteristics is how he or she looks physically, notably in terms of “racial” characteristics. Another is how he or she sounds in terms of conversational performance and accent. Unfortunately, these characteristics may activate stereotypes and trigger prejudices and discrimination, either consciously or unconsciously (Holtgraves, 2001; Jandt, 2004). Thus, the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from non-traditional sources means that language proficiency cannot be examined in isolation. Host society attitudes and responses to immigrants and visible minority status affect both the utilisation of existing linguistic proficiency and the acquisition of further proficiency through employment (Chiswick and Miller, 1995; Miller and Neo, 1997; Valtonen, 2001).

As a social activity, language is particularly sensitive to its social context and this social context influences one’s assessment of a speaker’s language proficiency. So, for example, in a Canadian study, Munro and Derwing (2000) found that opinions regarding pronunciation problems varied according to subjective listener responses to non-native accents. Heavily accented speech was sometimes found to be perfectly intelligible and accent reduction did not necessarily increase intelligibility. Similarly, in an American study, listening with an attitude was found to affect the comprehension of Korean non-native speakers of English, and the perceived success of interactions was found to be affected by the attitudes of native speakers, with negative attitudes associated with the problematising of a partner’s utterances and the use of avoidance strategies detrimental to the outcome of the task set (Lindemann, 2002). Historical and contextual factors including contact opportunities
and asymmetrical relationships have also been associated with language and accent-based discrimination and the outcomes of intercultural communication in studies of both Chinese Americans (Goto et al., 2002) and Japanese-American professional interactions (Sunaoshi, 2005).

The effects of non-native varieties of a language on interlocutors have been widely researched through matched guise experiments, where respondents are asked to rate speakers on their voices. In such studies, accents have been identified as powerful interpersonal markers which influence evaluations of speakers in terms of power-status (including confidence, intelligence, education, social class and success) and solidarity (personal traits including friendliness, kindness, generosity, trustworthiness and humour) (see Bayard, 1995; Giles and Powesland, 1975; Scherer and Giles, 1979; Huygens and Vaughan, 1983; Watts, 1981). Giles is reported to have said (in a 1988 lecture at Otago University) that an average person subconsciously evaluates a speaker on the basis of his or her voice “in about 18 seconds” (Bayard, 1995: 36).

In face-to-face communication, physical appearance and non-verbal communication become more important but these attributes may also be speedily and stereotypically assessed, as Singer and Eder (1989) found in their New Zealand study of students’ reactions to simulated videotaped selection interviews. Furthermore, their study found that though ethnicity and job status were both significantly important in selection interviews, subjects preferred to attribute decisions to perceived accent rather than to ethnicity. Apparently it was considered more socially acceptable to judge people by their accent. It has also been found to be a very much harder form of (indirect) discrimination to take action against in the workplace (Lippi-Green, 1997; Roberts et al., 1992).

Discrimination on the basis of foreign accents has been identified by both immigrants and members of the anglophone majority in New Zealand. Two studies undertaken for the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Trust – of Sri Lankan migrants (Basnayake, 1999) and of human resource practitioners and recruitment consultants (EEO Trust, 2000) – reported discrimination related to non-New Zealand accents. Typical respondents’ comments included:

Some employers think that anyone with a non-New Zealand accent is from hell.

When I phone job agents, the moment they note our accent, they always try to discourage us (Basnayake, 1999: 26).
It is not hard to conclude that many employers, or their HR/recruitment staff, will consider applicants with a foreign accent or a foreign name only as a last resort (EEO Trust, 2000: 12).

In Janice Burns’ (EEO Trust, 2000) research, 70 per cent of the human resource practitioners and recruitment consultants surveyed felt that those with non-New Zealand accents were likely to experience discrimination and over 80 per cent said that first-hand experience of talented and appropriately qualified people being discriminated against in the job market” (EEO Trust, 2000: 6). Those identified as most likely to face unfair barriers to employment “were older people, those with a non-New Zealand accent, those with a disability and people from a different culture” (EEO Trust, 2000: 6). A similar view was expressed by the head of an ESOL department in a large metropolitan polytechnic in a survey of English language provisions for adult migrants, when he observed that “you can prepare them right up to IELTS-7, but they mightn’t get jobs because of a slight foreign accent and the foreign flavour of their qualifications” (Watts et al., 2001: 34).

In the EEO Trust’s Sri Lankan study, over 10 per cent of those surveyed identified “limited” knowledge of English as a barrier to their employment even though over 92 per cent reported that they were either fluent or very fluent in English (Basnayake, 1999). This claim echoed concerns expressed in the High Hopes study (Ethnic Affairs Service, 1996), and would be repeated in the New Settlers Programme longitudinal study (Henderson, 2002), where skilled Chinese immigrants reported that they were discriminated against on the grounds of their non-New Zealand accents rather than their actual levels of English language proficiency. Not sounding like “us” was identified in these studies as a marker for exclusion – just as the inability to say “shibboleth” identified outsiders (the Ephraimites who tried to escape from the Gileadites) in the Old Testament (Judges, 12: 4-6).3

In the light of the above findings, language can be seen to play a major role in the settlement of immigrants and their entry to the workforce. This is particularly true when professional, high status occupations are involved. The report that follows examines the level of English language proficiency considered necessary by employment agencies, professional engineers and computing firms for employment in the professions in New Zealand, and other issues related to the employment of immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds.

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3 An inability to pronounce the “sh” sound in “shibboleth” was used to identify the enemy, who were then slain.
METHODOLOGY

The target groups investigated in this study were recruitment agencies and organisations engaging professionally qualified personnel in the fields of engineering and computing, the two professional areas most commonly represented among those gaining permanent residence under the General Skills Category and its pre-October 1995 predecessor, the General Category. Private and institutional engineering and computing organisations, recruitment agencies and local government authorities – identified as the main avenues through which engineers and other technically-trained immigrant professionals were likely to gain access to positions in their field in New Zealand – were therefore targeted for the survey.

It had originally been intended to also include health-related organisations in the survey as access to positions in medicine continued to affect large numbers of doctors accepted under the provisions of the 1991-1995 General Category (Ethnic Affairs Service, 1996; Kirkwood, 2003; North et al., 1999; Selvarajah, 1998). However, the introduction in 1995 of a statutory registration prerequisite (where appropriate) for principal applicants applying for permanent residence under the General Skills Category, had significantly reduced the numbers of doctors gaining residence and hence issues related to language and access to the medical profession. The decision was made, therefore, not to include health-related organisations alongside professional engineering and computing firms as a third employer group in the survey. Questions regarding health professionals were, however, retained in the questionnaire as it was felt that it would still be useful to obtain the views of other organisations, particularly employment agencies, regarding English language proficiency levels and the recruitment and employment of immigrant health professionals.

Questionnaire Design

A 12-item postal questionnaire was designed to elicit data on policies and practices with regard to the recruitment and employment of immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire design drew on the experiences of skilled immigrants interviewed in the New Settlers Programme longitudinal study (Henderson, 2002; Henderson et al., 2001) and surveys conducted by the Ethnic Affairs Service (1996) and the EEO Trust (Basnayake, 1999; EEO Trust, 2000) in the selection and development of topics and items for inclusion. Questionnaire items were worded so as to be suitable for completion by recruitment agencies, private employers, and local and territorial authority employers involved in the employment of staff in the targeted professions.
The questionnaire was divided into four sections:

(a) background information, to determine the characteristics of the organisations and persons responding;
(b) opinions, to establish the level of English considered necessary for employment and the importance of English language proficiency vis-à-vis other employment-related factors;
(c) practices, to establish how applicants' levels of English are assessed and the responding organisation's actual experiences with respect to the employment of NESB immigrants; and
(d) government policy, with two items designed to obtain information on the perceived usefulness of immigration policy changes related to English language requirements.

Where appropriate, open-ended questions were included to give respondents the opportunity to comment in more detail on particular topics addressed in closed-ended questions. General comments were also invited at the end of the questionnaire.

The draft questionnaire was piloted with a recruitment agent, a computing services manager in an educational institution, and a professional engineer employed by a local government organisation. This led to some modification and clarification of particular items before the final questionnaire was printed in four batches and with different coloured covers for each of the four target groups for ease of identification and the collation of responses.

**Data Collection**

A postal survey, with the option of follow-up interviews with some respondents, was identified as the most effective method for data collection on a national basis. To obtain a national sample for each of the four target groups, lists of organisations and addresses were obtained from:

1) the Telecom *Yellow Pages*, for employment agencies, engineering and computing organisations;
2) the Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) website for WINZ regional offices; and
3) the 2002-2003 *New Zealand Local Government Directory* for lists of local and territorial authorities.
Lists of employment agencies, professional engineers and computing organisations were drawn from the Telecom *Yellow Pages* under the headings: "employment agencies" including "nursing agencies/bureaux"; "consulting", "civil", "mechanical", "metallurgical" and "mining", "electrical" and "professional" engineers; and "computing", "CAD" and "electronic engineers". Where organisations with the same addresses appeared in more than one list (for example, under "consulting engineers" and "CAD"), duplicate entries were deleted. To obtain manageable sample sizes for employment agencies and engineering firms, systematic random samples of 1 in 2 employment agencies and 1 in 3 engineering firms were drawn from a list of over 1,000 addresses in each case. All WINZ agencies, computing organisations, and local and territorial authorities identified were included in the mail out for the survey.

Consideration was given to accessing professional engineers via the Institute of Professional Engineers of New Zealand (IPENZ), and recruitment agencies via the Human Resources Institute of New Zealand and the Recruitment and Consulting Services Association, as was done for Burns’ (EEO Trust 2000) *Recruiting Talent* study. However, it was felt that accessing respondents through these professional organisations would involve not only positive features (e.g. easier access to professionals in the field) but also negative aspects (such as sample bias in accessing only the listed members of IPENZ etc, an inability to monitor the sample size and hence response rate, and responses from individuals rather than organisations). It was decided, therefore, to use the Telecom *Yellow Pages* listings to create a sampling frame from which to draw a national sample of recruitment agencies, engineering firms and computing organisations.

Questionnaires were sent out in stages (between March and July 2003) to the four sample groups. The original mail outs involved:

1) 284 employment agencies and WINZ offices, of which 17 were lost, gone and unable to be traced or no longer recruiting, leaving a sample of 267;
2) 362 engineering firms, of which no contact was made with 7, leaving a sample of 355;
3) 216 computing firms, with 3 not located and 1 having closed down, leaving a sample of 212; and
4) 83 local and territorial authorities.

A cover letter outlining the research and voluntary nature of participation was included with each questionnaire (Appendix 1) along with a pre-addressed, freepost envelope and a request that questionnaires be returned to the principal researcher (Henderson). No names were recorded on questionnaires, but the latter were numerically coded so that returns could be sorted by group and checked off against mailing lists. Reminder letters and replacement questionnaires were mailed out to
increase the response rate and local firms were also telephoned with a reminder and request to return the questionnaire.

While (returned) declines to complete the questionnaire were very rare (3 overall), the questionnaire was frequently identified as not being relevant, i.e. the receiving organisation/firm did not employ engineering, computing or health professionals or (as some engineers and recruitment agents explained in notes appended to the returned questionnaire) the recipient was a solic or very small operation. The commercial and service (rather than professional) nature of many computing firms and the declining number of computer service businesses since 2000 suggest that many of those for whom the questionnaire was not relevant did not return it and more than the four accounted for by returned, undelivered questionnaires may have closed down or moved on, reducing the original sample size below the 212 firms to which questionnaires were posted out.

Table 1  Sample size and response rates for the four sample groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Employment agencies</th>
<th>Engineering firms</th>
<th>Computing firms</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postal sample size</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses received (% of original mail out)</td>
<td>158 (59.2)</td>
<td>195 (54.9)</td>
<td>83 (39.2)</td>
<td>52 (62.7)</td>
<td>488 (53.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not relevant/not completed (% of total responses received)</td>
<td>71 (44.9)</td>
<td>83 (42.6)</td>
<td>36 (43.4)</td>
<td>3 (5.8)</td>
<td>193 (39.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant and completed returns (% of total responses received)</td>
<td>87 (55.1)</td>
<td>112 (57.4)</td>
<td>47 (56.6)</td>
<td>49 (94.2)</td>
<td>295 (60.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample size and response rates for each of the four groups and overall totals are presented in Table 1. While responses were lower than hoped for, all bar the computing group achieved a total response rate which is considered to be adequate for a postal survey (Babbie, 1991). As shown, total response rates to the questionnaire ranged from 39.2 per cent for computing firms to 62.7 per cent for local and territorial authorities. The overall response rate for the survey was 53.2 per cent.

Of the 488 questionnaires returned, 193 (39.5 per cent) were identified by recipients as not relevant/not applicable (Question 1a). Not completed returns included cases of firms which had ceased or were in the process of ceasing operations, organisations
which did not recruit in the specified professional areas, branch organisations which were not responsible for the recruitment of professional staff, and one-person/family operations which did not employ other staff. The 295 questionnaires (60.5 per cent of those returned) completed by employment agencies, engineering firms, computing firms, and local and territorial authorities which recruited and employed professional engineers and computer personnel, provided the data for analysis in this study. Finally, it should be noted that because the comments recorded by respondents on questionnaires provided a large amount of qualitative data for analysis, the option of follow-up interviews to supplement the data obtained from the questionnaires was not required.
PROFILE OF ORGANISATIONS AND RESPONDENTS

Background information was requested in the questionnaire on the participating organisations and respondents in order to gain a profile of the organisations, firms and persons involved in the recruitment or employment of immigrant job seekers. The results obtained are presented below.

Profile of Participating Organisations

The main professional focus areas of the organisations sampled, as adjudged from the source lists (i.e. the Telecom Yellow Pages, the on-line list of WINZ offices, and the 2002-2003 New Zealand Local Government Directory), were: employment and recruitment (in the engineering, computing and health areas including nursing bureau work), professional engineering, computing, and local and territorial authority functions.

Areas of operation

As expected, most of the participating employment agencies, professional engineering and computing organisations were private in nature, while the local and territorial authorities and WINZ offices were identified as public sector government agencies (Table 2). The “Other” category consisted, in the main, of a very small number of education-related organisations and local trusts.

Table 2  Area of operation of participating organisations (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of operation</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=87)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=112)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=47)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=49)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>98.2</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local/central govt. agencies</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main functions and recruitment and employment areas

Some organisations noted more than one main area of operation (Table 3). For example, nursing bureaux were both recruitment agencies and health providers, and engineering facilities within educational providers were engaged in the provision of both educational and engineering services. A request for information regarding the
main functions and areas of involvement of organisations indicated the degree of crossover between functions and professional areas.

Table 3  
Main function(s) reported by participating organisations (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main function(s)</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=87)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=112)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=47)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=49)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof. engineering</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>98.2</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing/IT/IS</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local/central govt.</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health provider</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These functions affected the fields in which organisations recruited and employed professionals. Of the 87 employment agencies, 77 per cent identified their main function as recruitment, with 58.6, 47.1 and 40.2 per cent engaged in recruiting engineering, computing and health professionals, respectively. Just over one-eighth were identified as health providers (usually nursing bureaux); 9.1 per cent were actively engaged in engineering or computing; 6.9 per cent were government agencies (Work and Income or other government employment-assistance agencies); and 8.0 per cent were private or community trusts or similar. Thirteen employment agencies (14.9 per cent) reported having more than one main function.

The blurred boundary between engineering and computing was clearly shown in the responses of engineering and, more particularly, computing firms regarding their main areas of operation and professional recruitment. Of the 112 engineering firms, virtually all (98.2 per cent) reported that they were mainly engaged in professional engineering. However, 5 (4.5 per cent) identified computing as the or a main function and 7 (6.3 per cent) were engaged in other main activities, usually land surveying or education. Reflecting their areas of operation, 12.5 per cent of the engineering firms also employed computing staff. Meanwhile, nearly equal numbers of computing firms identified their main function as computing and engineering (42.6 and 40.4 per cent, respectively), and 51.1 per cent reported that they recruited engineering-related professionals. A quarter of all computing firms identified an “Other” main function (e.g. an educational or retail function) and one reported recruiting staff with a medical background. Ten engineering firms and 5 computing firms reported more than a single main function.

At the local government level, as expected, virtually all local and territorial authorities reported employing engineering professionals (98 per cent). Most often
this involved staff engaged in civil or construction engineering. Many also employed computing professionals (65.3 per cent) and a small number employed public health-related professionals (12.1 per cent).

Locations and levels of operation

The geographic distribution of the New Zealand population was reflected in the location of the participating organisations (Table 4). Most of them were located in the North Island and in major centres (particularly Auckland). This trend did not hold true, however, for local and territorial authority responses, where the majority (67.4 per cent) came from smaller centres throughout the North and South Islands. This bias towards “Other” centres and the greater representation of the South Island (30.6 per cent) among local and territorial authorities mirrored the regional function of such organisations and the number of smaller authorities located in these areas.

Table 4  Location of participating organisations (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=87)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=112)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=47)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=49)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major city, Nth Island</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other centre, Nth Island</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major city, Sth Island</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other centre, Sth Island</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participating organisations were more likely to operate at a local (sub-national) level than at a national or an international level (Table 5). It was surprising, however, how many of them had national if not international linkages. One might expect, therefore, that they would have a more culturally diverse workforce or at least some contact with other cultures and associates from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The staff size of organisations in each of the four groups varied from small (1-5 people) to very large operations (over 100 employees), except that the smallest local government agencies had at least 6 employees (Table 6). While there was a tendency for firms operating at a sub-national level to be smaller operations, there was no clear relationship between the size of an organisation and its level of operation. For example, 5 employment agencies and 3 engineering firms operating mainly at an international level had 1-5 staff members, while 4 employment agencies and 4 engineering firms operating at a sub-national level employed 100-plus people. Local and territorial authorities also tended to employ large numbers of people.
Table 5  Main level of operation of participating organisations (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main level of operation</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=87)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=112)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=47)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=49)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-national</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>95.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6  Number of staff (equivalent full-time positions or EFTs) in participating organisations (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of EFT staff members</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=87)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=112)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=47)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=49)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-49</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100+</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents

All those who completed the questionnaires identified themselves as being “personally involved in the recruitment or employment of personnel” in one or more of the professional areas concerned.

Positions held

Respondents held positions ranging from owner or principal in the organisation surveyed to financial or administrative assistants. Those in engineering firms were more likely to be owners/principals (13.4 per cent) than those in computing firms (4.3 per cent), employment agencies (9.2 per cent) or local government (zero), and those in computing firms were most likely to be general managers, CEOs or directors (63.8 per cent). Almost 51 per cent of engineering respondents, 39.1 per cent of employment agency respondents and 40.8 per cent of local government respondents were also general managers, CEOs or directors. Reflecting the size of their organisations and generally large staff numbers, questionnaires returned by local and territorial authorities were completed by equal numbers of Human Resources personnel and general managers/CEOs/directors.
Immigrant status and languages other than English

Sixty-nine of the 295 respondents (23.4 per cent) reported that they themselves were immigrants to New Zealand (Table 7). Of this group, 36 (52.2 per cent) came from either the United Kingdom or Ireland (traditional source and predominantly anglophone countries) and were working mainly in employment agencies and engineering firms. In contrast, overseas-born respondents in computing firms and local and territorial authorities were more likely to come from source countries other than the United Kingdom and Ireland, and to be bilingual.

Table 7  Respondents born overseas and speaking languages other than English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=87)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=112)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=47)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=49)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas-born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in UK or Ireland</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other overseas-born</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total overseas-born</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks at least one</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language other than English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only very small numbers reported speaking a language other than English (Table 7). Just 13 (4.4 per cent) of the 295 respondents reported that they were (at least) bilingual. Furthermore, the ability to speak a language other than English was not clearly related to country of birth. Three respondents who reported an ability to speak a language other than English were New Zealand-born, with one speaking Maori, while several others who were bilingual were immigrants from countries where English was the main language. Although few spoke languages other than English, the languages spoken included: Dutch, Lithuanian, Croatian, Greek, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi and Marathi, Samoan, Tokelauan and Maori.

While country of birth and first language may have influenced the response rate among private agencies, the profile suggests that overseas-born respondents from places other than the UK and Ireland may be more likely to be employed in and hold higher-level positions in computing firms and local government organisations than in engineering or employment agencies. As expected, overseas-born respondents were also more likely to be employed in organisations located in a major city in the North Island.
Overall, there was no clear association among the respondents of being overseas-born and representing organisations operating at the international level rather than sub-national or national levels. Respondents for employment agencies were more likely to be overseas-born if they worked in organisations with national or international linkages, and overseas-born respondents in computer firms were more likely to work in those with international operations. The opposite trend was found in engineering firms, where there was no greater likelihood of the respondent being overseas-born if a firm had wider linkages. However, level of operation was not the only factor associated with the presence of overseas-born respondents. Area and staff size of the operation also appeared to be important factors.
OPINIONS, PRACTICES AND POLICY

In this section of the report, results are provided for the four groups studied (employment agencies, professional engineering organisations, computing firms and local and territorial authorities) under headings used in the questionnaire, that is: opinions, practices and government policy (see Appendix 1). Similarities and differences within and between the four groups surveyed are highlighted.

Opinions

Respondents were asked, with respect to immigrants, for their opinions regarding: the importance of English language proficiency for employment in professional positions in the areas or fields their organisations were involved in; the level of English language proficiency required at different levels of professional appointment in their own and other fields of employment; and the importance of English language proficiency compared with other factors (e.g. qualifications, work experience, personal attributes).

Importance of English language proficiency

The general consensus was that English language proficiency was an important issue affecting the employment prospects of professional immigrants, and a concern for at least some – if not all – NESB immigrants (Table 8). Only 2 respondents (1 from an engineering firm, 1 from a local government authority) felt that it was not an issue. Overall, 53.5 per cent felt it was an important issue for all immigrants, whether or not they came from non-English speaking backgrounds, with engineers the most likely to choose this all-inclusive option and employment agencies the least likely. A further 25.8 per cent felt it was an issue for all NESB immigrants, with employment agencies the most likely to choose this option and local and territorial authorities the least likely. The percentage that felt it was an issue for most NESB immigrants was, again, smaller at 12.2 per cent. Respondents from local and territorial authorities were the most likely to choose this option and also more than twice as likely as those in other groups to feel it was an issue for only some (rather than most or all) NESB immigrants. Three respondents (2 from employment agencies, 1 from an engineering firm) provided no information on this topic.

Comments regarding the importance of English language proficiency usually related to concerns surrounding safety, compliance with regulations, and the need to understand and work effectively with colleagues and clients.
Figure 1  Levels of English language proficiency required for positions
Table 8  Respondents’ opinions, by categories of organisations, regarding immigrants for whom English language proficiency is an important issue (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrants for whom English language proficiency is important</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=87)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=112)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=47)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=49)</th>
<th>Total (N=295)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All immigrants</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All NESB migrants</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most NESB migrants</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some NESB migrants</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not an issue</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English language proficiency for professional appointments at different levels

To determine what levels of English language proficiency were felt to be necessary for professional appointments to senior, middle and junior positions, a 6-point scale was provided, ranging from 1 = “Modest (e.g. IELTS 5)” to 6 = “Native-speaker fluency (with NZ accent)”. The lowest level on the scale (“Modest”) equated to that required of principal applicants (PAs) for approval under the General Skills Category (October 1995 to November 2002) before the level required of PAs for skilled immigration was raised to IELTS 6.5. The highest level – “Native-speaker fluency (with NZ accent)” – was a requirement higher than the IELTS 9 band score, which does not require a native speaker’s accent.\(^4\) Not only was this requirement of a New Zealand accent a level beyond that measured in IELTS tests but it was one which would exclude virtually all adult immigrants to New Zealand, including those from English-speaking source countries.

The levels which respondents felt to be required for senior, middle and junior level positions in engineering and computing, and responses regarding medical positions from employment agencies, are shown in Figure 1. As illustrated, there was a degree of accord among respondents regarding the minimum level of English proficiency needed by those filling engineering and computing positions at different levels of employment. The minimum “Modest” (IELTS 5-equivalent) level of English was rarely considered adequate for any position. No more than 4.4 to 4.5 per cent in any one group (employment agency and engineering firm respondents, respectively, for

\(^4\) See Appendix 2 for IELTS Band 9 descriptor. Note that pronunciation is assessed according to “the ability to produce comprehensible speech to fulfil the speaking test requirements” with key indicators being “the amount of strain caused to the listener, the amount of the speech which is unintelligible and the noticeability of L1 influence” (IELTS, 2003a: 9).
junior level positions in computing) selected this level. Computing firm and local and territorial authority respondents were a little more likely than those from employment agencies or engineering firms to choose the lowest ("Modest") level or the next level (equivalent to IELTS 6: "Competent user"), and these two lowest levels were more likely to be chosen for computing positions than for engineering positions. In contrast, large numbers of respondents felt that applicants needed at least near-native-speaker proficiency for employment at the senior level. For example, of the 250 respondents who answered the item, 60 per cent felt that a senior engineering position required all but a New Zealand accent, and a further 14.8 per cent felt that it required not only native-speaker fluency but also a New Zealand accent. The overall figures for computing (where N=135) were a little lower, with 51.9 per cent stipulating a near-native-speaker proficiency and 13.3 per cent native-speaker fluency with a New Zealand accent.

There were, however, interesting inter-group variations in opinion regarding the levels of English required. For example, respondents in employment agencies and engineering firms were more likely than those in computing firms and at least twice as likely as those in local and territorial authorities to feel that native-speaker fluency with a New Zealand accent was required for all levels of engineering. In particular, respondents in engineering firms and employment agencies were more likely than those in computer firms and local or territorial authorities to believe that a New Zealand accent was required for senior engineering positions (17.9 and 16.9 per cent, respectively). Employment agency respondents were also more than twice as likely to feel that native-speaker fluency with a New Zealand accent was necessary for senior positions in computing when compared with respondents for any of the other three groups of organisations. This situation also applied for junior computing positions. Respondents from local and territorial authorities and from computing firms were more likely to see lower levels of English language proficiency as being acceptable across the board. The acceptance of a level of English language proficiency less than that of native-speaker fluency with a New Zealand accent by local and territorial authority respondents supports Watts and Turlin's (2000a: 11-12) finding that while "[c]ompetency in English was emphasised as important .....the degree of competency expected depended upon the work activity concerned", and that "[a]ccented English was not seen as a communication impediment as long as a person’s speech was clear and not excessively rapid".

Overall, opinions regarding the levels of English required for senior, middle and junior level positions suggest:

- that while there was some degree of accord within and across employment groups, there were no universally accepted levels of English language proficiency required to fill particular positions;
that a “Modest” (IELTS 5) level of proficiency was rarely considered adequate for a professional appointment;
that some recruiters and employers expected even immigrant applicants to have a New Zealand accent, especially for a senior position;
that a New Zealand accent was more likely to be required for engineering than for computing positions;
that medical professionals were the most likely to be required to have a New Zealand accent;
that respondents for local and territorial authorities were more likely than those in other groups to consider lower levels of English proficiency adequate for all areas and levels of employment; and
that a New Zealand accent was more likely to be required by employment agencies than by organisations or firms in other groups.

**Importance of English language proficiency compared with other factors**

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of English language proficiency compared with other factors (i.e. qualifications, work experience, personal attributes, host country cultural factors) influencing the employment of immigrant professionals in New Zealand. The mean overall rankings (with mean scores and modes) for the three occupational groups are shown in Tables 9 and 10. Results for the medical profession (Table 10) are restricted to responses from employment agencies since no more than 4 respondents in each of the other groups provided any rankings for this category.

There was reluctance on the part of some respondents to rank the factors specified. Apart from those for whom a particular occupational group was not relevant, incomplete data were provided in some instances. Seven respondents (4 from employment agencies, 1 from an engineering firm and 2 from local or territorial authorities) provided no ranking of factors for any occupational group and 5 (4 from employment agencies and 1 from a local or territorial authority) provided only partial rankings. More commonly, respondents avoided ranking individual factors by allocating equal rankings to more than one factor.

While rankings varied considerably, a number of trends emerge from the mean rankings. New Zealand work experience and New Zealand qualifications tended to operate as a pair, as did overseas qualifications and overseas work experience. Employment agency respondents consistently ranked New Zealand qualifications above those gained overseas. The majority of engineering and computing firm respondents offered higher rankings for overseas qualifications and experience than for New Zealand qualifications in the others’ profession, but not in their own area. Overseas qualifications and/or work experience were more likely to produce split modes, reflecting the varying responses to these characteristics. Personal attributes
gained a higher mean rating (and mode) among engineering firm respondents with respect to their own profession, and from respondents for employment agencies involved in the recruitment of medical professionals, than in other situations (perhaps a reflection of a greater perceived need for employees to interact closely with other staff and clients in these occupations). Knowledge of New Zealand cultural practices was consistently rated last overall, even by respondents in employment agencies recruiting for the medical profession, where cultural awareness is widely considered an important issue. Across the two professional areas (engineering and computing), English language proficiency ranked within the top two places for all groups except local and territorial authorities, where is was placed below New Zealand qualifications and work experience.

**Table 9**  Respondents’ opinions, by participating organisation categories, regarding the importance of English language proficiency and other factors, ranked in order of importance from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important) for professional engineers and computing professionals (mean rankings and modes in brackets)

(a) **Importance of factors for professional engineers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall ranking</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=48)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=111)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=27)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=46)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>NZ work experience (2.38; 1)</td>
<td>English proficiency (2.51; 1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>English proficiency (2.97; 1)</td>
<td>NZ qualifications (3.02; 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>English proficiency (2.46; 1)</td>
<td>NZ work experience (2.99; 1)</td>
<td>Overseas work experience (3.41; 2)</td>
<td>NZ work experience (3.20; 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>NZ qualifications (3.00; 1)</td>
<td>NZ qualifications (3.46; 4)</td>
<td>Overseas qualifications (3.48; 2)</td>
<td>English proficiency (3.35; 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Overseas work experience (3.90; 5)</td>
<td>Personal attributes (e.g. age, personality) (3.75; 1)</td>
<td>NZ qualifications (3.52; 1)</td>
<td>Overseas qualifications (3.59; 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Overseas qualifications (4.18; 5)</td>
<td>Overseas work experience (4.15; 4)</td>
<td>NZ work experience (3.66; 4 &amp; 5)</td>
<td>Overseas work experience (4.02; 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Personal attributes (e.g. age, personality) (4.67; 7)</td>
<td>Overseas qualifications (4.31; 5)</td>
<td>Personal attributes (e.g. age, personality) (4.03; 6)</td>
<td>Personal attributes (e.g. age, personality) (4.24; 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Knowledge of NZ cultural practices (5.54; 7)</td>
<td>Knowledge of NZ cultural practices (5.50; 7)</td>
<td>Knowledge of NZ cultural practices (6.17; 7)</td>
<td>Knowledge of NZ cultural practices (5.47; 7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26
(b) Importance of factors for computing professionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall ranking</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=32)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=16)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=27)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>NZ work experience (2.56; 1)</td>
<td>English proficiency (2.5; 1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>English proficiency (2.52; 1)</td>
<td>NZ qualifications (3.19; 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>English proficiency (2.63; 1 &amp; 3)</td>
<td>Overseas work experience (2.94; 2)</td>
<td>NZ work experience (2.67; 1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>NZ work experience (3.37; 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>NZ qualifications (3.32; 3)</td>
<td>NZ work experience (3.56; 1)</td>
<td>NZ qualifications (3.11; 2)</td>
<td>English proficiency (3.67; 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Overseas work experience (3.70; 4)</td>
<td>Overseas qualifications (3.56; 2, 4 &amp; 5)</td>
<td>Overseas work experience (3.30; 2)</td>
<td>Overseas work experience (3.74; 2 &amp; 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Overseas qualifications (3.93; 2, 3 &amp; 6)</td>
<td>= NZ qualifications (3.81; 3)</td>
<td>= Overseas qualifications (3.96; 2, 4 &amp; 6)</td>
<td>Personal attributes (e.g. age, personality) (3.85; 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Personal attributes (e.g. age, personality) (3.97; 1 &amp; 6)</td>
<td>= Personal attributes (e.g. age, personality) (3.81; 3)</td>
<td>= Personal attributes (e.g. age, personality) (3.96; 6)</td>
<td>Overseas qualifications (4.11; 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Knowledge of NZ cultural practices (5.49; 7)</td>
<td>Knowledge of NZ cultural practices (5.81; 7)</td>
<td>Knowledge of NZ cultural practices (5.82; 7)</td>
<td>Knowledge of NZ cultural practices (5.52; 7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10  Respondents’ opinions (employment agencies only) regarding the importance of English language proficiency and other factors in recruitment, ranked in order of importance from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important) for medical professionals (mean rankings and modes in brackets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall ranking</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=32)</th>
<th>Mean ranking and mode(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>English language proficiency</td>
<td>(1.84; 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>New Zealand work experience (3.07; 2 &amp; 3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>New Zealand qualifications (3.10; 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Overseas qualifications (3.45; 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Overseas work experience (3.60; 2 &amp; 6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Personal attributes (e.g. age, personality) (3.81; 1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Knowledge of NZ cultural practices (5.10; 7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The medical professions were relevant for few respondents outside of the employment agencies group. Nonetheless, the few responses provided by those in other groups were of interest for their very wide variation. For example, medical qualifications gained overseas and personal attributes were each ranked at 1 (most important) and at 7 (least important), and English language proficiency variously at levels 2, 3 and 4 by the local authority respondents who offered rankings. Similarly, English language proficiency, qualifications gained overseas, qualifications gained in New Zealand and knowledge of New Zealand cultural practices were each ranked at 1 (most important) and at 7 (least important) by different individuals among those who responded from the engineering and computing groups. Different criteria were obviously being applied by these respondents in their ranking of the seven factors and assessment of the importance of English language proficiency for medical positions.

Intra-group and inter-group variations in the degree of emphasis placed on English language proficiency by different respondents, somewhat disguised in the aggregate results presented in Tables 9 and 10, are more evident in Table 11. For both engineering and computing positions, around 60 per cent of engineering firm respondents ranked English language proficiency as either the most or the second most important factor. Computing firm respondents were rather more likely to rank English high on the list in their own field (where their rankings were very similar to those of engineering firm respondents) than they were to rank it high on the list for engineering. There they were less unified in their responses but still more likely than local and territorial authority respondents to rank English proficiency above other factors. Employment agency respondents were split between those placing English first and those choosing third place for both engineering and computing, but they were still more likely to rank English as the most important factor for engineering than the three professional employer groups engaged in engineering and at least as likely to rank it first for computing positions. On the other hand, employment agents were clearly in accord regarding the medical profession, where over 80 per cent ranked English language proficiency first or second (resulting in the very high mean primary ranking for English language proficiency of 1.84 in Table 10).
Table 11  Ranking of importance of English language proficiency for professional positions in engineering, computing and medicine by respondents in participating organisations (percentages*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional positions and organisation groups</th>
<th>(N=)</th>
<th>Importance of English language proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (most impt) 2 3 4 5 6 7 (least impt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For engineering positions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment agencies</td>
<td>(48)</td>
<td>37.5 12.5 33.3 4.2 10.4 - 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering firms</td>
<td>(111)</td>
<td>29.7 29.7 21.6 6.3 5.4 5.4 1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing firms</td>
<td>(29)</td>
<td>24.1 20.7 17.2 20.7 10.3 3.4 3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local and territorial authorities</td>
<td>(46)</td>
<td>19.6 10.9 21.7 19.6 19.6 8.7 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For computing positions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment agencies</td>
<td>(32)</td>
<td>31.3 15.6 31.3 6.3 12.5 3.1 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering firms</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>31.3 31.3 12.5 12.5 6.3 6.3 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing firms</td>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>33.3 29.6 7.4 14.8 11.1 3.7 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local and territorial authorities</td>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>11.1 11.1 29.6 18.5 11.1 14.8 3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For medical positions:**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment agencies</td>
<td>(32)</td>
<td>62.5 18.8 6.3 - 9.4 3.1 -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Because of rounding, percentages do not all add to 100 per cent.

** Data not given for engineering firms, computing firms or local and territorial authorities as the number of responses for each group was negligible (3, 3 and 4, respectively).

Practices

Respondents were asked about the procedures used in their firm or organisation to assess immigrant job applicants’ levels of English language proficiency, and whether more weight was placed on some language skills than on others in the recruitment process. They were also asked: about actual experiences in their organisation regarding the employment of NESB immigrants; whether English language proficiency had been an issue for such employees; and, if so, what aspects of language proficiency had been problematic and what had been done to resolve such problems.

The assessment of English language proficiency levels

Almost 71 per cent of the respondents reported that their firm or organisation used specific procedures to assess the English language proficiency level of immigrant job applicants (Table 12). This included almost all of the employment agencies (94.3 per cent), along with smaller percentages for the local and territorial authorities (71.4 per cent), engineering (59.8 per cent) and computing firms (53.2 per cent).
Methods used to assess language proficiency

Where specific procedures were used to assess English language proficiency, the most common method employed was the face-to-face interview (including, occasionally, video-interviewing). This method was identified by 81.8 per cent of those respondents who reported the use of “specific” procedures to measure language ability (Table 12). A computer firm respondent and another from a local or territorial authority noted that face-to-face interviews were “always” carried out (by the former after an initial telephone contact), and 2 engineering firm respondents noted that this was the preferred option.

Face-to-face interviewing was often used in tandem with work-related or other testing procedures, most frequently telephone communication. The latter combination was particularly common among employment agencies, where respondents often reported use of the telephone to “screen” applicants, in some cases explicitly for accents. For example, a response from an employment agency stated that telephone interviewing was used “...to screen accents/language ...[for] clear understandable NZ English or equivalent (e.g. UK or US English etc)”. While telephone screening was a common practice among employment agencies, its limitations did not always go unnoticed as the following comment indicates: “[telephone] interviews [were] often surpassed by [applicants] acquiring suitable IELTS scores for registration with their professional body”. Respondents in other groups reported proficiency assessment via the telephone less often, and also generally referred to “telephone conversations” rather than “telephone screening”. This suggests a more positive telephone interaction with applicants.
Table 12  Use of specific procedures, reported by respondents for participating organisations, to assess levels of English language proficiency (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% using specific procedures</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=87)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=112)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=47)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=49)</th>
<th>Totals (N=295)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific procedures used</td>
<td>(N=82)</td>
<td>(N=67)</td>
<td>(N=25)</td>
<td>(N=35)</td>
<td>(N=209)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone contact</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(interview/conversation/screening)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face interview, video conferencing</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aptitude, psychological testing</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written correspondence checking (e.g. emails)</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifically ESOL testing</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other language-related tests</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Résumé/CV, document checking</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal reference/referee checking</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-related tests (e.g. role play, practical tests, reports)</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from face-to-face interviews and use of the telephone, a wide variety of other assessment procedures were also identified by respondents (see Table 12). It was notable, however, that specific tests designed to measure the proficiency of those for whom English is a second language were rarely mentioned. Among employment agencies, those engaged in the recruitment of nurses were considerably more likely than others to use specific ESOL tests, undoubtedly because they were aware of the English language requirements for New Zealand nursing registration and the international recruitment of nursing staff.⑤ Comments regarding the IELTS test from 2 local and territorial authority respondents reflected very different attitudes to the test. One expressed doubts about the efficacy of IELTS and other ESOL-specific measures of language use for employment, whereas the other (an immigrant and

⑤ In 2003 the IELTS band score requirements for registered nurses were as follows: the Nursing Council of New Zealand, an overall IELTS 6.5 (Academic) level; the Australian Nursing Council, IELTS 7 (Academic) with no band below 6.5; the US Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS), IELTS 6.5 (Academic) with a minimum of 7.0 in speaking (plus a baccalaureate degree); the Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia, IELTS 6.5 (Academic) with a minimum of 7.0 in speaking; and the UK Nursing and Midwifery Council, IELTS 6.5 (General) overall with at least 5.5 in each skill (IELTS, 2003b: 4-5).
bilingual speaker of English) observed that IELTS could give “...a clear picture of...English language skills [but] to my surprise no one ever asks for it”. The more frequent references by respondents to a wide variety of non-ESOL-specific language tests – including “spelling tests”, “literacy tests” and “written proficiency tests” – and psychological tests, with their linguistically demanding content and cultural biases, suggest a general lack of familiarity with ESOL testing rationales and procedures.

*Emphasis in assessment on particular language skills*

While most respondents felt that no particular language skills were weighted more heavily than others in the recruitment process or that equal weight was placed on all four skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing), a minority within each group of organisations did stress particular skills (Table 13). Among the organisations in this minority (37.6 per cent overall), the two language skills most often emphasised were speaking and listening, followed by writing (important for report writing, communicating with clients, etc). As Table 13 indicates, this pattern was reported by all but local and territorial authority respondents, who were more than twice as likely to identify writing as compared with listening as the skill on which weight was placed.

*Table 13  Language skills weighted in assessment of immigrant applicants for professional positions by participating organisations where respondents reported an emphasis on particular skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language skill</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=41)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=33)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=16)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=21)</th>
<th>Totals (N=111)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It depends**</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Other choices included skills that were identified broadly rather than specifically (e.g. “understanding” and “comprehension”).

** The weighting of skills depends on the position to be filled (i.e. level and/or functions).

*Employment of NESB staff, English language problems and responses*

To gauge the extent to which NESB immigrants were employed in organisations and to investigate language-related issues surrounding their employment, respondents were asked: if their organisation currently employ people from other countries;
where such people came from; whether there were any language-related problems surrounding the employment of these NESB staff members; and, if so, the nature of such problems and what actions were taken to overcome them.

**Employment patterns**

Table 14 shows the source countries/regions of NESB immigrants employed by the participating organisations. Clearly, local and territorial authorities were considerably more likely than other groups to be employing NESB immigrants. This finding was in line with both Watts and Trilín’s (2000a) finding for local government agencies⁶ and the lower English language proficiency requirements for employment by local and territorial authorities reported above (see Figure 1). Local and territorial authorities were also more likely than organisations in other groups, albeit only marginally in some instances, to employ staff from each of the source countries/regions identified. However, at least half of the organisations in each of the other groups had one or more NESB immigrants on their staff, and 56.9 per cent overall employed NESB immigrants.

**Table 14** Employment of NESB immigrant staff (by source countries/regions) reported by respondents in each of the four groups of participating organisations (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source countries/regions</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=87)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=112)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=47)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=49)</th>
<th>Totals (N=295)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian countries</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe (incl. Russia)</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Middle East</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total employing NESB staff</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The employees’ diverse origins reflected the range of non-traditional sources of skilled immigrants who have gained residence in New Zealand under the points

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⁶ That the percentage here (75.5 per cent) is somewhat higher than the 58.1 per cent of local government organisations employing NESB immigrants reported in Watts and Trilín (2000a) reflects the lower overall number of local and territorial authority responses in this language survey (N=49) compared with their earlier study (N=62), that included branch offices for which this language survey may not have been applicable (i.e. they were not engaged in the employment of staff).
system since 1991. Apart from the large percentage (57.1 per cent) of local and
territorial authorities for which respondents reported the employment of people
from Asian countries other than India and China, no one source stood out as
particularly dominant, though there were some interesting features. These included
(see Table 14):

- the lead position of local and territorial authorities (compared with other groups
  of organisations) for the reported employment of immigrants from India, China,
  the Middle East (almost matched by engineering firms in the latter case) and
  “Other” countries (which included Pacific Islands sources and South Africa);
- the runner-up position of employment agencies, particularly with regard to
  NESB staff from India and (less notably) “Other Asian countries”;
- the similarity between groups of participating organisations with regard to the
  reported employment of NESB staff from Eastern European (including Russia)
  and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East; and
- the relatively low percentage of engineering firms employing Chinese, a
  significant feature given the large number of professional engineers among
  applicants from China who gained entry to New Zealand under the points
  system during the 1990s (Henderson, 2002; 2003).

Of the 168 participating organisations employing NESB immigrants, 69 per cent
reported the presence of such staff from more than one source country or region.
Given the results presented above, it was not surprising that this trend was most
marked among local and territorial authorities (78.3 per cent) and least marked
among engineering firms (54.7 per cent).

Additional variations in the employment of NESB staff were observed in relation to
the staff size, geographic location and the level of operation (i.e. local, national or
international) of organisations. In particular, it was found that:

- organisations with larger staff numbers were more likely to be employers of
  NESB immigrants from a variety of source countries or regions;
- in general, the national geographic distribution of immigrants was reflected in
  the staffing of organisations with those located in the North Island (especially the
  Auckland region) and major South Island centres more likely to have NESB staff.
  Employment agencies were a notable exception to this pattern; only half of those
  located in major North Island centres reported having NESB immigrant staff
  members. Nor were employment agency respondents themselves likely to be
  from an NESB background or to speak a language other than English; and
- again with the exception of employment agencies, firms operating at the
  international level – rather than a national or local level – were more likely to
  have NESB immigrants on their staff.
Almost 60 per cent of all respondents from organisations with NESB immigrant staff reported that they knew of language-related problems at work associated with at least some of these employees. Further data analysis revealed two notable patterns. First, the reporting of language-related problems at work was more prevalent among the engineering and computing firms (64.9 and 64 per cent, respectively) than among employment agencies (53.1 per cent) and local and territorial authorities (56.8 per cent). While this was an interesting finding, it was not entirely unexpected. It will be recalled, for example, that although local and territorial authorities were the most likely to employ NESB staff (and generally the largest employers of such staff) they were also the least likely to expect native-speaker fluency and a New Zealand accent in their appointment of professionals. The second pattern was perhaps predictable as an indicator of cultural and possibly perceived “racial” differences. Language-related problems in the workplace were a little more likely to be associated with Asian staff (by around 30 per cent of respondents) and with those from the Middle East7 than with staff from Eastern Europe or other sources including Southern Africa, the Pacific Islands and Western Europe (by around 25 per cent of respondents).

Types of English language proficiency-related problems experienced at work

There was considerable agreement among respondents regarding the types of English language proficiency-related problems most frequently experienced at work. Dealing with clients or customers face-to-face and on the telephone plus work-related communication with colleagues were clearly the three most prevalent problems overall (identified by 87.9, 82.2 and 80.4 per cent, respectively) and across each of the four groups (Table 15). The elevated ranking of work-related communication with colleagues and lower reportage of problems related to dealing with customers in employment agencies (70.4 and 66.7 per cent, respectively, compared with 85-100 per cent in other groups) suggests a greater interface with colleagues than with clients or customers for staff working in these agencies.

There was also considerable accord among respondents on the position of literacy-related activities, with technical report writing the fourth most prevalent English language-related problem in each group and fourth overall (at 56.1 per cent). Writing technical reports appeared to be more important, demanding and/or common in engineering firms than other workplaces, with 30 engineering firms identifying it as

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7 Here the trend was more marked among employment agencies and local and territorial authorities (36.4 and 37.5 per cent, respectively) than among engineering firms (22.2 per cent). No computing firm respondents reported that their organisations included staff from Middle Eastern sources.
a problem for at least some of their immigrant employees. As expected, activities that involved the reading of written material (particularly technical reports as compared with office-related correspondence and enquiries) were less problematic than those involving writing and oral/aural skills.

Table 15  Respondents’ identification of the nature of English language-related problems experienced at work (ranked by reported prevalence) in participating organisations employing NESB staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking by reported prevalence</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=27)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=42)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=17)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (most)</td>
<td>Work-related communication with colleagues (81.5%)</td>
<td>Dealing with clients/customers face-to-face (88.1%)</td>
<td>= Dealing with clients/customers face-to-face (100%)</td>
<td>Dealing with clients/customers face-to-face (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dealing with clients/customers face-to-face (70.4%)</td>
<td>Work-related communication with colleagues (85.7%)</td>
<td>= Telephone communication with clients etc (100%)</td>
<td>Telephone communication with clients etc (85.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Telephone communication with clients etc (66.7%)</td>
<td>Telephone communication with clients etc (83.3%)</td>
<td>Work-related communication with colleagues (76.5%)</td>
<td>Work-related communication with colleagues (71.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Writing technical reports etc (44.4%)</td>
<td>Writing technical reports etc (71.4%)</td>
<td>Writing technical reports etc (52.9%)</td>
<td>Writing technical reports etc (42.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Social communication with colleagues (37%)</td>
<td>Handling written enquiries, correspondence (50%)</td>
<td>Handling written enquiries, correspondence (47%)</td>
<td>Handling written enquiries, correspondence (38.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>= Handling written enquiries, correspondence (33.3%)</td>
<td>Social communication with colleagues (45.2%)</td>
<td>Social communication with colleagues (35.3%)</td>
<td>Social communication with colleagues (23.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>= Reading technical reports, etc (33.3%)</td>
<td>Reading technical reports, etc (26.2%)</td>
<td>Reading technical reports, etc (23.5%)</td>
<td>Reading technical reports, etc (19.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (least)</td>
<td>Other (18.5%)</td>
<td>Other (7.1%)</td>
<td>Other (5.9%)</td>
<td>Other (-)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While these results were not surprising, particularly given the professional nature of the immigrants, the low prevalence of English language-related problems concerning social communication with colleagues was noteworthy. Within each group and overall, work-related communication with colleagues was identified as a problem area at least twice as frequently as social communication with colleagues.

**Actions to overcome language-related issues**

The frequency with which action was taken to overcome problems related to English language proficiency among those organisations reporting such problems is shown in Table 16. Overall, to the best of the respondents’ knowledge, 62 per cent of the organisations concerned had taken some action to solve the problem(s) identified. It appears that local and territorial authorities were the most likely to have taken any action, while employment agencies were the least likely.

**Table 16** Action taken to overcome English language proficiency-related problems with NESB staff in the workplace by organisations reporting such problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action taken</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=26)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=37)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=16)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=21)</th>
<th>Total (N=100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action focused on:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants &amp; others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total taking action</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No action taken</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In privately owned (and frequently smaller) organisations the emphasis was most often on making provision for the immigrant(s) concerned. Comments indicated that such provision most frequently involved suggesting attendance at, and sometimes funding and providing release time for, English language courses (although some respondents indicated that the courses available were rather general and not particularly useful for their staff members). In other cases, particularly in local and territorial authorities, actions often included in-house support for both immigrants and other staff members; for example, facilitating environments and staff communication to ensure that there was understanding, report-writing support, and cross-cultural awareness activities. As shown in Table 15, local and territorial authorities were not only the most likely to have taken any action, but also the most likely to have involved both the immigrants concerned and other staff members in
moves to solve the problems encountered. This dual focus was clearly a less preferred option among organisations in each of the other three groups.

**Government Policy**

In the final section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked for their views on recent immigration policy changes. At the time of the survey, recent changes included the introduction of a Job Search Visa and the November 2002 English language requirement of IELTS 6.5 for principal applicants seeking entry under this visa or the General Skills Category. The new IELTS score was considerably higher than the modest IELTS 5 level or equivalent, and “align[ed] immigration standards more closely to those of tertiary institutions, professional registration bodies, and employers looking for skilled immigrants” (Dalziel, 2002). It was felt that respondents would comment at least on the language requirement change and/or the major policy shift in progress during 2003 away from a general focus on human capital recruitment (via the Interim General Skills Category introduced in July 2003) to the Skilled Migrant Category introduced at the end of 2004 – especially since the new policy emphasised employability and securing a suitable job. (For further details and discussion of the policy changes, see NZIS, 2003; Trlin and Watts, 2004; and Bedford et al., 2005.)

**Table 17**  
Respondents’ views on recent changes in immigration policy with respect to language requirements for the recruitment of professional migrants (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Views on recent changes</th>
<th>Employment agencies (N=87)</th>
<th>Engineering firms (N=112)</th>
<th>Computing firms (N=47)</th>
<th>Local and territorial authorities (N=49)</th>
<th>Totals (N=295)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhelpful</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both helpful &amp; unhelpful</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither helpful nor unhelpful</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know/not sure</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not familiar with changes</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses were very varied (Table 17). Similar percentages felt that recent policy changes were “helpful” and “unhelpful”, with comments very mixed. Among those who saw the changes as being “helpful”, supporting comments indicated that the raising of the English language level:
• sent more realistic signals regarding the language levels needed for work;
• improved the quality level of candidates, even if prospective employers were still reluctant to engage skilled immigrants;
• reduced the number of unsuitable job seekers; and
• stopped the influx of highly qualified and skilled professionals who were unlikely to ever get a job in their field.

Where the changes were perceived to be “unhelpful”, the comments indicated that:

• the level remained too low (e.g. “below that of the relevant boards”);
• not enough emphasis was placed on language skills;
• entry might be gained on good English language skills rather than other skills; and that
• the new requirements had had no noticeable effect.

The substantial percentage of respondents in each of the four organisational categories choosing the “Don’t know”, “Not sure” and “Not familiar with changes” options (ranging from 40.2 per cent for employment agencies to 72.3 per cent for computing firms, and 58.6 per cent overall) is a matter of concern. These responses suggest: (a) possible failings in the dissemination of official information to keep stakeholders abreast of changes in immigration policy; and/or (b) the inability of stakeholders to monitor and absorb the substance of changes in immigration policy.

Finally, at the end of the questionnaire, respondents were given the opportunity to make any further comments they wished to offer on the issues raised. Their responses were wide-ranging and included views on: NESB immigrants seeking work where their English language proficiency or knowledge of New Zealand requirements was not considered adequate; the presence of highly qualified and skilled immigrants whose talents were not being recognised or utilised; the “risks” associated with employing overseas-trained professionals; discriminatory practices in the workplace; the need for better English and stricter language requirements; the lack of dissemination of information about immigration policies; and the need for more acceptance and greater tolerance of immigrants and their differences. In general, these comments underscored the frustration that many employers and employment agencies felt with the situation at the time of the survey.
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Immigration policy changes in the closing decade of the twentieth century facilitated recruitment from non-traditional source countries in the quest to attract skilled immigrants in the highly competitive international marketplace. While large numbers of skilled immigrants were admitted to New Zealand, many who came from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESBs) struggled or failed to find employment (see Basnayake, 1996; Benson-Rea et al., 2000; Ethnic Affairs Service, 1996; Friesen and Ip, 1997; Henderson, 2003; Ho et al., 2000; Trlin et al., 2004; Winkelmann and Winkelmann, 1998). Lack of proficiency in English was identified as an important, but not the only, contributing factor in unemployment. This research project was therefore designed to investigate the level of English language proficiency considered necessary for employment in two major professional areas, engineering and computing, and other issues related to the importance of English in the employment of NESB professional immigrants.

Profile of Organisations and Respondents

The 295 organisations that participated in the postal survey represented a wide variety of employment agencies, engineering and computing firms, as well as a majority of New Zealand’s local and territorial authorities. Their geographical distribution was similar to that of the resident New Zealand population, with a greater percentage in the North Island and large urban centres than in the South Island and smaller centres. They ranged in size from one-person operations to very large organisations with over 100 employees, and included enterprises with national and international linkages as well as those engaged in business within the more common local sphere of operations. Although most employment agencies were private operations, a small number of Work and Income offices and related Workbridge operations which dealt with professional job seekers also opted to participate. Work and Income, while mainly geared towards the needs of unqualified and unskilled people, has been the catalyst behind a very successful skilled migrant placement programme in the Auckland region, an example of how an organisation can shift its practices to better meet the needs of particular groups of job seekers (Fisk, 2003; Hudgell, 2005).

Although almost a quarter of the respondents representing the participating organisations were themselves overseas-born, this did not indicate any major acceptance or movement of NESB immigrants into positions of responsibility. Over half of those who identified themselves as overseas-born were from the United Kingdom or Ireland, sources from which immigrants are not generally considered to have “foreign” accents or qualifications. However, being overseas-born (especially
where it was linked to an NESB source country) and bilingual were characteristics associated with strong comments on cultural differences and the need for acceptance of other accents, qualifications and experiences.

Opinions Regarding the Importance of English Language Proficiency

While there was general agreement among respondents in all four groups of participating organisations on the importance of English language proficiency for professional immigrants (a majority felt that it was important for all immigrants), there was less accord on the levels of proficiency that would be considered adequate for a professional position in one’s field.

It had been expected that few respondents would indicate the need for immigrants to have a New Zealand accent in order to gain employment in their professions, since this is a regionally-defined linguistic requirement that is ultimately unobtainable, and undesirable in terms of self-identity and diversity, for the majority of adult immigrants (including those from other predominantly “white” English-speaking backgrounds). However, a speaker’s accent marks him or her as a member of a group and research has shown that speakers with certain accents tend to be perceived more positively than others. Moreover, a recent move in telemarketing and other services to locate American call centres offshore has given impetus to accent modification activities designed to make call centre personnel not only reduce marked accents but to sound like their clients by affecting a generic pseudo-American accent (Lal, 2003). While speech accommodation theory observes a reduction in social distance between interlocutors where there is a reduction in speech marker distance, it warns that goals and outcomes may not always coincide and does not suggest that people should all try to sound the same, since the effects of communication accommodation are largely dependent on the perceptions of the dominant party/host community (Gallois and Callan, 1991; Giles et al., 1991). Relative social and economic status, perceived social distance and degree of threat, all affect the extent to which speakers are perceived not only more positively but also to sound more (or less) standard and proficient in the language. Those who are perceived more favourably are also perceived to speak a more standard variety of English; those who are perceived less favourably are less likely to be perceived as speaking well and to be accorded the concessions and allowances that enable positive interactions between speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (see, for example, Bayard, 1995, 2000; Lippi-Green, 1997; Roberts et al., 1992). Finally, it should be noted that a particular accent does not increase one’s proficiency in English. The linguistic features of standard varieties of the language “are chiefly matters of grammar, vocabulary and orthography, not ... of pronunciation” (Crystal, 1997: 110), and proficiency in English is clearly not restricted to one particular accent. Nor do native speakers generally expect non-
native speakers of the language to sound just like them. Linguistically, if not socially, any accent should be equally acceptable so long as it can be understood without undue effort (see Appendix 2 for IELTS 8 and 9 band score descriptors).

With the above points in mind, the “native-speaker proficiency with a New Zealand accent” option was included in the survey questionnaire (Appendix 1, Question 8) to test both the attitudes of employment gatekeepers and the claims of immigrants that they were discriminated against and excluded from the workforce on the basis of their foreign accents. The results obtained and presented in this report are a matter of concern. Not only was native-speaker fluency widely identified as a prerequisite for positions, especially at the senior level, but disturbing numbers of respondents expected that applicants would also have a New Zealand accent. In effect, some employment agencies and employers would preclude any immigrant from a position on the basis of their accent, and its associated ethnicity (compare with Singer and Eder, 1989), unless exceptions were made for “acceptable” accents. That employment agencies were more likely to choose the exclusionary and unrealistic “native-speaker fluency with [a] New Zealand accent” across the professional areas and job levels specified in the questionnaire indicated a move toward excluding any who were “foreign” and therefore not certainties for positions (as noted in Basnayake, 1999; EEO Trust, 2000). In this way, employment agencies operate as gatekeepers, filtering out applicants who – despite their NESB backgrounds and other distinguishing characteristics – may well be acceptable to employers in the fields of engineering and computing.

Apart from those respondents selecting the exclusionary “...with New Zealand accent” option, the level of English language proficiency identified as necessary for positions across the occupations and levels of employment varied, but showed a degree of accord. A broad band across the four groups of organisations surveyed identified something less than native-speaker fluency as suitable for entry to middle and junior level positions in engineering and computing, if not in medicine. Local and territorial authorities were more likely to accept lower levels of proficiency than other groups. This was possibly an indication of their size, more specialised positions, public rather than private client activities and a greater ability to take “risks” when making appointments. That said, they were, nevertheless, much more likely than organisations in the other three groups to employ NESB staff and less likely to report language proficiency-related problems in the workplace. The latter features suggest both a positive attitude to (and experiences involving) immigrant professionals and a reasonable expectation regarding levels of English language proficiency.

The IELTS 6.5 requirement for skilled applicants introduced in November 2002 (less than a year before the present survey was conducted) was rather closer to the mark set by employers for positions in their organisations than the earlier minima set for
skilled immigration. IELTS 6.5 identifies a level of proficiency between a “competent” and a “good” user of the language, and is at the level, if not involving the Academic modules, set for most postgraduate study in university courses in New Zealand and elsewhere. It is also higher than the minimum English language proficiency level required by skilled immigrants applying for residence in either Australia or Canada. Unfortunately, the possible efficacy of the IELTS 6.5 level will remain uncharted, since it has been largely superseded by other policy changes, in particular the introduction of the Skilled Migrant Category.

The overall patterns across the four groups of organisations surveyed with regard to the importance of English language proficiency and levels required for particular positions were reiterated in the mean ranking of this language proficiency and other factors involved in the recruitment of NESB immigrants. Local and territorial authorities ranked English language proficiency behind both New Zealand qualifications and New Zealand work experience, whereas employment agencies ranked it second only behind New Zealand work experience, apart from in medicine, where it was very clearly pre-eminent, and the other two employer groups ranked it number one.

The aggregate ranking of factors other than English language proficiency for applicant selection highlighted the Catch-22 situation that skilled immigrants face. New Zealand work experience was more highly regarded than overseas work experience and qualifications (with the notable exception of engineers and computing firms with regard to each others’ professions, but not their own). New Zealand work experience was also ranked ahead of New Zealand qualifications except among local and territorial authorities (and by computing firms for engineering positions). This result, coupled with the ongoing problems faced by Asian graduates from New Zealand universities seeking employment (New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 1999, 2003, 2004), supports the conclusion that the gaining of New Zealand qualifications does not provide the key to employment that many immigrant professionals hope for. It supports also the need to provide more work experience opportunities of the sort presented in the joint initiative between Work and Income and the Auckland Chamber of Commerce (Fisk, 2003; Hudgell,

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8 See Henderson et al. (1997) for a discussion of changes in immigration policies and English language requirements over the period 1986-1997.

9 At September 2005, these were: (a) for Australia, “vocational” English, involving evidence of having a qualification which required at least 2 years full-time study in English, a pass on the Occupational English Test (OET) or IELTS 5 (with 5 on all four components of the test); and (b) for Canada, accruing enough points for proficiency in the first and second official languages (with maxima of 16 and 8 points, respectively) to achieve the required overall pass mark of 67. For further details, see the websites of (a) the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMA), and (b) Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).
2005) to assist more immigrant professionals into employment in small and medium sized organisations. Currently, it often falls to the larger local and territorial authorities to provide immigrant engineers and computing professionals with the needed entrée into the New Zealand workforce.

Practices Within the Workplace

While high levels of English language proficiency were identified as being very important for NESB job applicants, few of the participating organisations had ESOL-based procedures for proficiency assessment. Only nursing agencies regularly used ESOL tests, reflecting their profession’s specified language-entry levels for NESB applicants seeking registration. Other organisations, without clear professional guidelines and/or knowledge of ESOL-specific tests, relied on telephone contact, face-to-face interviews and a pot-pourri of other assessment methods to assess language proficiency by proxy. The reported prevalence of telephone screening before interviewing as a “specific” means of assessing English language proficiency and suitability for employment among employment agencies, suggests that Giles’ subconscious 18-second test may have been operating in many situations (see Bayard, 1995: 36). Obviously, face-to-face interviews and work-related tests offer NESB immigrants a better opportunity to show their professional and interpersonal skills than the arbitrary and potentially discriminatory telephone screening procedure.

Despite the many difficulties experienced by NESB immigrant professionals wishing to access the mainstream professional workforce reported in other research, over half of the organisations participating in this survey (including over three-quarters of the local and territorial authorities) employed NESB staff from a wide variety of countries or regions. Immigrant employees reported by respondents to be experiencing English language proficiency-related problems were similarly diverse, with different groups within particular workplaces and no one particular group of immigrants standing out overall as a source of difficulties. There was a strong degree of accord, however, regarding the nature of English language problems experienced at work. The three most frequently reported problems across all four groups of organisations concerned face-to-face interactions with clients/customers, dealing with clients/customers on the telephone and work-related communication with colleagues. Ranked fourth by prevalence, again across all four groups, was the writing of technical and similar reports. Social interaction with colleagues, often vaunted as a major problem and focused on in general language classes, was fifth for employment agencies and a distant sixth in the other three groups. Where language proficiency-related problems were identified, the participating organisations which were more accepting and accommodating of linguistic and other differences were also more likely to have taken action that focused on both immigrant and other
employees. Those organisations which expected that most (or all) adjustment would be made by the immigrant(s) were less likely to take any action or, if they did, to focus on changes in the immigrant(s) rather than in the wider workforce and workplace situation.

The broad consensus regarding the nature of English language proficiency-related problems provides a useful guideline for organisations wishing to make provisions for NESB staff, for ESOL institutions designing and providing courses, and for other providers of settlement services. Quite simply, English language provisions need to target work-related activities and interactions. Such targeting is not the norm in the more general English programmes that are still so common in ESOL teaching despite criticism of “English for ever” courses for their lack of focus and positive outcomes (see Gubbay and Coghll, 1988; Henderson, 2002; White et al., 2001). While there has been some retrenchment with the decline in numbers of Asian students studying in New Zealand, the ESOL industry remains focused largely on international education and more generic and academic study-related language courses rather than on providing for the needs of highly educated professional immigrants. Such provision, to be effective, will require dedicated settlement funding, more focused, innovative teaching and flexibility to cater for varying needs under varying conditions over time and space. Furthermore, as White et al. (2001: 39) conclude in their report on immigrant and refugee experiences of ESOL provision in New Zealand:

...while formal English language instruction is extremely valuable for NESB immigrants ... the commitment of the entire community is necessary to the inclusion of immigrants in everyday life, with the adjustments that entails, and the fostering of this is a key part of any immigration policy.

Views on Government Policy Changes Related to Immigration

A common thread of frustration with the situation regarding skilled immigrants and immigration policy ran through the comments made by respondents in the final section of the questionnaire. Large numbers were less than happy with the outcomes of immigration policies targeting skilled immigrants. Some expressed their frustration with regard to NESB immigrant job seekers who lacked adequate levels of English language proficiency and/or other skills required for employment in their professions. Others commented on aspects of discrimination within the professions that contributed to high levels of unemployment among professional immigrants.

It was expected that the two questions on recent immigration policy changes would elicit responses related to the helpfulness of the November 2002 raising of the English language requirement to IELTS 6.5, and perhaps comments on the then pending shift to the Skilled Migrant Category with its emphasis on employability
and securing a suitable job. While relatively even numbers of those who had a view on the topic fell into the positive (“helpful”) and negative (“unhelpful”) categories regarding changes in the language requirements for the recruitment of professional immigrants, it was disturbing to find that over half of the respondents replied that they were “not sure” or “not familiar with policy changes”. With aspects of English language proficiency so clearly identified by the majority of respondents, elsewhere in the survey, as a key issue in the employment of skilled immigrants, the lack of knowledge regarding recent changes in immigration policy is a matter that should be noted and treated with the utmost concern.
CONCLUSION

Proficiency in the national language (or, occasionally, languages) of the host society is widely recognised as an important factor in the employment outcomes of skilled immigrants, and associations are often made between this factor, labour market participation and earnings (see, for example, Chiswick and Miller, 1995, 1998; Fletcher, 1999; Winkelmann and Winkelmann, 1998). However, the actual level of target language proficiency required for employment in a particular field, how this level is assessed, its importance vis-à-vis other employment factors, and the nature of language proficiency-related problems in the workplace are topics that researchers and other interested parties rarely address. This study examined these topics via a national postal survey of employment agencies, private firms, and local and territorial authorities involved in the recruitment and employment of engineering and computing professionals in New Zealand.

The general consensus among the survey respondents was that English language proficiency is an important factor affecting the employment of NESB immigrant professionals, if not all arrivals. However, the results highlighted not only the value placed on English language proficiency compared with other factors in the employment of professional immigrants, but also the effects of social context and potentially discriminatory personal judgements in the assessment of this proficiency. For skilled immigrants seeking to work in their fields of expertise, a totally unrealistic level of proficiency in English – not only native-speaker fluency but also a New Zealand accent – was often required. That such an accent is unattainable for virtually all adult immigrants and is not a prerequisite for native-like fluency and proficiency in English (see Clyne, 1994; Cook, 1991; Ellis, 1997) was apparently not recognised by respondents who chose this option. Or, if it was recognised (as was flagged by comments regarding “screening for suitable accents”), it was indicative of a discriminatory filtering practice operating in the labour market. This finding supports previous reports by immigrants of their experiences and perceptions of discrimination related to employment (Basnayake, 1999; Ethnic Affairs Service, 1996; EEO Trust, 2000; Henderson, 2003; Ho et al., 2000; McGrath et al., 2005; NZIS, 2003). Obviously, New Zealand still has some way to go to achieve the “level playing field” required for successful immigrant integration (Bauböck, 1996a; Neuwirth, 1999) and noted in Bauböck’s (1996b: 232) taxonomy of the cultural rights of minorities, “...where race, gender or ethnic origin no longer counts as disadvantage”. It is a finding which also points to a need for greater awareness among recruitment agencies and employers regarding the nature of language proficiency and appropriate measures to assess this proficiency in NESB immigrant professionals.
Negative responses to difference, as evinced in the New Zealand-accent requirement, extended to overseas qualifications and work experience, factors for which “employability” points were gained by all successful skilled applicants prior to the introduction of the Skilled Migrant Category (SMC). The SMC’s restriction of points for work experience to those labour markets deemed “comparable” to New Zealand’s (which includes South Korea, but not India or China) side-steps rather than addresses the real barriers to work faced by professional immigrants from non-traditional source countries. Unless such immigrants can gain access to work-experience placements where they can prove their worth (see Fisk, 2003; Hudgell, 2005), they are likely to require not only further (New Zealand) qualifications but also – and more importantly – prior New Zealand work experience obtained via other means in order to obtain a position in their profession. However, as demonstrated in this report, a key barrier to gaining such work experience is the unrealistic level of English language proficiency required by employment agencies and employers. This conundrum underlines the importance of targeted bridging and workplace courses to reduce the perceived risk for New Zealand’s predominantly small to medium sized businesses in hiring NESB immigrant professionals whose very differences may bring innovation and competitive advantage to their operations (see Cope and Kalantzis, 1997; Watts and Trlin, 2000b).

Despite the weight placed on native-speaker proficiency, a New Zealand accent and prior New Zealand work experience, the ambivalence regarding the efficacy of employing immigrant professionals and mixed views on immigration policy changes (where respondents were aware of them), NESB immigrants were nevertheless identified as employees in a majority of the participating organisations. The presence of NESB employees in an organisation, in many cases from diverse sources, was not necessarily linked to language proficiency-related problems at work. Where these problems were reported they: were not associated with immigrants from one particular region; usually involved aspects of interpersonal communication; and were best targeted by an approach involving not only immigrant ESOL courses but also wider workforce provisions (the dual option favoured by local and territorial authorities).

Employment has been identified by many immigrants as the preferred route to English language proficiency (see Henderson, 2002; White et al., 2001, 2002) and stands out as a source of positive contact with members of the wider speech community, native-like language fluency, sociolinguistic competence and successful settlement (Burnett, 1998; Fletcher, 1999; Henderson, 2002). Failure to find appropriate employment impacts negatively not only on English language proficiency but also on socio-economic integration and social participation in the wider society. From the evidence presented in this report and by researchers in other studies, changes are therefore required in: (a) the targeting of language provisions to focus on language proficiency-related problems in the interactions of immigrant staff
with clients, customers and workplace colleagues; and (b) the wider society’s attitudes and responses to linguistic and ethnic diversity, which not only exacerbate other obstacles but are themselves barriers to employment. These changes are particularly important regarding NESB immigrant professionals if the benefits associated with skilled immigration are to be maximised and the problems minimised, especially as it has been claimed that (L.E.K. Consulting, 2001: 12):

...some occupations have a greater prevalence of talented people contributing their ideas and innovation ...including information, communication and technology specialists, engineers and scientists.

As Freeman (1999) concluded in his study of policies in the USA, Canada and Australia, and as some policy changes in New Zealand attest, the international quest for skills has been less successful than the numbers of immigrants would suggest and policy makers have hoped. The arrival of skilled immigrants does not automatically translate into employment and economic growth. Successful socio-economic inclusion, a key factor in the settlement and effective integration of skilled immigrants, depends to a large extent on the expectations and attitudes of host community members and on how they perceive, are affected by and respond to policies for immigrant selection and settlement. A crucial element for successful socio-economic inclusion, therefore, is a host community which is tolerant of immigrant cultural diversity, appreciative of the benefits that it brings and well informed about the nature and objectives of relevant policies and the changes introduced. In this respect, the research reported here has revealed not only an apparent lack of tolerance and/or appreciation of diversity (evidenced by unrealistic and discriminatory English language proficiency requirements) but also a widespread lack of knowledge of or familiarity with policy changes that bear directly upon the interests of those intimately involved in the recruitment and employment of professional immigrants. These findings are all the more alarming when public knowledge of immigration is more likely to come from negative mass media coverage and the politicisation of immigration than from more positive, well-informed debate (see Munshi, 1998; Spoonley and Trlin, 2004; Trlin et al., 1998b). There is clearly a need for greater and more effective dissemination of information on immigration policy issues and changes by both government and professional associations, and for more informed discussion of the broader issues related to immigration, multiculturalism and their implications for New Zealand society.

Lack of knowledge among the respondents notwithstanding, we do not believe that more stringent English language requirements will resolve the language proficiency-related concerns raised elsewhere by skilled NESB immigrants and in this study by the people and organisations that may offer them suitable employment. Nor does the SMC’s revised points system and occupational selectivity address the issue of discrimination that permeates the professions, employment agencies and the wider
society. New Zealand needs a more comprehensive immigration policy infrastructure which tackles the less tractable issues of acceptance and belonging and more successfully integrates new arrivals if it is to reap the many benefits that skilled immigrants can provide (Bauböck, 1996b, 2001; Cope and Kalantzis, 1997; Neuwirth, 1999; Watts et al., 2004). English language proficiency per se is an important factor in the employment outcomes of skilled immigrants, but it is just one part of a complex equation.
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Watts, N., White, C. and Trlin, A. 2001: *English Language Provision for Adult Immigrants and/or Refugees from non-English Speaking Backgrounds in Educational Institutions and Training Establishments in New Zealand*, New Settlers Programme Occasional Publication No.4, New Settlers Programme, Massey University, Palmerston North.


APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Schedule of questions for English Language Proficiency and the Recruitment and Employment of Professional Immigrants in New Zealand (postal questionnaire)

Appendix 2: IELTS Band descriptors
Appendix 1: Postal questionnaire

NEW SETTLERS PROGRAMME
SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE
SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL WORK
MASSEY UNIVERSITY
2003

English Language Proficiency
and the Recruitment and Employment of
Professional Immigrants in New Zealand

Contact: Dr Anne Henderson
Research Officer
New Settlers Programme
School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work
Massey University
Palmerston North
English Language Proficiency and
the Recruitment and Employment of Professional Immigrants
in New Zealand

Over recent years there has been considerable public debate about the employment of professional immigrants, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds. This project seeks your opinions, experiences and ideas regarding the level of English language proficiency and other factors which influence the employment outcomes of professional immigrants in the engineering, computing and medical fields in New Zealand. (English language proficiency is identified here as the overall ability to communicate in English and involves all four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.) The results of this survey are intended to enhance professional understanding and to inform both the development of best practice and the development of any relevant government policy initiatives in this area.

This research forms part of the New Settlers Programme, which is funded by the New Zealand Foundation for Research, Science and Technology, and is being conducted by Dr Anne Henderson, the Research Officer in the Programme, with the assistance of Associate Professors Andrew Trlin and Noel Watts.

The survey is anonymous and information will be reported and published in aggregated form only. The code number on the front of the questionnaire is to assist us in any follow-up if needed. The questionnaire will take 15-20 minutes to complete. You may decline to answer any particular questions. The completion and return of the questionnaire implies consent to participate in this project.

If you have any queries regarding the research, please feel free to contact the principal researcher, Anne Henderson, at:

School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work
Massey University
Private Bag 11222
Palmerston North

Telephone: (PN) 06 3505799 (Akld) 09 443 9700 (Wgtn) 04 801 5799

email: A.M.Henderson@massey.ac.nz

Information on the New Settlers Programme is also available on our website: http://newsettlers.massey.ac.nz.

If you would like to receive a summary of the overall findings, please complete the section at the end of the questionnaire.

Please return the questionnaire in the enclosed, freepost envelope by
Friday 21 March 2003
whether or not it has been completed.
Background information

1a. Is your firm or organisation involved in the recruitment or employment of personnel in any of the following professional areas/fields – engineering, computing, medicine – in New Zealand?

Yes ☐ (please continue with the questionnaire)
No ☐ (please return the questionnaire in the enclosed envelope)

1b. Are you personally involved in the recruitment or employment of personnel in any of these professional areas/fields (engineering, computing, medicine) in New Zealand?

Yes ☐ (please continue with the survey)
No ☐ (could you please pass the survey on to someone in your firm/organisation who is)

2a. What is the nature of your firm or organisation?

Private firm or organisation ☐
Local government agency ☐
Central government agency ☐
Other (please specify): ______________________ ☐

2b. Please indicate your firm/organisation’s main function(s):

(Tick all that apply.)

Professional engineering ☐
Computer services/IT/IS ☐
Health provider ☐
Local/central government services ☐
Personnel recruitment/employment agency ☐
Other (please specify): ______________________ ☐

3. Approximately how many full-time staff equivalents (FTEs, ie working 30 hours plus per week) are employed altogether in your firm or organisation?

0-5 ☐
6-9 ☐
10-49 ☐
50-99 ☐
100+ ☐

4a. Where is your firm or organisation located? (If a branch of a larger organisation, please indicate your branch’s location in New Zealand.)

Major city, North Island ☐
Other centre, North Island ☐
Major city, South Island ☐
Other centre, South Island ☐

4b. Does your firm or organisation operate mainly at a sub-national, national or international level?

Sub-national ☐
National ☐
International ☐
5a. What is your personal position within this firm or organisation?

.............................................................

5b. Are you an immigrant to New Zealand?

Yes ☐ (please specify your country of birth: .............................................)
No ☐

5c. Are you from a non-English speaking background?

Yes ☐ (please specify your language[s] other than English: ..............................)
No ☐

6. Within the following professions, what particular area or areas (eg civil engineering, computer software development, general nursing) do you recruit or employ personnel for?

Engineering: ............................................................. N/A ☐ ☐

Computing: ............................................................. N/A ☐ ☐

Medicine: ............................................................. N/A ☐ ☐

Opinions

7a. In your opinion, is proficiency in the English language an important issue affecting the prospects of immigrants seeking employment in New Zealand in a professional position in the areas/fields you are involved in?

Yes ☐ (please go to Question 8)
No ☐

7b. If yes, which immigrants is it an important issue for?  

(Please tick only one box.)

all immigrants ☐
all immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds ☐
most immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds ☐
some immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds ☐

Comments: ........................................................................
........................................................................
........................................................................
8. What level of proficiency in English would you generally consider necessary, on a scale of 1 (modest level) to 6 (native-speaker fluency and a New Zealand accent), for appointment to a professional position in New Zealand? Please answer for each of the following areas/fields as applicable.

(Circle the appropriate level for each position.)

(a) Engineering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modest level (eg IELTS 5)</th>
<th>Native-speaker fluency (with NZ accent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) senior level position</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) middle level position</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) junior level position</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional area/field not applicable for my firm/organisation</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Computing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modest level (eg IELTS 5)</th>
<th>Native-speaker fluency (with NZ accent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) senior level position</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) middle level position</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) junior level position</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional area/field not applicable for my firm/organisation</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(c) Medicine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modest level (eg IELTS 5)</th>
<th>Native-speaker fluency (with NZ accent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) senior level position</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) middle level position</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) junior level position</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional area/field not applicable for my firm/organisation</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. In your opinion, with regard to the professional area(s)/field(s) you are involved in, how important is English language proficiency compared with other factors in the recruitment of immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds?

(Please rank items in order of importance from 1 [most important] to 7 [least important] for each of the 3 areas/fields, as applicable.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English language proficiency</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
<th>Computing</th>
<th>Medicine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications gained overseas</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications gained in New Zealand</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience gained overseas</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience gained in New Zealand</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of New Zealand cultural practices</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal attributes (eg, age, personality)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area/field not applicable for my firm/organisation</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments: ..............................................................................................................

.........................................................................................................................

.........................................................................................................................
Practices

10a. Does your firm or organisation use any specific procedure(s) (eg, telephone conversations, face-to-face interviews, IELTS or other language tests) to assess the level of English language proficiency of immigrant job applicants?

Yes □, (please go to Question 11a) □
No □, (please go to Question 11a) □

10b. If yes, please specify the procedure(s) used:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

11a. In the process of recruitment, do you place more weight on a particular English language skill or skills (eg, listening and/or speaking and/or reading and/or writing)?

Yes □, (please go to Question 12a) □
No □, (please go to Question 12a) □

11b. If yes, please identify the skill(s) and circumstance(s):

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

12a. Are there immigrants from any of the following regions currently employed in your own firm or organisation? (Please tick all that apply.)

India □
China □
Other Asian countries □
Eastern Europe (including Russia) □
The Middle East □
Other non-English speaking regions □
None of the above □, (please go to Question 13a) □

12b. Has English language proficiency been an issue at work in your firm/organisation for any employees from any of the above regions?

Yes □, (Please specify region(s): ..................................................) □
No □, (please go to Question 13a) □
Don’t know □, (please go to Question 13a) □
12c. If yes, what aspects of English language proficiency have been an issue?

(Please tick all that apply.)

- Work-related communication with colleagues
- Social communication with colleagues
- Dealing with clients/customers/patients face-to-face
- Telephone communication with clients/customers/patients
- Handling written enquiries, correspondence
- Reading technical reports, papers, instructions, etc
- Writing technical reports, papers, instructions, etc
- Other language-related factors

(please specify): ...........................................

Comments: ...........................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................

13a. Has anything been done by your firm/organisation to overcome these issues?

- Yes, for immigrant employees
- Yes, for other employees
- Yes, for both immigrant and other employees
- No
- Don’t know

(please go to Question 14a)

13b. If yes, please specify what has been done:

...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................

Government policy

14a. In recent years, have New Zealand immigration policy changes with respect to language requirements been helpful or unhelpful for your recruitment of professional immigrants?

- Helpful
- Unhelpful
- Both helpful and unhelpful
- Neither helpful nor unhelpful
- Don’t know/not sure
- Not familiar with policy changes

(please go to Question 15)

14b. If helpful and/or unhelpful, please provide an example:

...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................

69
15. Are there any other comments you would like to make about English language proficiency and the recruitment/employment of professional immigrants in New Zealand?

........................................................................................................................................
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Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.

Please see notes on the following page.
(a) Would you be willing to be contacted for a possible follow-up interview to discuss some of your firm/organisation's best practice features regarding English language issues and the employment of professional immigrants?

Yes
No  □ (please go to b)

If yes, please provide contact information in the panel below:

Name and/or position: ..............................................................
Address: .......................................................... and/or email: ..........................................................


(b) Would you like to receive a summary of findings from this questionnaire?

Yes
No  □

If yes (and details not already provided above), please provide contact details below:

Name and/or position: ..............................................................
Address: .......................................................... and/or email: ..........................................................


Thank you again for your cooperation.

Please return the questionnaire in the freepost envelope provided by Friday 21 March.
## Appendix 2: IELTS band descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band 9 – Expert User</strong></td>
<td>Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band 8 – Very Good User</strong></td>
<td>Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band 7 – Good User</strong></td>
<td>Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band 6 – Competent User</strong></td>
<td>Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band 5 – Modest User</strong></td>
<td>Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band 4 – Limited User</strong></td>
<td>Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band 3 – Extremely Limited User</strong></td>
<td>Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band 2 – Intermittent User</strong></td>
<td>No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty in understanding spoken and written English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band 1 – Non User</strong></td>
<td>Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band 0 – Did not attempt the test</strong></td>
<td>No assessable information provided.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AUTHORS

Anne Henderson

Anne Henderson was the part-time Research Assistant and later Research Officer for the New Settlers Programme, funded through the Foundation for Research Science and Technology, from January 1997 to June 2004, when FRST funding for the project ended. Anne is particularly interested in language issues and immigration policy, ESOL provisions, and the settlement experiences of immigrants in New Zealand. These interests have developed from her initial involvement, as a teacher of English (and French), in voluntary ESOL work with Southeast Asian and Chinese immigrants, through: postgraduate studies and research in linguistics and second language teaching, education, and social policy; university lecturing and ESOL-teacher training in New Zealand and China; supporting and supervising postgraduate NESB students at university; work as a Regional Coordinator for New Settlers and Multicultural Education for the Ministry of Education; teaching English, retraining English teachers and struggling to gain a modicum of facility in the Chinese language during five years residence in Shanghai; the completion of a PhD on the settlement and integration of skilled Chinese immigrants in New Zealand; research involvement in the New Settlers Programme; and, more recently, teaching English for Academic Purposes to Japanese and other international students at International Pacific College in Palmerston North. Recent publications on immigrant research include chapters in Unfolding History, Evolving Identity: The Chinese in New Zealand edited by Manying Ip (Auckland University Press, 2003) and (co-authored) in Asian Nationalism in an Age of Globalisation edited by Roy Starrs (Curzon Press, 2001). Anne is currently working on a book on the settlement experiences of Chinese immigrants in New Zealand which draws on research for her PhD and the New Settlers Programme longitudinal study.

Andrew Trlin

The Programme Leader for the New Settlers Programme, Andrew is a Research Fellow in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Massey University, Palmerston North. His main research interests are in the broad areas of social demography, social policy and programme evaluation in contemporary New Zealand, but he is best known for his work on immigration policy and immigrant settlement. Andrew’s publications on aspects of international migration include: (as author) Now Respected, Once Despised: Yugoslavs in New Zealand (Dunmore Press, 1979); and (as co-editor) the series New Zealand and International Migration: A Digest and Bibliography (Department of Sociology, Massey University 1986, 1992, 1997). Andrew served on the Ministerial
Committee that produced the report *Drawing on the Evidence: Social Science Research and Government Policy* (Ministry of Research, Science and Technology, 1996), and he has recently been appointed as a panel member to the Human Rights Review Tribunal.

**Noel Watts**

Noel was an Honorary Research Fellow (formerly an Associate Professor and Programme Co-ordinator for Linguistics and Second Language Teaching) in the School of Language Studies, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Massey University, Palmerston North and the Deputy Leader for the New Settlers Programme to the end of 2005. Noel’s research interests are in applied linguistics, particularly in the area of language policy and language use. Amongst his publications are: *Foreign Languages in Exporting* (Massey University, 1987); *Language and Communication* (Dunmore Press, 1989); *English for Communication in New Zealand* (Yamaguchi Press, Kyoto, 1989); *The Use of French in Exporting and Tourism in New Zealand* (commissioned by the Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres, Paris, 1992). He is co-author of four Occasional Publications for the New Settlers Programme: *Utilisation of Immigrant Resources in International Business, Trade and Tourism in New Zealand* (2000), *Employment and Service Provision for Immigrants from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds in Central and Local Government Organisations in New Zealand* (2001) and *Immigrant and Refugee Experience of ESOL Provision in New Zealand: Realities and Responsibilities* (2001) and *Young Migrant Settlement Experiences and Issues in New Zealand* (2002). Noel was awarded a life membership of the New Zealand Association of Language Teachers in 1999 and is a member of a number of advisory committees on language teaching programmes.
SELECTED NEW SETTLERS PROGRAMME PUBLICATIONS
(TO NOVEMBER 2005)


ASCADAPI (Association for the Study of Chinese and Their Descendants in Australasia and the Pacific Islands), University of Otago, ASCADAPI, Dunedin.


Watts, N., White, C. and Trlin, A. 2001: *English Language Provision for Adults and/or Refugees from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds in Educational Institutions and Training Establishments in New Zealand*, New Settlers Programme Occasional Publication No. 4, New Settlers Programme, Massey University, Palmerston North.


