

## Bonus Points – 6 Months Work Experience in Australia

With the increase in the pass mark for the 880 visa due to take effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 many students are desperately looking for a way to gain an extra 5 points. One of the most popular avenues to achieve this is going to be demonstrating at least six months of work experience in Australia.

On the face of it this sounds fairly simple but when you look into the DIMIA policy requirements on this issue, its not so straight forward. In this article we will briefly outline these policies.

## Must be in a Skilled Occupation

DIMIA has provided a list of occupations with skills which are needed in Australia and called it the Skilled Occupation List (SOL). This list by no means covers all the jobs you can do in Australia. When asking for the extra 5 Bonus points however you must have been **employed** in **an** occupation from this list. This means that many of the jobs that students may do to earn extra money in Australia are often not on the SOL.

## Employed?

Policy states that “employed” is defined as “engaged in an occupation for remuneration for at least 20 hours per week”. This is indeed fortunate as students with permission to work on their student visas have the usual 20hrs per week limit during school session times (plus more in holidays).

Of course, this means you must be paid for the work so unfortunately you cannot use voluntary experience. DIMIA has defined **remuneration** as making a “financial profit”. So even scholarships and living allowances designed to cover just costs are not acceptable.

## Work Limitations

It is possible however that some students will be able to meet this definition of employed and DIMIA acknowledges this as a fact in policy statements.

However they go on to state;

*“Student visa conditions place strict limits on the hours the holder of the visa is allowed to work. This means that casual work as a researcher, for example, is unlikely to take up sufficient proportion of a student’s time or cover the full range of duties for that employment to have been at a skilled occupation level (which must be at least 20 hours per week).”*

The key to this statement is that if you have worked for less than 20hrs per week on a casual basis they may consider you have not had the full responsibility in your duties that would be normally expected of a professional. Obviously the best way to be employed therefore would be on a permanent part-time basis of 20 hours per week (and more on holidays). In the Australian Public Service (which includes DIMIA) many of the staff work a 20 hour week on a permanent part time basis so it is not uncommon.

## Pre-graduation Employment?

There is a major problem for undergraduate students in telling DIMIA that they were working as professionals before they finish their qualification. DIMIA provides the following example; *“A person who works in an accountancy firm during the course of their accountancy degree and after the degree has been awarded works as an accountant for two months before applying for their visa. The applicants experience as an accountant is not sufficient to satisfy the ‘skilled occupation’ criterion as an accountant. However, the applicant would still have been employed at a lower skill level ie an accounts clerk.”*

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The bottom line is if you have not finished your qualification then DIMIA may not consider you have been capable of effectively carrying out your full range of duties. You will be considered ‘semi skilled’.

## Postgraduate Employment?

For those postgraduate students who are lucky to gain work in their occupations whilst studying full time, the outlook is much brighter. In these cases where you are already qualified since completing your previous studies you should be ok as long as the occupation you are working in is on the SOL.

Example 1

A person who has completed their Bachelor Degree in Engineering from an overseas university and has found a job in Australia working as an Engineer whilst they are completing their Masters degree in Engineering.

Example 2

A person is enrolled in a 2 year Diploma of Commercial Cooking at TAFE. After the first 12 months they have completed a Certificate III in Commercial Cooking. Since Trades Recognition Australia only requires Certificate III level to qualify as a Cook, then any work experience obtained after this Certificate III can be used. This could even be at your local restaurant.

Example 3

A person is studying a Bachelor of Architecture in Australia. Whilst studying they have been able to gain a job in an Architects firm as an Architectural Associate. This occupation requires an AQF Diploma level education or higher qualification (ASCO Dictionary). Normally it would be considered that after the second year of study of a Bachelor Degree a Diploma level of education would be obtained.

## Evidence required

A work reference containing a detailed duty description is mandatory. It is a good idea to provide an organisational chart indicating your position in the company. DIMIA may ask for 6 months of pay slips and perhaps Tax Assessment Notices from the ATO. Your level of salary must reflect on an hourly basis what is expected at a professional level.

You must also have the appropriate visa which allows you to work and that you have not breached the conditions of your visa. Keep in mind that you cannot use any working periods while working in Australia whilst holding a Bridging Visa. This is important to remember for if you are working whilst waiting for your 497 visa to be granted and you hold a Bridging Visa after your student visa expired. If you are intending to use this work experience after you have completed your course, this would be a problem for you.

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