

## Expats begin summer pilgrimage home

*Sam McKeith*

More expatriates are sounding out recruitment firms about job opportunities as Australia's stand-out economic performance - and the weather - boost the number of workers looking to head home.

Meanwhile employers, in siege mode since the start of the year, are losing valued staff because they have not resumed career development programs shelved in the downturn, recruiters say.

Hamilton James & Bruce Group director Robin Jerome said the number of expats looking for work had surged.

"The UK market is down: unemployment is up and there is little sign of a recovery happening, and news has travelled to the UK that Australia is on the recovery out of recession," Mr Jerome said. "Here employment is up, recruitment is up and indeed wages are starting to go up, and so we are seeing [Australian expats] flooding back.

"We're seeing it predominantly in the accounting area - a lot of chartered accountants, a lot of the IT folk coming back and some of the administration people also," he said.

Julia Ross spokeswoman Caroline Vickers-Willis said many expats had decided now was the right time to jet home.

Seasonal factors were also boosting numbers, Ambition Finance managing director Gavin Houchell said.

"Seasonality is driving the additional flow that we're seeing now. People pull up stumps, do some travel, and get back for summer," Mr Houchell said.

"Workers in their mid to late 20s with no ties - they'll blow with the wind a little. For example, young chartered accountants might race away from these shores for a few years to see the world and generally return around this time of year."

In a sign that conditions in the labour market may be recovering, more than 40,000 jobs were added last month, including 35,400 full-time positions, pushing the unemployment rate lower to 5.7 per cent from 5.8 per cent.

Aggregate hours worked last month also climbed, increasing 13.4 million hours, or 0.9 per cent, to 1.52 billion hours, said the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Trevor-Roberts Associates said some firms had restarted internal development processes in order to retain staff. "One utilities company we work with has reinvigorated their graduate program," principal Edwin Trevor-Roberts said. "They've done nothing on it for six months.

"Another organisation in the aged-care sector that has suffered budget cuts has been actively exploring how they keep front line managers who now have more work to do and less resources to do it, given that mobility is increasing."

Mr Trevor-Roberts said firms that did not restart human resource programs risked losing staff as the labour market loosened.

"Many firms will be caught a couple of months too late because they haven't sat down with their employees and asked, 'Hey what's happening? What can we do for you?'" he said.

Quay Appointments urged firms to refocus on retaining valued staff.

Founder Winsome Bernard said: "You may think 'we kept them informed', but were they actually kept

informed, were they involved in what was going on, and what is left for them as the market starts to improve?"

Recruiters were even reassessing their own strategies to retain staff.

"We're looking at incentive and training programs and encouraging people, letting them know they're worthwhile and valued," Ms Bernard said.

**KEY POINTS**

The relatively robust economy is luring Australians back from the UK.

Employers are urged to restart programs to retain valued staff.

***Geographic area:***

*Australia*

*England*

***Classification:***

*Labour/Employment/Recruitment*

*Economy/Finance*

*Labour/Employment/Job Sharing*