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Aussies on way home

By NICK GARDNER

AUSTRALIA'S "brain drain" - where talented professionals headed overseas to pursue a career and cash - is in decline and our expats are now returning home in record numbers.

More than 9500 Australians moved back from overseas last November - 2300 more than the number of residents departing in that month.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics data also shows the difference between the number of Australians returning and those heading offshore has reached record levels in the past two years.

The strong dollar, solid economy and quality of life here are behind the influx, experts say.

Brian Haratsis, chief executive of strategic consulting group MacroPlan, said the brain drain was over. "There are around one million Australians currently overseas and with economic conditions as they are, we

STILL CALLING AUSTRALIA HOME

- **9507** Australians returned home in November compared with **7238** departures.
- **IT and engineering** are the most popular skills among returning Australians.
- **The majority of expats** are returning from the UK, Ireland and Europe.

could see half of them heading back home," he said. An even bigger spike in talent would result from temporary workers settling here.

"It's a huge positive for Australia because we're now sucking in top brains from the UK and South Africa in particular - a complete reversal of the old brain drain."

Jeff Knowles, general manager of recruitment firm Peoplebank, said Australia has become more attractive with solid wage growth and a strong dollar making it more appealing to our expats.

The news will be welcome for many employers who are still struggling to find skilled workers for

specialist positions. Craig James, chief economist at CommSec, says the influx is a boon for the local economy.

"Demand for skills is high and expats are realising that the best conditions in the world are right here at home," Mr James said.

But Karen Colfer, managing director of Kelly Services Australia, said unless returning Australians had a specific skill, they could find it difficult to get a job.

"Only highly skilled workers specialising in particular areas will find it relatively straightforward to get work," she said. "If you're just a general accountant, forget it."