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Patron

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former Prime Minister of Australia

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**ECCV
Submission
to the
Australian Senate Education and Employment Reference
Committee
Inquiry into TAFE**

March 2014

Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) is a peak advocacy peak body that represents over 200 Victorian ethnic and multicultural organisations.

ECCV welcomes the Australian Senate Inquiry into Technical and Further Education (TAFE).

1. ECCV points out that TAFE programs have played a critical pathway for training, skills and employment access for disadvantaged people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
2. ECCV advocates that reforms and funding decisions in State Government jurisdictions, in particular in Victoria, respond to the education, training and employment needs of vulnerable young people from culturally diverse backgrounds.
3. The recommendations in this submission focus on:
 - a) Educational linkages with secondary and higher education regarding students from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
 - b) The development of opportunities for young Victorians from culturally diverse backgrounds to improve themselves and increase their employment prospects.
 - c) The targeted delivery of services and programs to support disadvantaged individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds to access education, training and skills and a pathway to employment.

Background

4. Youth unemployment is increasing in Australia. There is limited information available on the extent to which TAFE institutions adequately target disadvantaged young people from culturally diverse backgrounds in the State of Victoria. ECCV community feedback, however, indicates that the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) program was a viable pathway for those culturally diverse school leavers who did not go on to university, to enter the workforce. ECCV expects a long-term consequence



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of the cuts to TAFE VCAL programs to lead to increased unemployment of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. ABS figures show that Australia's unemployment rate increased to a post-global financial crisis high of 5.8 percent in August 2013¹, while youth unemployment (15-19 year-olds) increased to 17.3 per cent, its highest level since October 2010.²

Impact of TAFE cuts

5. ECCV emphasises that funding cuts to the TAFE sector have had a negative impact on education, training and employment pathways for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. ECCV believes there is a real risk of entrenched disadvantaged groups emerging, made up of unemployed migrants and people from refugee backgrounds including disillusioned young people, women and newly arrived people. More needs to be done to address the educational and training needs of new migrants and refugees with a particular focus on young people.
6. ECCV asserts that inflexibility within the education system, limited pathways from education to employment and sector funding reduction only serve to further discourage participation.³
7. According to the report, *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage* (2013 Productivity Commission) there is a link between higher levels of education and better employment outcomes; education is the route out of disadvantage for most people of working age; and ideally education also creates greater labour market resilience within individuals⁴.
8. ECCV believes that restricting the choices leads to reduced opportunity for ability for young people to come to find education and training pathways and would lead the temptation for young people to leave education, because it is no longer relevant to their needs.
9. ECCV community feedback indicates that lack sufficient choice, relevance and opportunities to enter TAFE programs sometimes results in disengaged young people and this often leads to disillusionment, and risk seeking behaviour. How to re-engage them becomes a challenge, especially regarding those with drug and alcohol, and mental health issues.

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¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force, Australia Aug 2013*, Cat. No. 6202.0, Canberra 2013, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/6202.0Main%20Features2Aug%202013?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6202.0&issue=Aug%202013&num=&view=>

² Pat McGrath, Australian Broadcasting Commission, "Australia's unemployment rate climbs to 5.8 per cent to its highest level in four years", ABC News, posted 12 September 2013, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-12/jobless-rate-up/4953338>

³ "Education, Training and Employment", Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2013, <http://www.cmy.net.au/EducationTrainingandEmployment>

⁴ McLachlan, Gilfillan and Gordon, 2013 *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage*, Productivity Commission Staff working Paper July 2013 109. Commonwealth of Australia



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Recommendation 1

ECCV recommends that TAFE reforms in Victoria develop flexible, affordable and varied pathways from education to employment with a specific emphasis on relevance to the needs of disadvantaged young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Youth disadvantage

10. According to the ECCV discussion Paper *Work Solutions: improving cultural diversity and inclusion in the workplace* (2014), young people from recently arrived backgrounds and refugees are at greater risk of leaving education earlier than their local-born counterparts and therefore are represented more highly in the jobless rates.
11. ECCV notes that there many complex factors that contribute to educational disadvantage and unemployment amongst young people from culturally diverse backgrounds such as:
 - A young person's still-developing English language skills can lead to communication challenges with other students and teachers.
 - Some young people with a disrupted education pre arrival may experience additional learning difficulties, for example being illiterate in their first language.
 - Young people and their families from migrant and refugee backgrounds are often unfamiliar with the Australian education system.⁵
12. Experiencing racism and discrimination at school adds further discouragement. In 2013, growing economic uncertainty coincided with an increase in unemployment and a marked increase in reported experiences of discrimination according to the Mapping Social Cohesion 2013 National Survey (Scanlon Foundation)⁶.
13. On an international level youth unemployment is a ticking time-bomb as it has reached a critical level in most G20 countries, including Australia, according to the Ernst and Young report: *Avoiding a Lost Generation* (2013⁷). The findings show that young entrepreneurs have a crucial role to play in tackling the youth unemployment crisis and governments are increasingly looking for incentives to provide young people with the tools and support to start up new businesses to create jobs and economic growth.

⁵ "Education, Training and Employment", Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2013, <http://www.cmy.net.au/EducationTrainingandEmployment>

⁶ Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2013 National Report* (Caulfield, Monash University, 2013), 1.

⁷ Ernst and Young June 2013, *Avoiding a Lost Generation – young entrepreneurs identify five imperatives for action*, produced for the G20 Young Entrepreneurs Alliance Summit Russia.



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Recommendation 2

ECCV recommends that TAFE programs develop business orientated courses specifically targeted at young people from new and emerging communities and refugee backgrounds.

VCAL programs

14. The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), a hands-on year 11 and 12 alternative designed to create an individual pathway for you to employment or further studies at TAFE, was particularly beneficial for young Victorians with a refugee background and interrupted schooling. It provided them with pathways to further study at TAFE and employment, as well as traineeships with apprenticeships as a career path.

15. ECCV acknowledges that some lifestyle VCAL courses needed to be rationalised, the funding cuts to the TAFE sector have had a negative impact on education, training and employment pathways, particularly for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds as they:

- Reduced student options and pathways.
- Would potentially reduce retention rates in schools, especially of students were not able to study at university
- Reduced the ability of educational institutions to develop community links that would often lead to employment for students.
- Schools need a program like VCAL that can change to adapt to student needs.
- Some of the programs in VCAL may need to be rationalized or cut out.

Recommendation 3

ECCV recommends that TAFE programs explore the educational and training needs of young people, from culturally diverse and refugee backgrounds.

TAFE links with secondary schools

16. The TAFE and Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) programs are pivotal in providing appropriate education, training and employment options for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

17. ECCV is aware that the LLENs programs are designed to improve education, training and employment options for young people from 10-19 years particularly those at risk of making poor transitions from compulsory

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schooling to the next stage of their lives and careers.⁸ ECCV believes a concerted effort should be made to target those programs at vulnerable young people from culturally diverse backgrounds

18. ECCV advocates for resources to be redirected to enable TAFE providers to work with schools to support better outcomes for students, and with local communities to develop programs and support for students from disadvantaged and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
19. ECCV believe reduced spending on TAFE and LLENs programs would jeopardise the development of working relationships between secondary schools and TAFE colleges.

Recommendation 4

ECCV recommends that the Victorian Government redirects allocations for reforms in the TAFE sector and Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) programs to target disadvantaged young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

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⁸ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, "Locate Local Learning and Employment Networks", (State Government of Victoria, October 2013). <http://www.llen.vic.gov.au/>