



Submission on the *Industry Skills Fund – Youth Pilot Programmes* Discussion Paper

***Prepared by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)
and the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV)***

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The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) and the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) welcome the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department of Industry regarding the recently released Discussion Paper on the *Industry Skills Fund – Youth Pilot Programmes*.

FECCA is the national peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy, and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to the Australian Government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism, so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are designed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion, and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

ECCV is the peak body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria, and a member council of FECCA. It aims for a culturally diverse and harmonious society that is just, fair and inclusive and where all people have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to, community life. ECCV advocates for freedom, respect, equality and dignity for multicultural communities and strives with others, to build a strong, vibrant Victorian community.

FECCA and ECCV welcome the introduction of the *Training for Employment Scholarships* and *Youth Employment Pathways* programmes, which are considered important initiatives aimed at addressing employment issues facing young Australians today. We highlight, however, the need for consideration of, and responsiveness to, the particular needs of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with regard to the planning and implementation of the programmes, given the prevalence of unemployment amongst this cohort.

We further highlight that, in addition to the challenges that face all Australian youth in entering the labour market, such as lack of previous working experience and limited opportunities to secure entry-level jobs, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and new and emerging community backgrounds in particular, face a series of additional intersectional disadvantages. These relate to their varying language proficiency and literacy levels, levels of educational attainment, incidence of pre-migration trauma, lack of local experience, lack of referees and often limited knowledge of Australian

workforce systems and cultures¹. In addition, they often face the challenge of having no networks to use in seeking out employment, and the potential to face discrimination, both through recruitment and on-the-job, on the basis of their cultural, religious or linguistic background.

This submission seeks to highlight the above issues with reference the specific questions raised in the Discussion Paper.

Background

As noted above, unemployment is a significant issue for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and particularly for those from new and emerging communities. Employment is linked not only to financial stability, but also to social cohesion, self-esteem, independence, the ability to gain stable housing, opportunities to build and maintain English language skills and achieve a greater sense of community belonging and personal wellbeing. Conversely, unemployment often results in increased risk of depression, poor health, and social and economic exclusion². The need for sustainable employment opportunities for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is subsequently paramount to ensure successful settlement outcomes. Yet despite this, current research indicates that the needs of a significant number of young people are not being adequately catered for³. The recent *CALD Youth Census Report 2014* released by the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, for instance, analyses census data regarding young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and notes that this cohort had generally lower rates of employment compared to Australian born youth⁴. The report further notes that the rates vary across different states and territories, with the highest rates of employment for culturally and linguistically diverse youth recorded in the Northern Territory, and the lowest rates in Tasmania⁵.

In the context of the above findings, we cite the important need for employment pathways made available through the *Youth Pilot Programmes* to be facilitated through promoting a holistic approach to the provision of support for young people that will allow for employment to be meaningful and sustained. Specifically, we highlight the connections between sustainable employment, and the extent to which this is facilitated by stability and support in other respects, such as housing, health, education and other key areas. For instance, as noted by the Centre for Multicultural Youth in a recent report discussing employment pathways, “there is a need for holistic initiatives that address education and employment

¹ FECCA. 2014. *Better Beginnings, Better Futures. Improving Outcomes for New and Emerging Communities*. ‘Factsheet 3: Youth Employment in New and Emerging Communities’. Available at: http://www.fecca.org.au/images/NEC_factsheets/factsheet3_youth%20employment%20in%20new%20and%20emerging%20communities.pdf

² Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria. 2014. *Work Solutions: Improving Cultural Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace*. Available at: http://eccv.org.au/library/FULL_REPORT_ECCV_Work_Solutions_Discussion_Paper_Feb_2014.pdf

³ Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2014. *Facilitating the Transition to Employment for Refugee Young People*. Available at: <http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/Transitions%20to%20Employment%20Report.pdf>

⁴ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, 2014, *The CALD Youth Census Report 2014*, Available at http://cmy.net.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/CALD%20Census%20Report_Digital.pdf

⁵ *Ibid.*

pathways while being sensitive to health, wellbeing and settlement needs of young people”⁶. Consistent with this view, FECCA and ECCV strongly highlight the need for such a holistic approach to be considered and applied with regard to the implementation of the *Youth Pilot Programmes*, and for recognition of the extent to which employment is not, nor should be, regarded or assumed as separate to other issue areas.

Criteria for selecting regions

FECCA and ECCV welcome the programmes’ focus on investing in young people living in regional Australia. This is particularly significant given the often lack of investment in infrastructure and other support mechanisms available in such areas, which can impede settlement prospects. The extent to which the proposed programmes subsequently focus on providing resources to connect employment providers and young people in a targeted and structured manner is therefore welcomed.

We caution the need, however, for funding for the programmes to be sustained in order to deliver meaningful employment outcomes for both young people and providers. Fluctuation in funding levels would be likely to exacerbate volatile employment conditions in many regional areas identified in the discussion paper, and particularly those where youth employment levels are already high.

Further concerning the selection of locations, we appreciate the extent to which the Discussion Paper appears to strike a balance between greatest need and likelihood of success regarding youth employment outcomes. In order to maximise the benefit of the initiative, we support the need for reasonable likelihood of success to be considered as a criterion with regard to the roll-out of the programmes, and for this to factor as a major consideration in choosing pilot programmes locations. We see this and necessary in order for the model to be considered worthy of replication and broad-scale implementation.

FECCA and ECCV also note the number of locations identified as experiencing high levels of youth unemployment as also being those in which large populations of young people from new and emerging community backgrounds live. For this reason, the need for recognition of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and their participation in the programmes, must be paramount.

Local conditions required for pilots to be effective

As previously noted, we observe that sustainable employment is reliant on a range of broader factors and social determinants that will, as a whole, be likely to result in positive employment and settlement outcomes. Further to this, however, we cite that supporting employment for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will largely be facilitated by broader societal factors, such as building inclusive communities and workplaces. Creating a healthy and inclusive work and social environment is imperative in ensuring that young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can

⁶ Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2014. *Facilitating the Transition to Employment for Refugee Young People*. Available at: <http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/Transitions%20to%20Employment%20Report.pdf>

effectively engage with, and contribute to, their workplace and society. In particular, this means eradicating racism and discrimination, and promoting the benefits of cultural diversity and the extent to which the latter prompts development, innovation and growth⁷. We also highlight the need for the local economy in a selected region to be supportive of employment initiatives, in order to allow for sustainable outcomes for employment providers and job seekers.

Criteria to be applied to businesses and organisations

Many people from new and emerging communities and refugee backgrounds continue to experience high rates of unemployment and underemployment. A number of factors can be highlighted as affecting people's ability to obtain stable and meaningful work. Such factors comprise a lack of recognition of skills and experience, language and communication barriers, discrimination and employers' requirement for Australian working experience. Feedback received by ECCV from stakeholders also indicates that parental unemployment or underemployment is hindering children's capacity for aspirations and achievements. It is very common to see children from new emerging communities and refugee backgrounds witnessing their skilled parents struggling to find work in their chosen field or employed below their skill level. Children from these communities face additional challenges consisting of navigating an unfamiliar education system, a new language and culture, as well as problems associated with the adolescent stage of development⁸. We recommend that businesses should meet additional requirements to access Training for Employment Scholarship and Youth Employment Pathways. These include cultural competence and employer's commitment to workplace diversity.

We also recommend the need for businesses and organisations involved in the programmes to demonstrate or present evidence of cultural competency, understanding of the complex issues that youth from culturally and linguistically diverse face, and the effects of refugee-like experiences, including evidence of inclusive and culturally competent organisational practices. This is particularly important for organisations located in pilot regions that identify as having a large population of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and particularly, new and emerging community backgrounds.

Recommendation 1:

That a proven record of cultural competence and employer's commitment to workplace diversity be considered as additional requirements for businesses to access the programmes.

⁷ FECCA. 2013. *Harmony in the Workplace: Delivering the Diversity Dividend*. Available at: http://www.fecca.org.au/images/Documents/Harmony/full_harmony%20in%20the%20workplace_delivering%20the%20diversity%20dividend.pdf

⁸ Adult Migrant English Services (AMES). 2014. *Preparing for the next step – a proposal to invest in AMEP Youth Programs*. Available at: http://www.ames.net.au/files/file/Research/AMES_YOUTH_ResearchReport_LR_FA.pdf

Examples that may demonstrate cultural competency or evidence of inclusive workplace practices could include:

- Demonstrated experience of successfully working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- Internal policies, programs and systems that acknowledge and refer to cultural diversity;
- Recruiting, developing and supporting a diverse workplace (including reflecting on how diverse the business workforce is, and whether or not the workforce reflects the diversity of the communities it serves);
- Policies and structures dealing with workplace discrimination and racism;
- Staff training, including cultural competency training;
- Communications, such as newsletters and staff updates, reporting on cultural diversity in the organisation; and
- Events, celebrations, activities, staff development exercises and initiatives that acknowledge and celebrate cultural diversity.

Criteria to be applied to individuals

Regarding the criteria to be applied in the selection of candidates to participate in the programmes, we highlight the need for simplified processes, where possible, in order to avoid excluding culturally and linguistically diverse candidates. In Australia, recruitment processes often focus not so much on actual job competency, but rather, on whether a candidate has the verbal and interactive skills to effectively engage with, and meet the expectations of, the selection panel. In this context, we highlight the imperative need for employers to be mindful of cultural differences and that cultural interpretations of what an interview will be like may vary among participants⁹. This is particularly important to ensure that discrimination is avoided in the process of recruiting candidates to participate in the programmes, who will subsequently be provided with the opportunity to pursue employment opportunities on the basis of greatest need.

In addition, ECCV highlights the significant body of evidence that suggests many refugees or other newly arrived young people are at high risk of leaving school before the legal school leaving age. Many factors influence this important decision including low levels of English, limited formal education because of disrupted schooling and limited knowledge of their options within the education system¹⁰. There is also some anecdotal evidence that indicates young people, especially those who are unaccompanied, leave school as they feel pressure to meet the financial needs of family members left behind or contribute financially to family. It is important to note that certain groups, such as youth with refugee backgrounds and lower socioeconomic status, face more disadvantages of high unemployment. Therefore, we

⁹ FECCA. 2013. *Harmony in the Workplace: Delivering the Diversity Dividend*. Available at: http://www.fecca.org.au/images/Documents/Harmony/full_harmony%20in%20the%20workplace_delivering%20the%20diversity%20dividend.pdf

¹⁰ Beadle, S. 2014. *Facilitating the Transition to Employment for Refugee Young People: A data update and review of recent literature*. Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation and Centre for Multicultural Youth. Available at: <http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/Transitions%20to%20Employment%20Report.pdf>

recommend that young people who drop out of school should benefit from the Training for Employment Scholarship. In addition to this, we suggest that socioeconomic status should be considered as criteria during the selection process.

Recommendation 2:

That young people who drop out of school be allowed to access both programmes.

Recommendation 3:

That socioeconomic status of young people from culturally diverse communities be taken into account when considering their access to Training for Employment Scholarships and Youth Employment Pathways schemes.

Effective support mechanisms for disadvantaged youth

In nominating effective support and training strategies, feedback received by FECCA through community consultations has suggested that training programmes attended by young students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds should include a practical experience component¹¹. This is essential in facilitating a holistic educational approach and providing valuable experience that may not otherwise feature as part of a formal training process. There is also a need to extend apprenticeship opportunities beyond the traditional manufacturing industries in order to meet both Australia's workforce shortages, as well as the employment preferences of young people with regard to their interests and skills¹².

A recurring theme concerning employment issues that FECCA has identified through its engagement with young people from new and emerging community backgrounds, is the need for targeted mentoring programmes. Due to the varied intersectional barriers they face, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and those from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds in particular, require additional support to identify and pursue education and employment opportunities and to navigate the Australian employment system.

In this context, mentoring has been identified as an effective way to provide young job seekers with practical knowledge of workplace practices, expectations, cultures and systems, and enable them to overcome some of the barriers that they face in gaining and retaining employment. Mentoring programs also help job seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to develop professional networks, boost their confidence

¹¹ FECCA. 2014. *Better Beginnings, Better Futures. Improving Outcomes for New and Emerging Communities*. 'Factsheet 3: Youth Employment in New and Emerging Communities'. Available at: http://www.fecca.org.au/images/NEC_factsheets/factsheet3_youth%20employment%20in%20new%20and%20emerging%20communities.pdf

¹² *Ibid.*



in their skills, and improve their prospects in terms of finding jobs to match their qualifications.¹³

Moreover, ECCV recognises that the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) delivered by Adult Migrant English Services (AMES) in Victoria caters to the needs of newly arrived refugees and migrants between 16 and 25 years of age. The programme is also being offered to migrants living in regional Victoria (Shepparton, Bendigo and Ballarat) and focusses on delivering the following outcomes:

- support young people from these categories engage in education;
- assist them develop employability skills;
- help them improve their knowledge of mainstream education system in Australia and their options post AMEP; and
- facilitate and foster their social inclusion.

Given its importance and effectiveness, we therefore recommend that the AMEP Youth Program be resourced and promoted to businesses located in regional sites where the two pilot programmes will be trialled.

Recommendation 4:

That AMEP Youth Program be resourced and promoted to businesses located in regional sites where the two pilot programmes will be trialled.

Additional support for disengaged youth

Some young people from a refugee background experienced torture and persecution and extended periods of interruption in education in their countries of origin. As a result, they would need extra learning support and culturally sensitive counselling services to improve their training and employment outcomes and access.

Recommendation 5:

That additional support and culturally appropriate services be provided to young people who experienced persecution and war-related trauma prior to their arrival in Australia.

Programme delivery models

Community feedback received by ECCV suggests that some training providers take advantage of people who are desperately trying to improve their employment prospects. Many community members have been offered (sometimes coerced into) courses that are not in their best interests. Some of the courses are either substandard, too expensive (risk of debt accumulation) or simply not suitable for the clients. ECCV proposes that training

¹³ FECCA. 2014. *Better Beginnings, Better Futures. Improving Outcomes for New and Emerging Communities*. 'Factsheet 3: Youth Employment in New and Emerging Communities'. Available at: http://www.fecca.org.au/images/NEC_factsheets/factsheet3_youth%20employment%20in%20new%20and%20emerging%20communities.pdf



providers and employers should play roles in the delivery of both programmes. However, ECCV recommends that the Australian Government Department of Industry ensures that a risk management system be put in place so that unscrupulous employers and training providers are discouraged to access the programmes.

Recommendation 6:

That a risk management system be set up to discourage unscrupulous operators.

Appropriate payment milestones

ECCV believes that some young people from refugee backgrounds would need additional time and support to achieve their learning goals. This is especially true of those who have been exposed to extreme hardship and trauma during their perilous journey and years spent in refugee camps. We propose that both programmes allow for some flexibility in milestone timing.

Recommendation 7:

That flexibility in programmes milestone timing be considered.