

## **ECCV Submission to the VET Reform Taskforce On the Review of Training Packages and Accredited Courses – Discussion Paper**

**February 2015**

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments to the VET Reform Taskforce on its discussion. ECCV is the voice of multicultural Victoria, its peak advocacy body and has a membership of over 220 ethnic and multicultural community organisations. It maintains an active sub-committee looking into employment, education and training issues in a multicultural context in Victoria.

### **Implementing industry-defined occupational standards fairly and equitably**

This submission focuses on the need for a fair and equitable procedure for the recognition of overseas qualifications for migrants and refugee job seekers in Victoria, which has implications for national VET reform. It is based on the ECCV community consultation forum *Qualified but not Recognised* (ECCV 2015) and highlights the participants' contributions. The process of recognising overseas skills and qualifications in Australia is fragmented and complex. Recognition of overseas qualifications varies between different assessing authorities. The professional assessing authorities are not accountable to any centralised body, nor does an independent appeals process exist.

Internationally, Australia is moving towards a 'mutual recognition' of skills and qualifications with overseas countries. Adapting to a global labour market requires that reform of VET include recognition of overseas qualifications if Australia is to successfully respond to emerging skills needs.

### **The Role of Industry Professional Associations**

#### **Recommendation 1**

ECCV recommends that the Government allocate resources to research and review the current state of the recognition of overseas skills and qualifications and to map the relevant organisations, pathways and courses across jurisdictions to ensure they remain compliant with relevant national and state equal employment opportunity (EEO) legislation.

## Recommendation 2

ECCV recommends that overseas qualifications units in each jurisdiction are resourced (or established) to provide better face-to-face community level advice, assistance and networking opportunities in line with relevant national and state equal employment opportunity (EEO) legislation.

ECCV understands that the COAG Industry and Skills Council's reform agenda is concerned that qualifications provide reliable information to employers about employee's skills through industry-defined occupational standards. The Department of Industry's acknowledgement of tensions in achieving this goal is commended. *Qualified but not Recognised* found that the current system is not meeting the core needs of students and job seekers who have overseas qualifications or are recent migrants and seeking employment in Australia.

In Victoria the Overseas Qualification Unit (OQU) is the key agency for qualification recognition. In 2015 it contracted VETASSESS – a private company under auspices of the Australian Government – to screen and recognize certain qualifications. Outside of OQU/VETASSESS, VET accreditation provides the other avenue to gain equivalent qualifications, though it does not screen and recognize previous ones. Professional associations represent industry when informing VET's "industry-defined occupational standards". They therefore exercise considerable influence both with VET training packages and assessment and directly with employers. ECCV community consultation found that industry associations' understanding of the barriers to recognize overseas qualifications was very low.

VET training packages and assessment for award qualification provide evidence to employers of an employee's core competencies. When the correlation between qualification and employment outcomes is weak, association accreditation and licensing of job seekers has more authority than VET. As training packages account for 85% of Australian occupations it is important to recognize the impact that proposed VET reforms will have on individuals with overseas qualifications.

ECCV is concerned that without a regulatory body or appeals mechanism, professional associations have unbound influence on qualification pathways in Australia that impacts on students and job seekers. There is a need for greater data collection by professional associations or employers to assist Australia to respond to emerging skills shortages by identifying the diversity of qualification categories in a global labour market.

## Effective Tools - Bridging Courses

### Recommendation 3

ECCV recommends that adequate resources be provided, in the form of seeding funds or grants, for professional associations to conduct reviews of their accreditation processes in consultation with multicultural communities to support students and job seekers with overseas qualifications.

Overseas qualified workers currently face twice the scrutiny of their locally qualified peers which will increase if industry-defined occupational standards are increased without more research or, at the very least, some form of bridging course to create a more level playing field for migrants and refugees with overseas qualifications.

Community consultation identified a need in Victoria to implement affordable and accessible bridging programs and short courses to support migrants and refugees seeking recognition of their overseas qualifications and employment in their nominated fields. Current programs and courses available are fragmented and expensive. There is a concern that migrants face a fragmented, two-tiered qualification assessment system that disproportionately disadvantages them when seeking work that they are qualified and experienced to do.

Addressing this issue meets COAG's priority to seek an appropriate balance between the technical skills and knowledge required to complete a specific job or task and the cognitive skills that are increasingly becoming an important component of all jobs.

Bridging programs will also enable fairer assessments of overseas qualified students and job seekers during the contextualisation of a training package qualification by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). 'Contextualisation' is an area of VET training packages where the local knowledge of individual RTOs and their trainers plays a role in identifying the workforce barriers to employment.

The introduction of bridging courses and more scrutiny and education of professional associations falls in line with current evaluations that a more tailored approach to the regulation, development and maintenance of training packages and accredited courses can help to improve the training outcomes for migrant and refugee job seekers and improve the credibility of the system.

## Overcoming Workforce Barriers

ECCV highlights that people from a non-English speaking background, encounter a variety of challenges in accessing employment opportunities. According to the ABS report *Perspectives on Migrants* of 2011, 35% of recent migrants, who arrived in Australia after the year 2000, experienced some difficulty finding their first job in Australia.

The single biggest issue was a lack of Australian work experience or references. ECCV notes that the lack of employment opportunities for migrants increases the risk of economic hardship and is more likely to lead to poor health. High unemployment and under-employment have been accepted as key obstruction to social cohesion policies initiated by governments. ECCV also notes that a major obstacle for migrants in finding a job in Australia is the recognition of an overseas qualification.

ECCV thanks the VET Reform Taskforce for considering its submission and recommendations for the facilitation of recognition of overseas qualifications be included as a key priority of the VET Reform Taskforce.

The challenge of VET reform for ECCV is in implementing industry-defined occupational standards fairly and equitably. To do so, the role of industry professional associations needs to be better understood in the overall qualification pathways system in Australia. Migrants and refugees with overseas qualifications currently experience gaps between overseas qualification units at the state-level and VET qualification assessments and training packages at the Commonwealth level, when trying to overcome workforce barriers. Investing in bridging courses to level the playing field is one alternative to greater regulatory scrutiny to ensure that Australia's VET system remains compliant with EEO legislation.

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