



MYAN Australia

Submission to the Department of Education on Employability Skills Training consultation paper

31 August 2016

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia)

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) is the national peak body representing multicultural youth issues.

The MYAN works in partnership with government and non-government agencies at the state/territory and national levels to ensure that the particular needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised, and to support a coherent and consistent approach to addressing these needs in policy and service delivery. The MYAN undertakes a range of policy and sector development activities, provides advice and capacity building to those who work with young people, and seeks to influence the national agenda.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds demonstrate high levels of resilience and resourcefulness and have the potential to be active participants in and contributors to Australian society. However, they face particular barriers to accessing services and opportunities, including language, culture, limited social capital and unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes (including the employment service system), racism, and discrimination. These factors can place them at social and economic disadvantage within Australian society, which can mean they are at higher risk of social and economic isolation.

The MYAN believes that a targeted approach to policy and service delivery is essential to addressing these barriers. The MYAN has recently developed the National Youth Settlement Framework to support a targeted and consistent approach to addressing the needs of newly arrived young people settling in Australia.

About this submission

The MYAN welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the proposed Employability Skills Training.

One in four young people in Australia are from a refugee or migrant background.¹ Their active engagement as citizens in Australian society has significant and long-term benefits for them, their families, communities, and a diverse socially cohesive Australia. This submission looks at the particular vulnerabilities young people face as they seek to actively participate in economic activity.

This submission provides a national perspective, drawing on the MYAN's breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities, and the youth and settlement sectors across Australia. It has been informed by the policy and program delivery experience of the Centre for Multicultural Youth in Victoria, and also by the role of MYAN working collaboratively with youth transition providers in the Settlement Sector which are currently delivering the Department of Social Services funded Youth Transition Support Pilot (YTSP) program.

Pre-employment and basic skill training in employability skills could potentially be very positive for young people from CALD background, and particularly for refugee young people with limited or no experience of the Australian work place culture. For them, a focus on pre-employment skill development is critical.

The submission responds to a selection of the questions that MYAN regards as central to determining how relevant this element of the Jobs PaTH package will be to migrant and refugee young people.

¹ Centre for Multicultural Youth, The CALD Youth Census Report, Carlton, Victoria 2014

Why economic participation of refugee and migrant young people is a significant issue.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds make up a significant proportion of the youth population in Australia and are a diverse group with varying needs and circumstances. 25% of Australia's 3.7million young people are from a refugee or migrant background and 11% have arrived in Australia as refugees or migrants.²

In the five years between 2010 and 2015, there were 174,586 young people aged between 12-24 who arrived under the Humanitarian, Family and Skilled Migration streams.³ The overwhelming majority of these were aged between 18 and 24 years old.

For a significant number of these young people, the transition to employment is more complex than for most of the youth population. Newly arrived young people and their families often face significant language barriers, as well as experiencing the ongoing impact of pre-migration experiences. (For example, refugee young people often experience ongoing trauma following their flight from persecution.) In addition, many have had limited or disrupted schooling. They also may lack knowledge of the Australian education system and labour market, and the networks that can facilitate finding employment. As a result, it is essential that they have access to a range of relevant support services to assist them.

The needs of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are not being adequately catered for. This is reflected in high rates of school dropout and consistently higher rates of unemployment. There is limited provision of specialised programs to meet the complex support needs of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Significant barriers in transitioning from education to employment include:

- Lack of critical networks such as family and friends in employment
- Limited vocational skills relevant to the Australian labour market
- Limited work experience prior to arrival
- Lack of familiarity (both for young people and their parents/family) with employment and education systems and available support options and pathways.

Other commonly reported barriers to employment include: limited English proficiency; lack of Australian work experience; limited access to transport and affordable housing close to employment; lack of knowledge of Australian workplace culture and systems; pressures of juggling employment and domestic responsibilities with caring responsibilities (especially for young women and girls); limited social and professional networks in Australia; the stressors of settlement; racism and discrimination; difficulties with skills recognition, qualifications and experience; and lack of qualifications.^{4 5}

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and their families often demonstrate strong motivation and drive to pursue education, training and career goals. It is therefore critical that the right level of support is available and that appropriate systems are in place to facilitate young people's transition into Australia, to address their needs, and to help them work towards their goals and enable them to participate in the economic life of the nation.

² Centre for Multicultural Youth, The CALD Youth Census Report, Carlton, Victoria 2014

³ MYAN, National Youth Settlement Framework, Data Snapshot July 2014-June 2015, using DSS data

⁴ Kellock, W, The Missing Link? Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, social capital and the transitions to employment, Carlton, Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), 2016.

⁵ FEECA, Better Beginnings, Better Futures, 2014

Employability Skills – General Comments

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds need support to develop employability skills and to develop better understanding of the Australian labour market and how it functions.

If the delivery of employability skills training is conducted as a series of standalone three week (25 hour per week) courses, it is likely to be of limited effect for this group of young people, given their varied and complex needs. It will likely be much more effective if it is integrated with the practical experience (such as work placements and mentoring) element of the proposed PaTH scheme.

As Social Ventures Australia notes, the most effective approach to instilling employability skills in young people, is offering opportunities to practice these skills in a work context. The development of employability skills is a life long journey. Skills are developed by experience, perspective and coaching and can be developed, practiced and refined at school, work, whilst travelling, volunteering, or playing sports.⁶ Delivering the program as a series of standalone training modules is likely to encounter difficulties engaging these young people.

Q 2. What arrangements should be put in place to ensure that highly disadvantaged job seekers are appropriately represented and referred for training by jobactive?

The need for young people to be appropriately assessed and referred is pivotal.

We note that it is proposed that jobactive providers will *'use their judgement in determining whether the job seeker will benefit, taking into account the job seeker's individual circumstances.'* If this means there will be a more considered and in depth approach to weighing potential benefit to the job seeker's circumstances, then this would be welcome.

The use of a short time and a standard classification tool to assess the complex needs of migrant and refugee young people has not worked well in the past, and is unlikely to be any more effective for this important initiative.

Early data from the recently introduced Transition to Work program indicates very low rates of referral to TtW of the refugee cohort. To achieve appropriate representation and referrals, there needs to be review and improvement in the assessment tools used by jobactive, ensuring any additional intake and assessment tools developed for PaTH consider the particular needs of refugee and migrant young people. The processes by which needs are assessed also needs to become more sophisticated.⁷

If the assessment and referral process is to operate more appropriately, then in our experience young refugees and migrants need more support before and during engagement with jobactive. In many

⁶ Social Ventures Australia, Fundamental Principles for Youth Employment, Feb 2016

⁷ The Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) does not work well for job seekers from a refugee or migrant background. Specific concerns with the JSCI include: it does not adequately identify needs, risks or appropriate supports for refugee or migrant young people; does not adequately capture varying/limited English language proficiency or limited social and cultural capital; time allocated to undertake assessment is insufficient to obtain the required information from highly disadvantaged young people with multiple needs. See, Settlement Council of Australia, Response to Employment Services discussion paper, 2013 and MYAN, Submission to DEEWR Discussion Paper on employment services, March 2013.

cases young people require a culturally competent advocate to ensure they understand the assessment process and that they can provide the relevant information, in order to ensure they are provided the correct level of support.

Even where specialized services are available, often job seekers from refugee or other CALD backgrounds do not know that they exist, and do not know what they are entitled to.

The need for a role that provides support and advocacy for the young person in the assessment process is further discussed later in this submission.

Q 8. How can training providers be encouraged to form partnerships or consortia to provide both blocks of training which also meets the needs of a diverse range of young people?

Partnerships between services are essential for supporting young refugee and migrant job seekers in their path to employment.

Increased collaboration between refugee and migrant youth services and training providers would lead to an improved knowledge base and provide young people with assistance from services that can provide targeted support.

Incentives are needed to motivate providers to work in partnership with organisations that possess expertise in working with this group of young people. Without such incentives, the approach of training providers will likely be to create a standardised model of service delivery, such as already exists, that fails to address the unique learning and support needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This could potentially further marginalise some of the most disadvantaged job seekers.

In addition to incentives, partnerships should be strongly supported by the Department of Education and designated as the preferred approach to delivering training for this cohort. Providers need the involvement of specialist youth organisations with experience in working with refugee and migrant young people to ensure training is targeted and beneficial. As an example, the UCan2 program is a partnership based approach involving the Centre for Multicultural Youth that combines training, mentoring, work experience and language support to increase the employability of young refugees.

Partnership and consortia approaches require time and resourcing if they are to be sustained. The Youth Transition Support Pilot projects currently funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS), have seen six organisations in three states funded to deliver transition services to young migrants and refugees. All are based in partnerships, and DSS has, in some cases, required service providers to partner with designated other organisations and allocate a percentage of the total budget to that partner (based on specific expertise or the knowledge and networks that the partner brings).

The Department of Education could develop incentives for providers to develop partnerships with relevant local agencies / organisations with expertise in working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. In regions with high concentrated numbers of recently settled migrants and refugees, it would be sensible to require that training providers partner with appropriate partners with expertise in migrant and refugee service delivery.

A secondary element to such an approach would be to ensure, either through incentives or other contractual obligations/responsibilities, that all providers are trained in cultural competency and supported to implement this in the delivery of training.

Q 9. How could the Department best ensure that diverse groups have access to training providers with appropriate cultural competence?

Following on from the comments in the section above, a central ingredient of successful programs for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds is that those delivering services understand their unique experiences and challenges.

Ensuring that training providers work in partnership with specialist youth organisations with knowledge of refugee and migrant experience when delivering training to this group of young people would ensure those with knowledge and expertise in cultural competence are supporting appropriate services and programs.

Constrained funding models tend to result in agencies reducing flexibility, with providers responding to the continual pressure to do more with less by developing a standard approach irrespective of the diverse needs of their clients. A client centred service model would address the needs for cultural competency and cultural sensitivity.⁸ Training providers unable to demonstrate appropriate prior experience delivering culturally competent training should be required to work in partnership if delivering employability skills to refugee and migrant young people.

A much stronger option for meeting this requirement would be to employ a small pool of bi-cultural youth workers in regions of higher concentrations of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds whose role would be to work with both training providers and as a support to the young people. The employment services system would provide a much better service to this group if cultural advocates were available in areas of high concentration of migrant and refugee young people. The role could also include assisting providers to develop cultural competence.

Q 12. How should training providers adapt the training to address the cultural and social diversity of young job seekers?

Young people from humanitarian backgrounds have needs that are distinct from those of older refugees. As well as adjusting to life in a new country, recovering from trauma, navigating education, employment and complex bureaucratic systems, young people from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds must also negotiate family, peer, individual and community expectations within the context of adolescence.⁹

Refugees also face different challenges from other migrant groups and therefore require a specific and tailored response. Providers will need to distinguish between the needs of migrants and the likely more complex needs of young people with refugee or refugee-like experiences.

Even after participating in the Adult Migrant Education Program or SEE program, many recently arrived young people are likely to possess limited English language skills, which training will need to accommodate. (See also comments on importance of detailed, timely assessment.)

In addition, it can be expected that they will:

- lack knowledge about post compulsory training pathways;
- lack familiarity with employment services and Australian systems in relation to searching for and securing paid employment (e.g. job applications, interviews, developing a CV) compared with other job seekers
- have had little or no previous education (Up to 40% of humanitarian entrants aged between 12–24 years arrive with six or fewer years of education)
- have experienced racism and discrimination in looking for work and in the interview and selection processes.¹⁰

⁸ Settlement Council of Australia, Response to Employment Services discussion paper, 2013

⁹ Centre for Multicultural Youth, Making It Work; Refugee young people and employment, Melbourne 2014

¹⁰ CMY, Making It Work, 2014

As a result, the more that the training can be practically based and experiential, the more likely it is that the lack of previous education and knowledge of the Australian employment system can be accommodated. Intermittent access during the training to cultural support through the training provider's partner organisation would also help to address the needs of these young people.

Q 13. What are the advantages and disadvantages of specialist youth or community organisations being involved in delivery of the training?

The advantages of specialist youth or community organisations being involved in the delivery of training are that they can potentially increase the likelihood that the training is relevant to the needs of the young people, and seek out related activity that might assist participants acquire the skills and understanding necessary to support their transition to employment.

Research highlights that employment programs specifically designed for refugee youth are able to be flexible to individual learning needs. However, currently these programs are usually small scale (and sometimes short-term) community-based initiatives which often have sustainability issues in the face of funding restrictions and/or lack of staff capacity.¹¹

Employability skills training that involves specialist youth and community organisations in the delivery of training is likely to be more flexible and thus capable of meeting individual needs.

Recommendations

- In regions with higher levels of recent migrant and refugee settlement, the Department establish a pool of culturally competent advocates available to assist young job seekers navigate the employment services system and access appropriate employment focussed supports and programs.
- That the department provide guidelines to jobactive providers that indicate that referral to integrated employability skills training should be strongly considered for any young person with a migrant and refugee background prior to the proposed five month milestone at which participation becomes compulsory.
- Selection of training providers should include a requirement that they partner with a youth or community organisation that can demonstrate an understanding of the experience of refugee and migrant young people (particularly in regions with higher concentrations of young migrants and refugees).
- That the Department require that providers deliver employability skills in a work-like and practical applied environment and in industry work environments to provide maximum value for young people unfamiliar with Australian labour market and job search requirements.

¹¹ Beadle S, Facilitating the Transition to Employment for refugee young people, University of Melbourne, 2014