

# English Language Acquisition for Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds

A brief policy review and reflections from providers of the Youth Transition Support services

May 2019

## Acknowledgements

This paper has been prepared by Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) with the Youth Transitions Support (YTS) service providers through the YTS Community of Practice (COP). The YTS service providers are: Foundation House, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Lebanese Muslim Association, Community Migrant Resource Centre, Access Community Services, and Multicultural Development Australia.



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background to this paper

This paper has been prepared by MYAN with Youth Transitions Support (YTS)<sup>1</sup> service providers through the YTS Community of Practice (COP). The YTS COP was established to support an independent evaluation of the YTS pilot, facilitate collaboration and reflection on good practice and document YTS practice. It was coordinated by MYAN.

This paper highlights the perspectives of YTS providers and draws on MYAN's policy work to provide an overview of recent research, policy and programming into the acquisition of English language skills in Australia by recently arrived young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. It provides an overview of gaps/barriers and strategies for strengthening young people's English language acquisition identified by YTS providers.

While building English language skills is not a core element of the YTS, it is a critical factor in both young people's successful transition from education to employment and to achieving successful settlement outcomes more broadly. Given this, and the role of YTS in assessing and meeting the transition needs of young people between 15 and 25 years of age, YTS service providers have important perspectives on barriers and facilitators to improving young people's English language acquisition.

## 1.2 Young people and EAL

In 2016, 45% of all young people in Australia aged 12 to 24 were from refugee and migrant backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> Young people make up a significant proportion of Australia's Migration Program and Humanitarian Program. In the 2017/18 financial year, young people aged 12 to 24 made up 26% of all arrivals under the Humanitarian Program, 21% of the Family stream and 7% of the Skill stream of the Migration Program. They comprise 14% of all arrivals under all migration categories. Young people aged 18 to 24 made up 59% of youth arrivals in all migration categories and more than half (51%) of the humanitarian youth arrivals.<sup>3</sup>

Young Australians from refugee and migrant backgrounds have enormous potential to be active participants in and contributors to Australian society.<sup>4</sup> They are a diverse population group who commonly display immense resilience and resourcefulness. They come to Australia with an array of strengths and capabilities and are often highly motivated to succeed in education and embrace the opportunities available to them.<sup>5</sup> However, they also face particular challenges in accessing the support and opportunities they need to navigate the demands of building a new life in a new country, including education, training and employment transitions.

English language skills and education are essential foundations for social, economic and civic participation and are critical for young people to build pathways to employment.<sup>6</sup> Their access to employment is highly dependent on successfully developing English language skills.<sup>7</sup> Refugees' and migrants' employment prospects are determined by a combination of their level of education or technical skills, and their ability to communicate in the local language<sup>8</sup>, as well as other aspects of settlement, including their social capital, diversity of their networks, family dynamics, etc.<sup>9</sup> In addition to employment and education/training opportunities, limited English language skills can impact on young people's capacity to develop bridging social capital (networks outside of their own linguistic/cultural community and limit their opportunities for access to diverse friendship groups.<sup>10</sup> This can in turn impact on successful social, economic and civic participation.

1 Department of Social Services (2018) *Youth Transition Support services*. Available at: <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlementservices/programs-policy/settlement-services/youth-transition-support-services>. See Appendix B for more detail.

2 VicHealth, Data61, CSIRO & MYAN (2017) *Bright Futures: Spotlight on the wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds*. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, p. 6.

3 Statistics were sourced directly by MYAN from the Department of Social Services (DSS) on 25 October 2017. Data includes all permanent (or provisional) settlers who arrived between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017. All data presented is accurate as at this date within noted caveats of the Settlement Database (SDB).

4 Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) (2016) *National Youth Settlement Framework*. Melbourne: MYAN, p. 4.

5 See Gifford, Correa-Velez & Sampson (2009). *Good Starts for recently arrived youth with refugee backgrounds: Promoting wellbeing in the first three years of settlement in Melbourne, Australia*. Melbourne: La Trobe Refugee Research Centre, p. 15.

6 Rioseco, P & Liddy, N (2018) *Settlement outcomes of humanitarian youth and active citizenship: Economic participation, social participation and personal wellbeing*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Available at: [https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publicationdocuments/1804\\_bnia\\_settlement\\_outcomes\\_of\\_humanitarian\\_youth\\_research\\_summary.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publicationdocuments/1804_bnia_settlement_outcomes_of_humanitarian_youth_research_summary.pdf), p. 2.

7 MYAN (2018) *Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of jobactive*. Melbourne: MYAN.

8 McHugh, M & Challinor, A (2011) *Improving Immigrants' Employment Prospects through Work-Focused Language Instruction*. Washington D.C.: Migration Policy Institute.

9 MYAN (2017) *Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration: Inquiry into Settlement Outcomes*. Melbourne: MYAN, p. 12.

After 18 months in Australia, refugees and migrants with good English skills are 70% more likely to have a job than those with poor English. 85 % of refugees who speak English very well participate in the labour market compared to 15% who cannot speak English.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.3 Rate of language acquisition

People from refugee and migrant backgrounds who arrive as children or young people are significantly more likely to speak, read and write English at a higher level than those who arrive in Australia at an older age.<sup>12</sup> A *Building a New Life in Australia* (BNLA)<sup>13</sup> research summary looking into settlement outcomes of young people from refugee backgrounds in Australia points to faster acquisition of English language for younger people (aged 15–17) compared to young adults (aged 18–25).<sup>14</sup>

Young people who come to Australia as refugees or migrants commonly demonstrate a remarkable capacity to learn English and succeed in education regardless of their English language capability prior to arrival. The BNLA research study confirms this, pointing to significantly improved English-speaking proficiency of young refugees with longer time in Australia.<sup>15</sup>

However, the previous level of education and the level of literacy in one's mother language both have a major impact on the rate at which a young person learns a new language. Some young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have minimal or disrupted prior schooling<sup>16</sup>, and subsequently have limited literacy in their first language. These refugee and migrant young people understandably make slower progress in learning English than other newly arrived young learners.<sup>17</sup>

According to the Multicultural Youth Australia Census 2017/18 many young people with lower levels of English language proficiency cited language capacity as a significant barrier to participation and belonging;

“If one person from Australia asks me ‘you’re from another country’, I say ‘no, I’m from Australia because now I live in Australia!’... [But] I can’t say I’m from Australia because my language is very bad! ... If you don’t have language you don’t have anything in Australia.”<sup>18</sup>

In addition, the experience of trauma and loss can significantly impact on young people's ability to function and learn in educational settings.<sup>19</sup> Both exposure to traumatic events and the need to acquire a new language are factors that need to be considered in order to provide appropriate educational approaches and pathways. These young people may require interventions which target emotional and psychosocial functioning in order to improve language learning and academic performance.<sup>20</sup>

11 Centre for Policy Development (2017) *Settling Better*. Available at: <https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Settling-Better-Report-20-February-2017-compressed.pdf>

12 Australian Survey Research Group (2011). *Settlement outcomes of new arrivals*. (DIAC). Available at [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01\\_2014/settlement-outcomes-new-arrival\\_access.docx](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2014/settlement-outcomes-new-arrival_access.docx) p. 63.

13 *Building a New Life in Australia* (BNLA) is an ongoing longitudinal study about how humanitarian migrants settle into a new life in Australia. Data is collected annually, starting in 2013, with participants' early months in Australia. For more on BNLA, see <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities-families-and-children/programs-services/building-a-new-life-in-australia-bnla-the-longitudinal-study-of-humanitarian-migrants>

14 Rioseco, P & Liddy, N (2018) *Settlement outcomes of humanitarian youth and active citizenship: Economic participation, social participation and personal wellbeing*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Available at: [https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publicationdocuments/1804\\_bnla\\_settlement\\_outcomes\\_of\\_humanitarian\\_youth\\_research\\_summary.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publicationdocuments/1804_bnla_settlement_outcomes_of_humanitarian_youth_research_summary.pdf), p. 2.

15 Rioseco, P & Liddy, N (2018) *Settlement outcomes of humanitarian youth and active citizenship: Economic participation, social participation and personal wellbeing*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Available at: [https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publicationdocuments/1804\\_bnla\\_settlement\\_outcomes\\_of\\_humanitarian\\_youth\\_research\\_summary.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publicationdocuments/1804_bnla_settlement_outcomes_of_humanitarian_youth_research_summary.pdf) p. 2.

16 VicHealth, Data61, CSIRO & MYAN (2017) *Bright Futures: Spotlight on the wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds*. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, p. 9.

17 MYAN (2017) *Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*. Melbourne: MYAN.

18 Wyn, J, Khan, R & Dadvand, B (2019) *Multicultural Youth Australia Census Status Report 2017/18*. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Research Unit in Public Cultures, School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne, p. 16.

19 Kaplan I, Stolk Y, Valibohy M & Tucker A. (2016) 'Cognitive assessment of refugee children: Effects of trauma and new language acquisition', *Transcultural Psychiatry*, vol. 53, no. 1, pp. 81-109.

20 Kaplan I, Stolk Y, Valibohy M & Tucker A. (2016) 'Cognitive assessment of refugee children: Effects of trauma and new language acquisition', *Transcultural Psychiatry*, vol. 53, no. 1, pp. 81-109.

## 2. English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D)

Young people for whom English is an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) who are enrolled in the compulsory education system [primary and secondary levels) require specific support to build the English language skills required to communicate effectively, and to successfully access and engage with the Australian school curriculum.

### 2.1 Background

English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) is the core program provided to school aged students in Australia, if Standard Australian English is not their first language. This program is delivered through specific English Language Schools (ELSs) or Intensive English Language Centres (IELCs) in each state and territory. The EAL/D program in Australia is an integral part of the support provided for students from a refugee and migrant background in their transition to life in Australia.<sup>21</sup> As of 2017, there are over 300,000 EAL/D students across all systems in Australia.<sup>22</sup>

Young people under the age of 17 are eligible for and usually enrolled in specific intensive English Language Schools<sup>23</sup>, for a set period of time, and transition into mainstream schooling once their English levels are at an appropriate level.

The EAL/D program aims to provide the necessary support services and language education to enable the transition of students into mainstream education. Most specialist schools and IELCs help with the transition into mainstream schooling for their students and families, but the extent of this support varies considerably across the country. This support may include cultural liaison officers, qualified EAL support teachers, Multicultural Education Aides or designated mainstream teachers.<sup>24</sup>

When part of a mainstream school setting, EAL/D education is generally taught within the context of key learning areas in the relevant mainstream curriculum, so that integration into mainstream classes is achieved following completion of the program. Young people generally spend approximately 12 months in EAL program, although longer periods of time may be available upon request.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.2 Additional school level support for literacy

'Outside-school-hours' support, including homework support clubs, are also delivered across Australia by a variety of agencies including schools, settlement services and various community organisations. These programs aim to support migrant and refugee students at primary and secondary level with one-on-one and small group tutoring. They provide support with literacy, numeracy and study skills. This also facilitates improved self-esteem and confidence for students, and can also provide a safe space (and play an important role) in helping families understand and engage in the education system.<sup>26</sup>

21 Beadle, S (2014) *Facilitating the Transition to Employment for Refugee Young People*. Carlton: Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY).

22 Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2017) *No one teaches you to become an Australian: Report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 62.

23 These schools might be for both primary and secondary, or just secondary school students, and have different names in each state and territory.

24 Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) (2018) *Education Pathways for Refugee and Migrant Youth*. Canberra: SCOA.

25 SCOA (2018) *Education Pathways for Refugee and Migrant Youth*. Canberra: SCOA.

26 SCOA (2018) *Education Pathways for Refugee and Migrant Youth*. Canberra: SCOA, pp. 23-24.

## 2.3 Concerns about EAL/D

### 2.3.1 Duration of program support

The rationale behind the EAL/D model is to provide the necessary English language skills to be able to make a successful transition into mainstream education and employment.<sup>27</sup> However, for some students, support through an ELS or an IELC is not sufficient to acquire the required language and literacy skills to progress successfully through mainstream secondary school, and then transition to training and employment or career pathways. Without proficiency in these areas, students will have difficulty adjusting to mainstream schooling 'when they are amongst everybody for whom English is their main language.'<sup>28</sup>

Time limits in ELSs can result in young people being transitioned to mainstream schools before they are equipped with the necessary English language skills. Young people share these concerns:

"Some of us started in mainstream schools but many of us were sent to English Language School for a year. English language school was important for us but was not long enough to prepare us to enter mainstream schools. After our year at English Language School many of us were immediately transitioned into mainstream primary school, which was difficult because there were still gaps in our English language skills. Compared to other students our age, many of us were behind and found it difficult to catch up."<sup>29</sup>

### 2.3.2 Limited transition support from EAL/D to mainstream schools

The transition into mainstream schooling can be difficult, even once students have completed EAL/D. This is particularly hard for older students with low-levels of English language proficiency.

The transition to mainstream secondary school requires continued support, but such support is not provided consistently across each of the states and territories. Many young people do not receive the support they need to navigate mainstream secondary school. Those students who, in the transition, are placed into inappropriate year levels based on their chronological age or level of education struggle without the additional support required in these circumstances.<sup>30</sup>

27 MYAN (2017) Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes. Melbourne: MYAN.

28 Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre (2017) Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes.

29 New Change (2017) Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes.

30 Gifford, Correa-Velez & Sampson (2009) Good Starts for recently arrived youth with refugee backgrounds: Promoting wellbeing in the first three years of settlement in Melbourne, Australia. Melbourne: La Trobe Refugee Research Centre.

### 2.3.3 EAL/D training for teachers

Although there are positive efforts by many schools to support further training for EAL teachers, there is a gap in the skill level of EAL/D teachers across Australia. While demand for EAL/D has continued to grow, government funding for teacher training has stagnated. As a result provision of EAL/D qualifications in tertiary institutions has declined and places are now limited. Decentralisation policies have also resulted in reduced EAL/D professional development support for qualified teachers.<sup>31</sup>

Through MYAN's networks, we are aware that mainstream teachers often do not feel they have adequate training, or they do not feel responsible for the additional support EAL/D students require. This impacts on the capacity of the school to provide a positive and inclusive whole-school experience.

### 2.3.4 EAL/D funding arrangements

- Lack of effective monitoring of the impact of school funding to support better education outcomes,<sup>32</sup> specifically for EAL/D students and ensure that funding is allocated to schools based on the needs of students. This may see a re-allocation of allocated funding for EAL/D to other needs that are considered a higher priority.<sup>33</sup>
- Lack of a national framework to guide and direct funding allocations for English language learning in EAL/D (including to support continuous improvement of EAL/D programs through whole-school planning, implementation and evaluation<sup>34</sup>), leading to fluctuating funding from year to year and inconsistencies in the schools' capacity/willingness to provide a cohesive and comprehensive program.<sup>35</sup>
- Lack of nationally consistent definitions, measurements and cost structures that reflect the education needs of students to guide English language provision in schools with newly arrived and/or EAL/D students.
- Absence of funding transparency and accountability that schools with an EAL/D cohort allocate adequate funding to meet the learning needs and enhance the English learning of young from refugee and migrant backgrounds.<sup>36</sup> This would also overcome lack of awareness by some schools of the funding available for EAL/D programs.
- Lack of monitoring of funding on its utilisation to support young people in acquiring sufficient levels of English to enable them to engage successfully in mainstream education and transition out of compulsory education successfully, including: through the provision of professional development to teachers and other school staff.
- Programs and resources being located primarily in metropolitan areas.<sup>37</sup>

## 3. Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)

### 3.1 Background

AMEP aims to promote and support the acquisition of English language skills by all eligible adult migrants and refugees, through the provision of timely and quality English language services. Through language tuition, the program aims to improve outcomes in relation to social participation, economic participation, independence and personal wellbeing - all contributing to settlement within, and integration into, the broader Australian community.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup> SCOA (2018) *Education Pathways for Refugee and Migrant Youth*. Canberra: SCOA.

<sup>32</sup> Australian National Audit Office (2018) *Monitoring the Impact of Australian Government School Funding*, ANAO Report No.18 2017-18. Available at: [https://www.anao.gov.au/sites/default/files/064931/ANAO\\_Report\\_2017\\_2018\\_18a.pdf](https://www.anao.gov.au/sites/default/files/064931/ANAO_Report_2017_2018_18a.pdf), p.8 and p.10.

<sup>33</sup> Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2017), *No one teaches you to become an Australian: Report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) (2018) *National Strategy For Language In Education And Training*. Available at: [http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/2018\\_ACTA\\_language\\_in\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_strategy\\_November\\_2018.pdf](http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/2018_ACTA_language_in_education_and_training_strategy_November_2018.pdf), p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2017), *No one teaches you to become an Australian: Report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 59.

<sup>36</sup> Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (2019) *Report 476: Australian Government Funding Inquiry based on Auditor-General's reports 18 and 50 (2017-18)*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> SCOA (2018) *Education Pathways for Refugee and Migrant Youth*. Canberra: SCOA, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> ACIL Allen Consulting (2015) *AMEP Evaluation*. Melbourne: Department of Education and Training (DET).

AMEP assists eligible migrants and refugees in the development of English language skills needed to access services in the general community, provide a pathway to employment, undertake further study or training and participate in other government programs.<sup>39</sup>

Participants receive up to 510 hours of free English language tuition, with some AMEP clients eligible to access additional tuition and support under a number of the AMEP sub-programs.

The very high levels of participation in AMEP courses is one of the likely reasons for the rapid acquisition of English skills by new arrivals, evident over the first three years from the time of arrival in Australia.<sup>40</sup>

In 2017, AMEP underwent several changes seeking to help clients achieve better English language outcomes in order to find sustainable employment and participate independently in society. AMEP's new business model includes:

- Providing access to a capped program of up to 490 hours of additional tuition for clients who have not reached functional English after completing their legislative entitlement of 510 hours
- Removing the funding cap applied to the AMEP sub-program, the Special Preparatory Program, allowing all eligible humanitarian entrants to access additional training
- Increasing flexibility and innovation in service delivery by allowing providers to choose a curriculum that best meets their clients' needs, as well as providing access to an innovative projects fund
- Enhancing flexibility and support for clients by offering choice of tuition streams (i.e. pre-employment English stream and social English stream)<sup>41</sup> that will deliver tailored tuition to meet their needs and goals
- A trial of a competitive model for delivering AMEP services, encouraging service providers to become more responsive and creative in the way they engage clients
- Improving connections between AMEP and other government employment and education services, such as the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.2 AMEP eligibility

Young people 18 and over are eligible for enrolment in AMEP, and some AMEP providers offer specific programs for youth aged 15 to 17. Those eligible can register with an approved AMEP service provider after arrival in Australia (or their visa commencing if already in Australia), and can commence the English classes. Attendance at AMEP classes is voluntary. The following time limits apply from the date the person's 'eligible visa came into effect or the date they arrived in Australia, whichever is later':

For those 18 years and over:

- Register within six months;
- Commence tuition within 12 months; and
- Complete tuition within five years.

Below 18 years:

- Register and commence tuition within 12 months; and
- Complete tuition within five years.

In the 2018-19 Budget, the Australian Government announced changes to the registration period for young people under 18 and removed time limits for these young AMEP clients to seek an extension to their tuition entitlements whether they apply to register and/or to commence AMEP tuition before or after 12 months of their arrival in Australia.<sup>43</sup>

39 ACIL Allen Consulting (2015) AMEP Evaluation. Melbourne: DET.

40 Smart, D., De Maio, J., Riosco, P. & Edwards, B. (2017) Building a New Life in Australia Research Summary English skills, engagement in education, and entrance into employment of recently arrived humanitarian migrants. Available at: <https://aifs.gov.au/immigration/publication-documents/beta-researchsummary-eeec-ect17.pdf>.

41 Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2017) No one teaches you to become an Australian: Report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 50.

42 Department of Education and Training (2017) Background of the AMEP. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/background-amep>.

43 The Commonwealth of Australia (2018) Budget Measures 2018-19 – Part 2: Expense Measures. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 33.

Under the change introduced on 1 October 2018, for youth aged under 18, extensions may be available if the client could not register or commence due to:

- A serious illness or injury
- Family commitments
- Compelling and compassionate reasons<sup>44</sup>

All AMEP clients have five years from their date of arrival or visa commencement to learn English through AMEP.<sup>45</sup> However, in the 2018-19 Budget, the Australian Government also announced that as of 1 July 2018, all clients have the opportunity to access extensions to their AMEP tuition entitlements, regardless of age.<sup>46</sup> For all clients, an extension to complete tuition within five years may be available if the client could not complete tuition due to compelling and compassionate circumstances such as:

- A serious illness or injury
- The death of a close family member
- Suffered a traumatic experience
- Other compelling and compassionate reasons.<sup>47</sup>

### *3.3 Concerns with AMEP*

#### *3.3.1 Varying availability of youth-specific AMEP programs*

Some AMEP service providers offer youth-specific courses for clients under the age of 25 years. These are designed to provide a greater level of support for young people who require more intensive English language tuition. Youth-specific courses are tailored programs with both a social and educational focus, which target the specific needs of young people. Courses are developed by AMEP service providers in partnership with local schools, community groups, youth services and the vocational education sector.<sup>48</sup>

In areas where there are no youth specific AMEP classes, some young people find it difficult to remain engaged in AMEP courses as they have been designed for the adult cohort. Studies show that youth-specific English classes are much more effective in supporting young people to learn English and to transition to further education. Young people have better learning outcomes when they are placed in targeted youth programs, as they are specifically tailored to the young people's language, educational and socio-emotional needs.

These classes also offer peer-to-peer learning opportunities, support development of social connections and relationships, and provide opportunities for young people to undertake other important processes in the settlement journey, including establishing intercultural relationships and networks<sup>49</sup>. While the availability of such programs has increased, and youth-specific language classes have been made available in some states and territories for a number of years, these classes need to be widely available in across Australia.

<sup>44</sup> Based on information received from the Department of Social Services (DSS).

<sup>45</sup> Department of Social Services (2016) *Beginning a Life in Australia: Welcome to Australia*. Available at: [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/00\\_2016/welcomedy\\_bella\\_4a\\_120216.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/00_2016/welcomedy_bella_4a_120216.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> The Commonwealth of Australia (2018) *Budget Measures 2018-19 – Part 2: Expense Measures*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 38.

<sup>47</sup> Verbal advice from DSS.

<sup>48</sup> Department of Education and Training (2018) *English classes for eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants in Australia*. Available at: [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/amep\\_factsheet\\_-\\_updated\\_31\\_july\\_2018.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/amep_factsheet_-_updated_31_july_2018.pdf) p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> MYAN (2017) *Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes*. Melbourne: MYAN.

### 3.3.2 Access to AMEP by disengaged young people

Since 2011, AMEP has been available to 15 to 17 year olds who enrolled in school upon arrival, but have subsequently disengaged from school in the first year after arrival in Australia. In these situations, AMEP staff liaises with local schools to facilitate the transition into AMEP for those young people who have dropped out of the school system. However, young people may not always be referred to AMEP as there is no formal referral process.<sup>50</sup>

This lack of structured support can be a hindrance for some young people, particularly given their heightened vulnerability for those young people disengaged from school.

Young people may also be referred to AMEP more than 12 months after their arrival to Australia. In the past, this meant expiration of the young people's eligibility for the program<sup>51</sup>. The extensions made available for young people with the 2018-2019 Budget measures allowing young people to engage AMEP 12 months after their arrival have been a welcome development to overcome this issue. However, a young people's disengagement from school could have various different causes – i.e. different than the reasons needed for granting exemption of access post-12 months.

Greater engagement with - and information provision to - schools about this referral process is required. Schools need to support adequate assessment and identification of English language needs early (before enrolment into mainstream education) to ensure young people can access the most appropriate English language supports and education options from the outset.<sup>52</sup>

A recent positive initiative from AMEP is the introduction of a new innovative projects fund<sup>53</sup>. One successful project in 2017-2018 was a mentoring project for disengaged youth aimed at strengthening connections between AMEP and services/supports in the local community.<sup>54</sup>

AMEP's focus on disengaged youth, while a welcome development, requires a nationally consistent approach and formal referral procedures between schools and AMEP providers to work well for all young people.<sup>55</sup> While AMEP providers delivering youth-specific classes might be better placed in these process of referral and ensuring engagement with disengaged young people, in areas where there are no AMEP providers with youth specific classes, links with schools and referrals from schools to AMEP may be more problematic.

### 3.3.3 Insufficient hours for transition to employment or further education

A 2015 review of AMEP found that expecting refugees and migrants to attain functional English after 510 hours of tuition was 'unattainable and unrealistic' given the low-level of English that some refugees and migrants possessed.<sup>56</sup> Evidence from the program itself and from language learning research is clear that the amount of time allowed in AMEP is totally inadequate for eligible learners to gain adequate proficiency in English.<sup>57</sup> To address these issues, AMEP Extend was introduced in 2017. AMEP Extend is a capped program that offers up to 490 hours of additional tuition to eligible AMEP clients who have almost exhausted their 510 hour entitlement without achieving their English language proficiency goals. AMEP Extend can be used in either the Pre-employment English or Social English tuition streams for students participating in general tuition either in the classroom or via distance learning.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>50</sup> ACIL Allen Consulting (2015) AMEP Evaluation. Melbourne: DET.

<sup>51</sup> MYAN (2017) Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes. Melbourne: MYAN.

<sup>52</sup> MYAN (2017) Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes. Melbourne: MYAN.

<sup>53</sup> Department of Education and Training (2018) Adult Migrant English Program Innovative Projects Fund 2017-18. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/asset-upload/01/migrant-english-program-innovative-projects-fund-2017-18>

<sup>54</sup> The AMEP Youth Mentoring Program' aims to reconnect disengaged youth with AMEP through providing a structured and trusting relationship between AMEP youth clients and members of the local community engaged in community, youth and counselling services or other related fields. This program pilots an engagement program specifically designed to assist young AMEP clients and provide support and guidance through a youth specific mentoring program.

<sup>55</sup> ACTA has also suggested development of English focused education and training pathways for young people at risk as part of its National Strategy For Language In Education And Training in the shape of a coordinated network of flexible, needs based first and second chance education and training across schools, AMEP, ACE and TAFE within MYAN's National Youth Settlement Framework. For more see, Australian

Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) (2018) National Strategy For Language In Education And Training Available at: [http://www.tesol.org.au/files/0166\\_ACTA\\_language\\_in\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_strategy\\_November\\_2018.pdf](http://www.tesol.org.au/files/0166_ACTA_language_in_education_and_training_strategy_November_2018.pdf) p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> Productivity Commission (2016) Migrants Intake into Australia Inquiry Report No. 77 Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

<sup>57</sup> Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) (2017) Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes.

<sup>58</sup> Department of Education and Training (2018) English classes for eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants in Australia. Available at: [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/attachments/other/amep\\_facsheet\\_updated\\_31\\_july\\_2018.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/attachments/other/amep_facsheet_updated_31_july_2018.pdf) p. 4.

The AMEP's approach of limiting English tuition with set hours, despite the increase in hours with AMEP extend, has its own limitations, especially as the tuition delivered during the set 510 hours had not provided the English proficiency necessary for mainstream education, vocational training, and employment, especially for young people from refugee backgrounds with low or no previous education prior to arrival in Australia.<sup>59</sup> The 510 hour restriction has left a sizeable number of low proficiency learners who have completed their hours with no viable pathway into further English tuition.

These learners' access to the newly introduced Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program with the new AMEP contract is also blocked by the eligibility. Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) criticized the SEE program, as access to SEE is limited due to exclusions of various visa categories and/or people who cannot meet the Program's Key Performance Indicators, although SEE is "essentially the only English learning pathway from AMEP". SEE Program aims to "provide language, literacy and numeracy training to eligible jobseekers, to help them to participate more effectively in training or in the labour force". The program has a diverse client base defining them all as job seekers, i.e. refugees and migrants, people born and schooled in Australia, and Indigenous speakers of English, however it does not consider different learning needs of these groups.<sup>60</sup>

While successive AMEP contracts have variously increased tuition hours entitlements for selected clients, no additional budget were allocated for these extended hours of tuition to the providers.<sup>61</sup> The final report of the Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration recommended a shift in AMEP's business model to focus on building English competency, in order to achieve better social and labour market integration prospects in Australia for refugees and migrants<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, the proficiency level at which young people become ineligible for further AMEP assistance (i.e. functional English) is generally considered insufficient for employment, VET or higher education.<sup>63</sup> This is particularly the case for young refugees taking AMEP classes. Only a minority of refugee young people aged 16-25 who access AMEP exit with the level of required English. As they often have a history of disrupted education, young people from refugee backgrounds require additional time and support to acquire sufficient literacy in English to cope with Australia's education and training systems. The level of English required for work placements also often exceeds the capacity of refugee clients. Many refugees are not proficient enough in English to undertake employment and work placements. Others leave AMEP before completing their English language-training in order to take up opportunities for paid work.<sup>64</sup> Whilst this may sound positive, it is likely to severely limit their job opportunities in the future due to their low levels of English.

### *3.3.4 Combining language training with employment*

AMEP is not adequately flexible to support those who wish to combine part-time study and part-time work. While some AMEP providers have part-time and evening classes available, this is not consistent across the country. When there are no part-time or evening classes available, young people are forced to choose between working and learning English. Due to the financial pressures many young people and their families face, many feel forced to undertake employment and therefore have no option to continue their AMEP English classes<sup>65</sup>.

59 Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) (2014) Submission for AMEP Review; Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2017) No one teaches you to become an Australian: Report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 54.

60 ACTA (2018) Background Paper - Problems in the Adult Migrant English and SEE Programs. Available at: [http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/551\\_Problems\\_in\\_the\\_AMEP\\_SEE\\_Program\\_25\\_May\\_2018\\_-\\_an\\_ACTA\\_Background\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/551_Problems_in_the_AMEP_SEE_Program_25_May_2018_-_an_ACTA_Background_Paper.pdf) p. 7.

61 ACTA (2018) Background Paper - Problems in the Adult Migrant English and SEE Programs. Available at: [http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/551\\_Problems\\_in\\_the\\_AMEP\\_SEE\\_Program\\_25\\_May\\_2018\\_-\\_an\\_ACTA\\_Background\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/551_Problems_in_the_AMEP_SEE_Program_25_May_2018_-_an_ACTA_Background_Paper.pdf) pp. 24-25.

62 Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2017) No one teaches you to become an Australian: Report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 57.

63 ACIL Allen Consulting (2015) AMEP Evaluation. Melbourne: DET.

64 Centre for Policy Development (2017) Settling Better. Available at: [https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Settling\\_Better\\_Report\\_20\\_February\\_2017.compressed.pdf](https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Settling_Better_Report_20_February_2017.compressed.pdf)

65 RCOA (2014) Submission for AMEP Review.

## 4. Experiential learning and social participation

Studies have shown that the one-on-one support through working with volunteers contributes greatly to the confidence, English proficiency and social inclusion of newly arrived people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Opportunities for young people to learn English with support from a local volunteer or mentor are available through many settlement and mainstream service providers, but the use of these programs is not consistent across the country.

Programs that facilitate group and individual support for newly arrived people, where students can learn English first hand are successful as students can practice English with people who are fluent in English, as well as learn about Australian culture, education and employment options.<sup>67</sup>

Practical learning, such as through volunteering or work placements, greatly increases students' English competency, confidence and vocabulary. Some students learn more quickly through experiential learning, especially those who haven't had formal education experiences.<sup>68</sup> The innovative projects component under the new AMEP contract is understood to be an important step towards filling this gap to provide clients with more opportunities for experiential learning through different methods, such as creating an alumni and storytelling projects.<sup>69</sup>

The 'social English' stream introduced in 2017 under AMEP aims to focus on conversational activities for language learning, however the fact that these courses will be held in larger classes (max. 25 students versus max. 20 students) and be delivered by teachers that does not currently hold TESOL qualifications may produce less desirable outcomes.<sup>70</sup> This approach also risks leaving newly arrived refugee and migrants in a difficult situation – i.e. to choose between a pathway to employment on the one hand and, on the other, an easier class focussed on conversation.<sup>71</sup>

### 4.1 Connections to other courses and employment

Learning English is commonly interrupted for refugees and migrants as they are required to miss AMEP classes to attend other TAFE courses or to take up jobs, often under instructions from their employment service providers, i.e. *jobactive*. Attendance at TAFE courses without adequate English has often lead to an inability to complete these courses. Furthermore, many states have introduced policies that allow students to access subsidised courses only once, after which people must pay the full fee – at up to ten times the cost. As a result, people attending TAFE without an adequate level of English and not completing the course become ineligible for further funding support once they have obtained enough English.<sup>72</sup> Leaving AMEP to take up jobs has also been destructive for the process of language acquisition for refugees and migrants, as stated by one AMEP provider; “*We lose many students to fruit picking as they are directed to go to this by Centrelink so they disappear for 6 months at a time. They come back having lost their skills. They are used as cheap labour and stuck in a never ending rut.*”<sup>73</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Centre for Policy Development (2017) *Setting Better*. Available at: <http://cdp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Setting-Better-Report-28-February-2017-revised.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> Ucan2 program delivered by Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) and Foundation House is a good example. The Ucan2 program has three components: work skills curriculum (educational provider), psychosocial support (Foundation House) and social connections (CMY). The social connections component of Ucan2 is delivered with the support of volunteers to young people in education settings one day a week for six months (16-18 weeks) at multiple sites across Melbourne. Ucan2 volunteers help provide young people with encouragement, support and skill development through group activities. Volunteers share their work, study and life experiences in Australia, act as role models, help young people practice English, and help foster young people's confidence to make social connections in Australia.

<sup>68</sup> NCQA (2014) Submission for AMEP Review

<sup>69</sup> Department of Education and Training (2019) *Adult Migrant English Program Innovative Projects Fund 2017-18*. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/open-data/migrant-english-program-innovative-projects-fund-2017-18>

<sup>70</sup> All AMEP teachers were previously required to hold postgraduate TESOL qualifications; those running 'social English' classes are required to hold a degree (in any discipline) and be enrolled in a TESOL qualification. ACTA (2018) *Background Paper: Problems in the Adult Migrant English and SEE Programs*. Available at: [http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/551\\_Problems\\_in\\_the\\_AMEP\\_SEE\\_Program\\_24\\_May\\_2018\\_-\\_an\\_ACTA\\_Background\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/551_Problems_in_the_AMEP_SEE_Program_24_May_2018_-_an_ACTA_Background_Paper.pdf) 41.

<sup>71</sup> ACTA (2018) *Background Paper: Problems in the Adult Migrant English and SEE Programs*. Available at: [http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/551\\_Problems\\_in\\_the\\_AMEP\\_SEE\\_Program\\_24\\_May\\_2018\\_-\\_an\\_ACTA\\_Background\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/551_Problems_in_the_AMEP_SEE_Program_24_May_2018_-_an_ACTA_Background_Paper.pdf) 46.

<sup>72</sup> NCQA (2014) Submission for AMEP Review

<sup>73</sup> Australian Council Of TESOL Associations (ACTA) (2019) Submission To The Vocational Education And Training Review. Available at: [http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/558\\_ACTA\\_submission\\_to\\_the\\_VET\\_Review\\_-\\_January\\_2019.pdf](http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/558_ACTA_submission_to_the_VET_Review_-_January_2019.pdf) p.69

Changes in the 2018-19 and 2019-20 Budgets have addressed this issue for refugees. From 1 January 2019, newly arrived refugees who receive activity tested income support are only able to get access to full *jobactive* services once they have been getting a payment for a minimum of six months. This was in response to the ongoing criticism for limiting this period to 13 weeks following arrival, leading to limited access to AMEP due to prioritisation of job seeking related activities as directed by Centrelink. Newly arrived refugees in this first six month period are still able to access limited support through *jobactive* Stream A (Volunteer) before they are eligible for the full suite of *jobactive* services.<sup>74</sup> In the 2019-20 Budget, the requirement to attend *jobactive* has been further extended to 12 months (with an option to voluntarily access *jobactive* services earlier).

While there has been criticism of the AMEP, the innovative projects component under the new AMEP contract is understood to be an important step towards filling this gap to provide clients with more opportunities for experiential learning through different methods, such as creating an alumni and storytelling projects.<sup>75</sup>

To improve AMEP's connections with employment, one aspect of the new AMEP contract of 2017 has been improving connections between AMEP and other government employment and education services, such as the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program.<sup>76</sup> The innovative projects component of the new AMEP contract also had a focus on employment, through its funding of projects aiming to increase employability skills of AMEP clients.<sup>77</sup>

While AMEP's increased connection with employment related activities is welcome, there has been criticism that AMEP is increasingly moving away from its focus on integrating English language learning with migrant settlement, towards narrowly focussed employment skills and economic participation.<sup>78</sup>

## 5. YTS provider experiences with young people acquiring English language skills

Building English language skills is not a core focus of the YTS services, and does not form part of the formal delivery structure of the program. However, the experience of YTS providers in assessing and meeting the transition needs of young people between 15 and 25 years of age means that they are in a strong position to identify some of the issues relating to English language acquisition encountered by young people who take part in YTS services.

### 5.1 Greater relevance to employment and further education pathways

Opportunities for YTS participants to gain conversational skills through AMEP and EAL/D programs are limited, which impact on young people's ability to converse effectively in an Australian context. More contextualised approaches to language acquisition are required to support young people who wish to pursue a specific employment industry or education pathway.

YTS providers have found that language learning in a context relevant to the interests and goals of a learner increases success and rate of language acquisition. By constructing language learning around employment and education, students are motivated to learn and apply language in a context that is relevant to their interests. This requires language programs to identify and address the complexities of employment-related language for newly arrived young people.

74 Department of Human Services (2018) Budget 2018-19 Streamlining Services for Refugees. Available at: [https://www.humanservices.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018/05/2018-19-budget\\_71.pdf](https://www.humanservices.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018/05/2018-19-budget_71.pdf)

75 Department of Education and Training (2019) Adult Migrant English Program Innovative Projects Fund 2017-18. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/files/default/migrant-english-program-innovative-projects-fund-2017-18>

76 Department of Education and Training (2017) Background of the AMEP. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/background-amep>. SEE program has had mixed reviews from the sector. Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) criticised the current SEE program under the new AMEP contract, as access to SEE is limited due to exclusions of various visa categories and/or people who cannot meet the Program's Key Performance Indicators, although SEE is 'essentially the only English learning pathway from the AMEP'. For more see, ACTA (2018) Background Paper: Problems in the Adult Migrant English and SEE Programs. Available at: [http://www.tesol.org.au/files/051\\_Problems\\_in\\_the\\_AMEP\\_SEE\\_Program\\_31\\_May\\_2018\\_in\\_ACTA\\_Background\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.tesol.org.au/files/051_Problems_in_the_AMEP_SEE_Program_31_May_2018_in_ACTA_Background_Paper.pdf)

77 Department of Education and Training (2019) Adult Migrant English Program Innovative Projects Fund 2017-18. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/files/default/migrant-english-program-innovative-projects-fund-2017-18>

78 ACTA (2018) Background Paper: Problems in the Adult Migrant English and SEE Programs. Available at: [http://www.tesol.org.au/files/051\\_Problems\\_in\\_the\\_AMEP\\_SEE\\_Program\\_31\\_May\\_2018\\_in\\_ACTA\\_Background\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.tesol.org.au/files/051_Problems_in_the_AMEP_SEE_Program_31_May_2018_in_ACTA_Background_Paper.pdf) p. 26.

### *5.2 Conflicting demands with language learning*

The stressors and demands of the settlement process can result in young people struggling to commit to language learning due to competing demands for their time. These include:

- The logistics of Centrelink appointments
- Pressures to find paid employment
- Accommodation needs, and
- Supporting family members in the settlement process.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds can face particular pressure to move at an accelerated pace into employment, before they have had the time, resources, and investment required to develop the confidence needed to speak and write in English.

YTS providers have identified the strong need to work in partnership with TAFEs and other language skills providers to support participants to stay actively engaged in English studies, and to counteract pressure from employment service providers and others for participants to abandon their English classes in favour of finding full-time work. More flexible work opportunities are required that would complement continued participation in English classes, such as the Swedish example of “step-in” jobs outlined earlier.

### *5.3 Need for social networks and integrated groups*

Many young people engaged in YTS lack confidence in speaking with peers and prospective employers. Confidence can be built through social support networks and links to the broader community.

YTS participants specifically request more conversation groups to speak with Australian-born members of the community, as often their classes were with students who spoke the same first language as them, which they feel limits their learning progress. Participants also want more language support that helps them to acquire the language skills needed for higher education.

### *5.4 Inappropriate assessments of language capacity*

Young people can be held back from further progress in their language development due to incorrect streaming of their English level. Students with adequate levels of English can sometimes be held back from developing further skills as they are placed in a class with an English level they have already mastered.

There is also a need to consider (and address) the extent of interrupted prior learning that characterises the learning journey of many newly arrived students from refugee backgrounds. Having missed months or, in many cases, years of learning means that these students have also commonly missed out on the developmental and foundational principles of language skills and need to build these, as well as English language content.

Additionally, English Language learning must be viewed in the context of the various demands/stressors of navigating the settlement journey in Australia. A stronger emphasis on supporting students to address these demands is essential to successful English language learning.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are commonly carrying multiple responsibilities in the settlement context and juggling a range of (and sometimes conflicting) pressures and expectations, including: parent/family educational/career expectations, and prioritising education/English language learning among other obligations and demands of settlement (including supporting family to negotiate services and assisting with home duties). These factors can compound the demands of learning a new language and can result in feeling overwhelmed (and sometimes a sense of hopelessness) about overcoming the various challenges within which English language learning/education in Australia sits.

### *5.5 Time limits to IELC participation*

One of the biggest barriers to the development of language skills by refugee and migrant young people is the limits imposed on the length of time that they may spend at IELCs. Many students are exited to mainstream secondary schools before they have built the foundational English language skills necessary to successfully complete their secondary school education.

This results in a dual struggle for them:

- Comprehending and keeping up with the challenging material of secondary school, and
- Learning and re-learning foundational language skills.

The need to achieve language fluency is not addressed, as young people are commonly transitioned out of language programs well before they are able to converse fluently. High levels of language and literacy do not necessarily result in the ability to speak English fluently, resulting in ongoing difficulties across all facets of their settlement journey.

### *5.6 Racism and discrimination*

According to the findings of the Multicultural Youth Australia Census 2017/18, almost half of multicultural young people had experienced some form of discrimination or unfair treatment in the last 12 months (48.7%). An even higher proportion – almost two thirds – had witnessed someone else being unfairly treated or discriminated against (63.5%)<sup>79</sup>. Accordingly discrimination took place at a range of sites, including in public space, as well as at work and educational institutions. The most common places where discrimination took place were at educational institutions and on the street.<sup>80</sup> Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA) also refers to high levels of discrimination for young people.<sup>81</sup>

Both structural and individual racism in schools and other institutions can prevent students from refugee and migrant backgrounds from accessing the full benefits of language education. This can also discourage young people from practicing English in the broader community for fear of being discriminated against or ridiculed. Young people need safe spaces to practice and develop their language skills without judgment. This builds confidence in learners to apply their learning outside the classroom.

## **6. Responses from YTS providers to support young people to acquire English language skills**

Responses to support young people acquire English language skills by YTS providers have been developed in response to needs emerging in the areas serviced by providers. Common themes reported by YTS providers are outlined below.

79 Wyn, L, Khan, R & Davrand, B (2019) Multicultural Youth Australia Census Status Report 2017/18. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Research Unit in Public Cultures, School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne. p. 17.

80 Wyn, L, Khan, R & Davrand, B (2019) Multicultural Youth Australia Census Status Report 2017/18. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Research Unit in Public Cultures, School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne. p. 18.

81 Rosasco, P & Liddy, N (2018) Settlement outcomes of humanitarian youth and active citizenship Economic participation, social participation and personal wellbeing. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Available at: [https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/1801\\_bnla\\_settlement\\_outcomes\\_of\\_humanitarian\\_youth\\_research\\_summary.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/1801_bnla_settlement_outcomes_of_humanitarian_youth_research_summary.pdf) p. 1.

### 6.1 Language support with an employment focus

YTS providers have developed resources, curriculum and environments in which young people are supported to develop language skills with specific relevance to education and employment. In some cases, this has involved working with other partners to modify curriculum and provide tailored resources. Examples include:

- Development of an “Employment Language Dictionary”
- Progressive adaption of a Jobs Club model to focus on English language acquisition, paired with job seeking
- Partnering with local TAFEs to build work readiness sessions into classes
- Working with a partner to create a program curriculum catering for EAL/D learners aimed at developing language skills relevant to education and employment
- Providing work experience in a retail environment focusing on supporting student to apply language learning in the workplace.
- Partnerships with English language providers to deliver programs on-site to assist participants develop their English language skills. Such on site support assists young people who are feeling pressured to cease formal language classes due to *jobactive* or Centrelink requirements, assisting them to remain engaged in language learning.

### 6.2 Increased support to develop conversational skills

The majority of YTS providers have provided additional support to enable the development of conversational skills, to supplement the training available through EAL/D and AMEP. This can take the form of organised “conversation meet-up groups”. Examples included:

- Redeveloping a weekly Jobs Club program to allow for casual conversation groups to occur between participants, volunteers and program staff.
- Providing volunteering (and peer support<sup>82</sup> in particular) opportunities.
- Providing individual support for language development as part of mentoring activities.
- Developing a conversation-based English program (“*Questions Answered through Language for Migrants*”), providing conversational language support for communication in an Australian context. In combination with other programs, the English language component provides contextualised language support, particularly relating to industry sectors that participants are interested in studying or working in. This program employs TESOL methods and delivered by TESOL qualified teachers.
- Providing additional assistance to individual young people who may have completed a TAFE course, but do not have the level of English to commence further studies – including identifying alternative options and pathways to further develop English language skills.
- Providing referral to external English conversation classes where available.

### 6.3 Capacity building with schools

Some YTS providers have undertaken capacity-building activities with teachers in education settings, to respond to learning needs of students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This includes demonstrating interactive and experiential learning strategies that cater for all learning styles, as well as exposure to group facilitation approaches designed to maximise student participation and opportunities to speak English.

82 Peer support occurs when people provide knowledge, experience, emotional, social or practical help to each other. Peer support is distinct from other forms of support in that the source of support is a peer, a person who is similar in fundamental ways to the recipient of the support.

One program uses a trauma-informed framework in an English Language educational setting. This is designed to strengthen English language learning by addressing mental and psychological health, and is delivered by facilitators trained to cater for EAL/D learners.

In Queensland, school-based YTS staff work with high school staff to advocate for students with lower levels of English. This includes identifying the correct streaming of class levels and appropriate educational pathways.

#### *6.4 Additional tutoring and homework assistance*

Additional tutoring and homework assistance has been provided to students in both IELCs and secondary schools, with experienced tutors helping students at their schools. The assistance is provided on an ad hoc basis, to address gaps in student's learning. Providing students with individualised support in classrooms, has helped address their individual needs and stages of learning, within their year level group.

#### *6.5 Advocacy with jobactive and employers on English language issues*

YTS providers report that many young people try to combine English language classes with jobactive requirements or with initial employment. Most YTS providers have engaged in advocacy with jobactive providers in an attempt to ensure that participants are able to stay in English classes at the same time as they are job-seeking. One provider also worked with a major partner, the local council, to expand their relationships with employers that offer casual jobs involving evening and weekend shifts, in order to allow participants to stay engaged in English classes.

#### *6.6 Supplementary classes to AMEP*

Some YTS providers have identified programs and supported young people to enrol in further English classes outside of/in addition to the AMEP program (i.e. once young people have completed their eligible hours of learning with AMEP) in order to further build young people's English language competency for employment or further education.

Recently arrived young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds need access to targeted and appropriate English language learning. This should include a range of models and approaches responsive to their age and proficiency, to ensure educational engagement and facilitate successful transitions to training, higher education and employment.<sup>83</sup>

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## Appendix A: Recommendations from YTS providers

Over the past three years YTS providers have identified a range of ways in which language skills development for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds can be strengthened and improved. The following recommendations are made based on this work.

### 1. Removing restrictions on the duration of participation in English language programs

- Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds need more flexibility to remain in IELCs, in order to build the necessary language skills to make a successful transition into mainstream secondary schools and beyond, into post compulsory education, training and employment.
- Developing a 'follow-on' program from AMEP for young people who need additional support to acquire the necessary level of English skills for training and employment. Collaborating with AMEP providers to offer such a program would provide young people with additional pathway options when they have completed AMEP.

### 2. Combining language learning and job seeking/employment

- Policy and program changes are required to jobactive to enable young people to remain in English classes while simultaneously job-seeking.
  - For example, evening English classes for young people could be introduced to provide more capacity for young people to combine work and study. They would be further assisted by being able to access casework support to navigate the (often conflicting) demands of both language learning and employment seeking.

### 3. Opportunities for conversational English

- Opportunities for young people to practice conversational English in Australian contexts is an important component of language learning, however these opportunities are not commonly available or easy to find.
- This could be achieved through mentoring programs that match newly arrived young people with mentors for casual conversation, as well as an increased focus on conversational English in the school setting and in AMEP.
- AMEP and EAL/D programs should offer experiential learning sessions that provide young people with real world opportunities to practice their English language skills.
- More investment is needed in experiential learning opportunities in, which provide practical conversation support in flexible learning environments.

### 4. Investing in trauma-informed practice

- EAL/D programming (in all settings) must recognise the importance of trauma-informed practice in English language teaching and learning with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and develop policy and programs accordingly.
- This includes investing in building the capacity (support, resourcing and training) of teachers in this area.

### 5. Targeted, flexible and responsive language learning

- A targeted approach to English language policy and programming for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds is needed. This approach would ensure that the particular (and often complex) settlement needs and challenges for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised, understood and addressed.
- Language learning needs to be applied in contexts relevant to young people's needs, interests and aspirations, their age, development stage and competency levels – applying a level of flexibility and responsiveness in service planning and delivery.
- This includes applying an aspirational focus, where teachers, tutors and facilitators are equipped with the tools and strategies to develop lessons and pedagogies that foster motivation in young people.<sup>84</sup>

## Appendix B: Youth Transition Support services <sup>85 86</sup>

The Youth Transition Support services (YTS) assists young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds between the ages of 15 to 25 to stay in education and to find work. Those eligible for the YTS services are vulnerable migrants. This is defined as those permanent residents who have arrived in Australia in the last five years that are:

- Humanitarian entrants and/or
- Family stream migrants with low English proficiency; and/or
- Dependents of skilled migrants in rural and regional areas with low English proficiency.

YTS services incorporates four themes or 'pillars' delivered holistically by service providers. The four pillars are:

- **Partnerships for employment:** services supporting eligible participants to transition into employment through providing work placement opportunities and projects; work readiness courses and programs; work experience opportunities; links to job vacancies; and partnerships with employers, jobactive providers and other related services.
- **Strong connections to education:** services supporting participants to stay engaged with education; through projects that support them to complete their studies, build their knowledge, support them to complete their studies and increase self-confidence and peer connections.
- **Increased vocational opportunities:** services providing pathways to industry recognised vocational training and work experience, and vocational skills recognition, to help participants achieve sustainable employment outcomes. Partnerships with TAFEs, registered training organisations and engaged employers are used to strengthen and obtain vocational skills.
- **Sports engagement for youth:** services supporting sporting activities to help participants participate in sporting activities to build social connections, overcome isolation and increase participation with other young Australians beyond their own communities.

<sup>85</sup> Department of Social Services (2018) Youth Transition Support services. Available at: <https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-services/program-policy/settlement-services/youth-transition-support-services>

<sup>86</sup> Youth Transition Support services. Available at: <https://myan.org.au/with-the-sector/>

