



**SUBMISSION to:**  
**Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)**

**REVIEW OF FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS**

**March 2011**

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## **1. Introduction**

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### **The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (Australia)**

The MYAN is a nationally recognised body that represents migrant and newly arrived young people<sup>1</sup>, in order to advance their rights and interests. The MYAN is comprised of representatives from each of Australia's states and territories. These representatives are involved in multicultural youth issues at the policy or program levels in their respective states and territories.

The MYAN was established in 2005 in response to an identified need for a coordinated national advisory and advocacy network for multicultural youth issues. The issues and needs of multicultural young people are often overlooked as they are a sub-group of both the broader youth and multicultural sectors and underrepresented in the policy and advocacy work of both the government and non-government sectors. The MYAN believes that a targeted response at both the policy and service delivery levels is necessary to support their sustained participation and engagement Australian society.

While the MYAN has a focus on newly arrived young people, particularly those from refugee or humanitarian backgrounds<sup>2</sup>, the term 'multicultural' includes international students and young people who were born in Australia to parents who settled in Australia as migrants or refugees.

The MYAN is auspiced by the Centre for Multicultural Youth.

## **2. About this Submission**

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The MYAN welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Review of Funding for Schooling*. Education has been identified as a policy priority for the MYAN.

This submission draws on the MYAN's breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities and the youth and settlement sectors. Given the role and purpose of the MYAN, this submission has a focus on the impact of funding

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<sup>1</sup> Consistent with the United Nations, the MYAN defines young people are those aged between 12 and 25

<sup>2</sup> That is, those arriving in Australia under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program.

for schooling in relation to ESL and supporting the English language needs of young people who are newly arrived in Australia.

### **3. Multicultural young people and education issues**

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Access to appropriate education is commonly noted as the most significant issue for multicultural young people. Access to adequate English language learning is critical to achieving social inclusion and sustained participation in Australian economic and social life for young people from multicultural backgrounds.

While many young people from multicultural backgrounds succeed in the Australian education system, they face particular barriers to engagement in schooling. This group of young people are often required to learn English in an unfamiliar educational or learning environment, and for many refugee and newly arrived young people, this is compounded by limited, interrupted or no formal schooling prior to their arrival in Australia.

The key issues for young people and their families in accessing and remaining engaged in education are:

- Limited or no understanding of the Australian education and training system, combined with often unrealistic expectations from family and/or self.
- Limited resources for intensive ESL support, often resulting in insufficient English language proficiency for mainstream schooling.
- Lack of targeted support for the transition from English Language Schools/Centres into mainstream schools secondary schools and/or into training.
- Lack of flexibility and resources in mainstream schools (both English Language Centres and secondary schools) to cope with and respond to the literacy level and needs of newly arrived and refugee young people (particularly given the high rates of disrupted or very limited schooling prior to arrival in Australia).
- Limited understanding and targeted support to understand, navigate and access training and higher education pathways – i.e. understanding the system, accessing information

and services, and accessing alternative pathways between school and further education and training.

It is vital that newly arrived group of young people have access to appropriately targeted and quality educational and vocational support in their initial settlement period. Without adequate intensive English language support, refugee and newly arrived young people will leave the formal education system with insufficient literacy and language skills to participate productively in the workforce or pursue further education and/or training.

#### **4. Response to the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Review of Funding for Schools**

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This submission will respond to the following sections of the TOR:

- **Supporting educational outcomes**

##### **1. The role of funding arrangements in supporting improved educational outcomes, including:**

**a) Links between school resourcing and educational outcomes; and**

**b) funding allocation mechanisms that address current barriers to educational achievement such as English language proficiency, indigeneity, location, disability and special needs, and other disadvantaged groups such as low socio-economic areas and other concentrations of disadvantage.**

- **Accountability and regulation**

##### **6. What forms of accountability, transparency and regulation are necessary to promote high standards of delivery and probity among schools receiving public funding, and the data required to monitor and assess these standards of delivery and educational outcomes.**

The MYAN is concerned that there is currently no national framework to oversee or guide funding allocation for ESL support across Australia. Under the National Education Agreement, states and territories have the sole responsibility for determining and directing education funding, including ESL resources. While the MYAN supports the discreet 'English as a Second Language – New Arrivals' (ESL-NA) program, it is concerned by the lack of accountability in the delivery of this program at the state/territory levels. The MYAN understands that there is no requirement or funding imperative to report on how funds are allocated to support ESL students

and ensure that the objectives and outcomes of the National Education Agreement (or the ESL-NA program) are achieved.

The MYAN is increasingly concerned that, in the absence of a national framework for ESL support, the existing system has resulted in (i) funding being redirected away from specialised ESL support for newly arrived young people and, (ii) significant disparities between jurisdictions in the level and nature of funding for these programs.

The MYAN supports the need for “nationally consistent definitions, measurements and cost structures”<sup>3</sup> in order to factor in the particular cost of students with ESL needs, especially those from refugee or humanitarian backgrounds. Such definitions, measurements and structures are critical to address current barriers to educational achievement and, support improved educational outcomes for this group of young people.

The MYAN also believes that educational outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are greatly enhanced by programs that provide support to ESL students in their transition from intensive English language settings into mainstream education. These programs are currently delivered in an ad hoc manner but are often of great value in supporting refugee and migrant young people in remaining engaged in school and achieving effective outcomes.

## **2. The roles of families, parents, communities and other institutions in providing or supporting educational partnerships with schools.**

Families, communities and non-school based support services can play a critical role in supporting young people to remain engaged in the school system and achieve effective educational outcomes. This is particularly so for young people from refugee and newly arrived backgrounds, who face a number of barriers and require targeted support to accessing and remaining in education. It is essential however, that partnerships (alongside flexible and responsive approaches to service provision) are properly resourced.

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<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2010), Review of Funding for Schools: Discussion Paper and Draft Terms of Reference, p.14

Such resourcing may include (i) targeted support to engage parents/families of refugee, newly arrived and migrant young people, (ii) investment in learning support programs delivered as partnerships between schools and community-based agencies and (iii) engaging with non-school based support services in order for young people from refugee and newly arrived backgrounds to access the targeted support they often need to remain engaged in school.

The MYAN believes that, essential to partnerships between schools and parents/families of refugee and migrant young people is: (i) a recognition from schools of the particular barriers that parents or family members of young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds face in engaging with schools and supporting effective educational outcomes, and (ii) a commitment to implementing strategies to address these barriers. Some of the barriers include unfamiliarity with the Australian school system and expectations about family/parent involvement, language and culture.

The MYAN endorses the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) submission into this inquiry and its comments regarding the importance of partnerships between families, communities and other institutions (e.g. non school-based support services or programs) and adequate resourcing of such partnerships.

## **5. Recommendations**

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The MYAN makes the following recommendations in relation to (i) the role of funding arrangements in improved education outcomes and addressing barriers like English language proficiency and (ii) funding and accountability:

1. That the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) conduct a review of ESL programs for refugee and newly arrived young people to (i) determine the extent and nature of funding allocation and investment across jurisdictions and (ii) establish national consistency based on good practice.
2. Include a directive in the National Education Agreement (NEA) requiring states and territories to develop a specific strategy for supporting refugee young people with intensive English Language needs.

3. Include in the NEA reporting, accountability and monitoring mechanisms in relation to outcomes for ESL students (in particular in relation to the ESL-NA program) and the extent and nature of funding allocation to achieve these outcomes.
4. Increase investment in transition programs or initiatives that support the transition for newly arrived young people from ESL settings into mainstream secondary schools.
5. Increase investment in learning support programs, e.g. homework support, as an important mechanism for achieving effective educational outcomes for refugee and migrant young people.