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### **Employability Skills Training**

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to Government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

FECCA welcomes the introduction of the Youth Jobs PaTH package, which is an important initiative aimed at addressing employment issues facing young Australians today. We highlight the need for consideration of, and responsiveness to, the particular needs of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with regard to the planning and implementation of the programs.

### **Job seeker eligibility**

#### ***What groups of job seekers would benefit most from completing the training before the five month mark?***

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

knowledge of Australian workforce systems and cultures.<sup>1</sup> In addition, they often face the challenge of having no networks to use in seeking out employment, and the potential to face discrimination, both through recruitment and on-the-job, on the basis of their cultural, religious or linguistic background.

FECCA recommends that job seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are provided appropriate assistance from their jobactive provider to overcome these barriers before participating in employability skills training. This may include English language classes, assistance with digital literacy, and other interventions. This approach will maximise the effectiveness of the employability skills training and result in better employment outcomes for job seekers.

The mainstreaming of employment services, and removal of specialist services, has had a significant impact on the equity of experience with respect to employment services for refugee and other CALD job seekers. FECCA and the Refugee Council of Australia have found that job seekers, particularly refugees, are often inappropriately assessed as 'job-ready' and thus receive limited assistance from their jobactive provider. It is noted that people seeking asylum are only eligible for Stream A (the lowest level of support) despite their often high needs. The Refugee Council has received widespread negative feedback about how providers are responding to the needs of refugee job seekers, including that services are ineffective in helping refugee and humanitarian entrants to find employment.<sup>2</sup>

FECCA notes that employability skills training may have limited impact for asylum seeker job seekers who are only able to access basic assistance from their jobactive provider and not the more intensive support needed to overcome the significant barriers that they may experience to becoming job-ready.

### ***How will job seekers, jobactive providers and training providers respond to the compulsory nature of the training?***

FECCA has received feedback from job seekers that the current jobactive requirements are burdensome and time consuming. Many have reported that the requirement to attend an employment service provider regularly can also be onerous, interfering with commitments including caring responsibilities, study, and work.

If the employability skills training program is made compulsory, it will need to be perceived by job seekers as useful and constructive, rather than an arbitrary requirement with limited effect on their ability to find a job. Job seekers should be included in the design and evaluation of the training to ensure that it is meeting their needs.

Childcare is important to facilitate access to the employability skills training. RTOs who deliver the training should consider how appropriate childcare can be provided on-site to assist job seekers with caring responsibilities to attend.

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<sup>1</sup> FECCA, *Better Beginnings, Better Futures. Improving Outcomes for New and Emerging Communities*. 'Factsheet 3: Youth Employment in New and Emerging Communities' (2014), available at:

[http://www.fecca.org.au/images/NEC\\_factsheets/factsheet3\\_youth%20employment%20in%20new%20and%20emerging%20communities.pdf](http://www.fecca.org.au/images/NEC_factsheets/factsheet3_youth%20employment%20in%20new%20and%20emerging%20communities.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Refugee Council of Australia, 'Jobactive: Refugee community and service provider concerns' (April, 2016). Available at: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/1604-Jobactive.pdf>

***What is the best way for job seekers who cannot attend for 25 hours each training week to participate in the training? How practical is it to have two five-week blocks for the job seekers?***

As outlined above, job seekers have reported to FECCA that existing requirements often interfere with their other commitments. Five week blocks of 25 hours each are likely to have a similar effect, and jobactive providers must take care not to refer individuals who are completing other training or study which would be impacted by a compulsory requirement to attend employability skills training. It is crucial that individuals are not referred to the employability skills training until they have completed the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

Special consideration must be given to people with disability, especially those from CALD backgrounds. Although it is important to have set timelines to have young people job ready, people with disability may encounter barriers in relation to their condition, transport, access to appropriate carers and the like. A flexible approach and a timeframe should be adopted to assist people with disability who are recipients of Disability Employment Services depending on their conditions and circumstances.

### **Training providers**

***What practical limitations might there be on providing training to all job seekers in an Employment Region within 90 minutes travel time?***

Requiring some job seekers to travel 90 minutes to attend compulsory training would be a significant barrier for many individuals to attend the training and meet their mutual obligations requirements.

The travel times may vary based on the location of the job seeker, other commitments and their preference for a training provider. Some job seekers may willingly travel longer distances to attend a training of their preference. However, limited access to transport is an issue for young people from CALD backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> In rural and regional areas, public transport is limited and thus job seekers may face difficulties travelling to their training.

A driver's licence can significantly increase a person's ability to obtain and sustain employment. For example, 'Braking the Cycle' is a project of Police-Citizens for Youth Club (PCYC), a nongovernment organisation based in Queensland, where youth between 16-25 years of age are provided with free driving lessons to complete the compulsory hours to obtain a valid driver's licence.<sup>4</sup> Based on the needs of the individual, provision of access to a training of this nature would be beneficial for some young people as part of the job ready process.

***Should the employability skills training include accredited units and be delivered by RTOs? What are the advantages and disadvantages to the job seeker, the training industry, jobactive providers and employers?***

FECCA is supportive of the employability skills training including accredited units, which will enable job seekers to work towards a qualification. We note the importance of any RTOs who deliver the training having a proven track record of working with people from diverse backgrounds, and appropriate safeguards being in place to protect job seekers against exploitation.

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<sup>3</sup> FECCA, *Multicultural Access and Equity – Building a cohesive society through responsive services* (2015), 28, accessible at: <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Multicultural-Access-and-Equity-Report-2014-2015.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> See: Police-Citizens for Youth Club, Braking the Cycle, <http://www.ipswichpcyc.org.au/youth-program/braking-the-cycle>

### ***How should training providers adapt the training to address the cultural and social diversity of young job seekers?***

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

Examples that may demonstrate cultural competency could include:

- Demonstrated experience of successfully working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- Internal policies, programs and systems that acknowledge and refer to cultural diversity;
- Recruiting, developing and supporting a diverse workplace (including reflecting on how diverse the business workforce is, and whether or not the workforce reflects the diversity of the communities it serves);
- Policies and structures dealing with workplace discrimination and racism;
- Staff training, including cultural competency training;

### ***What are the advantages and disadvantages of specialist youth or community organisations being involved in delivery of the training?***

Specialist ethnic community and/or settlement organisations have unique expertise and experience with working with job seekers from CALD backgrounds. This expertise and experience should be considered in the delivery of the program, and opportunities should be provided to interested organisations to be involved in the delivery of training or provision of support to job seekers. Such an approach would maximise the outcomes for migrant and refugee job seekers.

### **Training content**

In Australia, recruitment processes often focus not so much on actual job competency, but rather, on whether a candidate has the verbal and interactive skills to effectively engage with, and meet the expectations of, the selection panel. In this context, we highlight the imperative need for employers to be mindful of cultural differences and that cultural interpretations of what an interview will be like may vary among participants.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly important to ensure that discrimination is avoided in the process of recruiting candidates to participate in the programs, who will subsequently be provided with the opportunity to pursue employment opportunities on the basis of greatest need.

Digital literacy is of key concern to many job seekers from refugee backgrounds. FECCA's consultations have revealed that there are significant access issues in applying for jobs, as most job applications are now online even for jobs where no computer skills are required (for example, a trade).

Considering the importance of the PaTH Program and its impact on developing Australia's future workforce, it provides an ideal opportunity to instil specific skills that are vital in the workplace. In addition to or as part of the eight skills developed under the Employability

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<sup>5</sup> FECCA. *Harmony in the Workplace: Delivering the Diversity Dividend* (2013), available at: [http://www.fecca.org.au/images/Documents/Harmony/full\\_harmony%20in%20the%20workplace\\_delivering%20the%20diversity%20dividend.pdf](http://www.fecca.org.au/images/Documents/Harmony/full_harmony%20in%20the%20workplace_delivering%20the%20diversity%20dividend.pdf)

Skills Framework, FECCA recommends the inclusion of cultural sensitivity and competency as part of the skills training program.

FECCA also recommends that education and/or training on workplace rights, health and safety regulations as well as complaints mechanisms could be provided to these young job seekers.

### **Indigenous Procurement Policy**

FECCA is pleased that the necessary and targeted supports will be provided to ensure that the Indigenous Procurement Policy under the PaTH program. Given the similarities of the issues and barriers faced by these cohorts of people, FECCA recommends adopting a similar support structure to support young people from CALD backgrounds. Adoption of a similar strategy to bridge young people from CALD backgrounds to employers from similar backgrounds may produce better results.