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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training
House of Representatives Committees
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Inquiry into School to Work Transition

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 strives to ensure that the needs and aspirations of Australians from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds are given proper recognition in public policy.

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 opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's Inquiry into School to Work Transition.

Key message

FECCA believes that meaningful employment is one of the most effective ways of empowering and including migrants in Australian society. Beyond the obvious financial and economic benefits, employment assists in creating dignity, self-confidence and stability. It also benefits the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals and families. The positive outcomes stemming from meaningful employment encourage the participation and inclusion of CALD communities beginning in the immediate settlement period and continuing throughout their life in Australia.¹

FECCA understands that there are challenges for most young people when entering the labour market. This includes a general shortage of entry-level jobs, limited work experience, lower levels of confidence and a lack of understanding of workplace norms. These challenges are exacerbated for CALD youth.

¹ FECCA 2011, *Settlement is a Life-Long Process*, Submission to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship on Achieving social inclusion and participation for new and emerging communities beyond the immediate settlement period, FECCA, Canberra p. 13

FECCA conducted a youth employment survey in 2014 and found that CALD youth identify the key barriers to finding sustainable employment as:

- English language proficiency. This includes employer discrimination with regards to accent
- Lack of experience as a result of their age
- Lack of local experience in Australia
- Experiences of discrimination, prejudice or racism
- Lack of Australian qualifications, or limited recognition of overseas qualifications
- Lack of networks for seeking and securing employment
- Limited familiarity with the Australian workforce, employment systems and culture
- Lack of confidence and/or fear of non-acceptance
- Lack of tailored employment services
- Pressure from families to prioritise obtaining a tertiary qualification over finding short-term employment
- Pre-migration experience, including experiences of torture and trauma.

FECCA strongly encourages the Committee to recognise these issues faced by youth from CALD backgrounds when looking at initiatives to help the school to work transition.

Key recommendations:

- Funding for research into the specific barriers and opportunities for CALD Australian young people in the school to work transition
- The creation of evidence-based programs with support from schools and government for the transition period, to be targeted at young people less familiar with Australian culture, workplace systems, and structures who are likely to need greater support
- Investment in CALD-specific youth or community organisations or programs that can offer support to CALD young people in the school to work transition
- Enacting and enforcing protections to prevent workplace exploitation of young people, particularly young people less familiar with the Australian workplace
- Targeted support for CALD youth in pursuing tertiary education
- Ensure that schools and teachers are resourced and trained to support CALD Australians achieve their individual goals, whether it is further education or employment
- Implementation of appropriate training at schools for students to help them understand Australian workplaces regulations, Australian workers' rights as well as social norms and expectations.

Overview

Recent figures in Australia show an increase in both youth unemployment and youth underemployment.²

Unemployment is a significant issue for young people from CALD backgrounds, and more so for those from new and emerging communities. A report released by the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, *The CALD Youth Census Report 2014*, which analysed census data with regards to young people from migrant backgrounds, noted that this cohort had generally lower rates of employment compared to the Australian born youth.³ The report further noted that the rates vary across different state and territories, with the highest rates of employment

² See <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-27/youth-underemployment-at-highest-level-since/8389904>

³ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, 2014, *The CALD Youth Census Report 2014*, Available at http://cmy.net.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/CALD%20Census%20Report_Digital.pdf

for CALD youth being in Northern Territory, and the lowest rates in Tasmania.⁴ Employment is linked not only to financial stability, but also to social cohesion, self-esteem, independence, stable housing, the development and maintenance of English language skills, community belonging and personal wellbeing. Consequently, unemployment often results in increased risk of depression, poor health, and social and economic exclusion.⁵

The need for sustainable opportunities for young migrants is key to ensuring successful settlement outcomes. Despite this, research has indicated that there are a significant number of young people whose needs are not being adequately met in the school to work transition.⁶

Determining ‘what works’ for CALD youth in the education to employment transition is difficult due to patchy evidence and lack of systematic and longitudinal analysis. Additionally, ‘youth transition programs tend to be funded on a short-term basis and lack rigorous evaluation’.⁷ Increased funding and detailed research is necessary in order to reach a holistic view of the needs of CALD youth in this transition period.

In defining a successful process of transition from school to employment, the focus should not only be on the securing of employment, but on the securing of *meaningful* employment with future prospects for advancement. The Brotherhood of St Laurence refers to the ILO (2009) definition of the transition from school to work where

‘the desired result: regular and satisfactory work. It starts: from the premise that a person has not ‘transited’ until settled in a job that meets a very basic criteria of ‘decency’, namely a permanency that can provide the worker with a sense of security (e.g. a permanent contract), or a job that the worker feels personally satisfied with’ (OECD 2009, p. 7).⁸

Too often, for CALD youth, that basic criterion of ‘decency’ is not achieved in their first experiences of employment. FECCA suggests that evidence-based programs involving schools, tertiary education providers, community organisations and employers should be established to support CALD youth making the transition from school to tertiary education to meaningful employment that provide satisfaction, financial security and opportunity for further development.

Supporting students to prepare for post-school education and training

Poor educational results, post-school unemployment rates and lower levels of entry to tertiary education demonstrate that the needs of many young migrants – and especially those from new and emerging communities – are not being addressed in schools.

The African Australian Multicultural Employment and Youth Services (AAMEYS) notes that African migrant youth in particular ‘have had limited, if any, education before reaching safety in Australia. The education of many has been hampered by lack of schooling opportunities and, for some, disrupted by forced displacement. So many African Australians of school age are starting from well behind scratch at Australian schools.’⁹

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria. 2014. *Work Solutions: Improving Cultural Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace*. Available at: http://eccv.org.au/library/FULL_REPORT_ECCV_Work_Solutions_Discussion_Paper_Feb_2014.pdf

⁶ Centre for Multicultural Youth. 2014. *Facilitating the Transition to Employment for Refugee Young People*. Available at: <http://www.myan.org.au/file/file/Transitions%20to%20Employment%20Report.pdf>

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Bowman, Dina, Joseph Borlagdan and Sharon Bond 2015, *Making sense of youth transitions from education to work*, Brotherhood of St Laurence report

⁹ Ahmed, Dr Berhan, Investment in education pays best interest, in *Australian Mosaic* issue 46, Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils of Australian (FECCA).

AAMEYS further notes that because of this interrupted education, many African youth believe they are not encouraged by schools to 'learn their full potential; rather they are encouraged to leave school and get a job'.¹⁰ This may be because schools do not have the resources or capacity to meet the additional education and social needs of these young people. However, CALD Australian young people can also be held back by stereotypes and low expectations of education providers. It is therefore critical that schools and teachers are resourced and trained to support CALD Australians achieve their individual goals, whether it is further education or employment.

FECCA encourages the implementation of evidence-based programs in schools and with support from government for the transition period, targeted at young people less familiar with Australian culture, workplace systems, and structures who are likely to need greater assistance. This may involve internships or training at schools to help CALD young people understand Australian workplaces regulations, Australian workers' rights as well as social norms and expectations.

FECCA's consultations with youth across Australia illustrated that a major obstacle to employment is the inability to obtain a driver's licence.¹¹ Having a driver's licence is a key requirement for apprenticeships and employment in many small businesses. There are numerous job opportunities in remote parts of Australia where public transport is scarce or travel times are excessively long. The process of obtaining a driver's licence, including driving lessons and licence costs, can be prohibitive for young people. In Queensland, a local organisation with the support of Commonwealth and Queensland governments introduced 'Breaking the Cycle', a program where youth between 16-25 years of age are provided with free driving lessons to obtain a valid licence. FECCA believes that support in obtaining driver's licence at school could be a tangible way of supporting youth in getting ready for post-school employment.

Information and support to students in relation to post-school education and training

As noted by the Centre for Multicultural Youth, in a report discussing employment pathways, there is a need for holistic initiatives that address education and employment pathways for young CALD Australians. Employment should not be regarded as separate from other areas of well-being. FECCA emphasises the importance of the relationship between sustainable employment and other elements including access to housing, transport, health services, child care and community support.

Many participants at FECCA's consultations with CALD youth were concerned about the pressure to accept cash-in-hand work as it was the only option available to them when facing immediate financial demands including rent, transportation costs and childcare costs. Working in the cash economy leaves young people vulnerable to exploitation and can lead to long-term exclusion from government services, further educational opportunities and long-term, meaningful employment.

More generally, many young people from CALD backgrounds are unaware of their rights at work, or do not feel confident demanding them for fear of losing their job. Community organisations play an important role in providing information, support and advice to CALD young people during the transition from school to work, move away from the family home and become independent. They require resources and funding to fulfil this role.

Mentoring has been identified in FECCA's consultations with communities as an effective way to provide young job seekers with practical knowledge of workplace practices, expectations, culture and systems, and enable them to overcome some of the barriers that they face in gaining and retaining employment. Mentoring programs also help job seekers

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ FECCA Access and Equity consultation, Logan, 19 March 2015.

from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to develop professional networks, boost their confidence in their skills, and improve their prospects in terms of finding jobs to match their qualifications.¹² FECCA encourages the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to review the evidence and experience from other mentoring programs and consider opportunities for such programs to support CALD young people in this important transition.

Efforts are also required on the part of employers in the private and public sector to reach out to CALD youth and ensure that they have an equitable access to post-school and post-higher education employment options. Programs to encourage hiring of CALD youth – particularly from new and emerging communities – and to address racism and discrimination in hiring practices are also needed.

Conclusion

A diverse workforce enables organisations to connect with customers and community, foster greater innovation, improve employee engagement and increase overall business performance.¹³ CALD youth, including migrants and refugees, are a tremendous resource and present exciting opportunities for organisations to diversify and develop their workforce. However, young people from migrant backgrounds often experience a variety of barriers in the transition from school to work. A holistic approach is needed at schools to ensure Australia's diverse young people are supported in the transition from school to work or further education.

FECCA thanks the Standing Committee on Education and Employment for the opportunity to make a submission to this important matter. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this submission further, please contact the FECCA Director, Dr Emma Campbell at emma@fecca.org.au or on (02) 6282 5755.

¹² FECCA Access and Equity consultation, Logan, 19 March 2015.

¹³ Jauncey, Lauren, CALD workers and Australia Post, in *Australian Mosaic* issue 38, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australian (FECCA).