



Submission to the SENATE INQUIRY INTO TAFE

26 February 2014

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is the national umbrella body for refugees, asylum seekers and the organisations and individuals who support them, representing over 900 organisational and individual members. RCOA promotes the adoption of flexible, humane and constructive policies by governments and communities in Australia and internationally towards refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian entrants. RCOA consults regularly with its members and refugee community leaders and this submission is informed by their views.

RCOA welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Senate Inquiry into TAFE. The comments below specifically relate to the experiences of those coming to Australia under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. This submission is informed by annual consultations held with communities across Australia¹ and from research undertaken by RCOA on employment, education and training transitions.² This submission addresses a) (ii), a) (iv) and b) in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

a) (ii) The role played by TAFEs in the development of skills in the Australian economy

RCOA has found through research and consultations that refugee and humanitarian entrants face significant difficulties in finding meaningful employment in Australia due to barriers including: limited English proficiency, lack of Australian work experience, difficulties with recognition of overseas skills qualifications and experience, and lack of qualifications. Refugee and humanitarian entrants are overrepresented among the ranks of underemployed, lowly-paid, low-skilled, precariously employed and casualised members of the Australian labour force. This is despite many refugee and humanitarian entrants having aspirations, skills and experience that are a good occupational fit for the labour shortages currently a feature of the Australian job market. As such, refugee and humanitarian entrants represent a potential untapped pool of skills and labour in the Australian economy.

TAFEs play an important role in developing the skills and employability of refugee and humanitarian entrants by providing an accessible vocational pathway for those who wish to train or re-train. TAFEs play an important role in providing vocational qualifications, recognition of skills and industry-recognised experience for refugee and humanitarian entrants who may otherwise be unable to translate their overseas skills and qualifications into the Australian context. TAFE is also a more accessible training pathway for people who arrive in Australia with limited education or work experience, as numerous supportive and targeted models have been successfully developed in TAFEs that combine vocational training with language and other supports to benefit disadvantaged learners. As such, TAFE provides an important bridge between new Australians (refugee and humanitarian entrants) who have aspirations to find work, skills, qualifications and relevant experience, and skills shortages within the Australian labour market.

¹ See: www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/intakesub.php

² RCOA (2012). *Job Services Australia: Refugee community and service provider views* (www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/rpt/2012-JSA.pdf); RCOA (2010). *What Works: Employment strategies for refugee and humanitarian entrants* (www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/rpt/2010-Employment.pdf); RCOA (2010). *Finding the Right Time and Place: Exploring post-compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW* (www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/rpt/2010-Education.pdf); Letter to the Hon Chris Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research, on concerns about [exploitative practices by vocational education and training providers](#) targeting refugee communities, (8 June 2012)

a) (iv) The role played by TAFEs in the delivery of services and programs to support regions, communities and disadvantaged individuals to access education, training and skills and, through them, a pathway to further education and employment

TAFE provides an important education and training pathway for people from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds that can lead to meaningful employment. Many TAFEs have developed specialist expertise and programs that benefit learners from non-English speaking backgrounds or who may experience other educational or employment disadvantage. This is reflected in statistics that show that 190,000 TAFE students in Australia were from a non-English speaking background.³ Historically, the larger size and/or funding models of TAFEs have been one of their greatest strengths because they have enabled TAFEs to develop, partner and implement tailored and effective programs to smaller sub-groups within the Australian community.

Moreover, TAFE provides a learning environment that differs from what other smaller (private) training organisations can offer due to their size, resourcing and experience. For example, many refugee community members and service providers have spoken about the vital role of pastoral care in enabling the ongoing engagement of refugee and humanitarian entrants in education and training. Providing support to learners who may be dealing with complex settlement, family and educational issues requires time and resources, including skilled welfare workers who are able to work intensively one-on-one with students or in specialist group programs. In the current competitive VET training market, there is little recognition of what it costs to ensure disadvantaged learners – including newly arrived refugee and humanitarian entrants – are not excluded.⁴ For example, the more effective models have been developed in TAFE environments link foundation skills, English language and vocational training and broader social supports (see Migrant Youth Access Program and YAMEC case studies below).

(b) The effects of a competitive training market on TAFE

For refugee and humanitarian entrants, the support needed to successfully complete training courses and effectively compete in the Australian labour market requires recognition of the particular barriers they face. In the current competitive training market, there is little incentive or imperative for vocational education and training (VET) providers to consider and cater for the learning needs of disadvantaged students, such as ensuring there is appropriate pastoral care, language and technology support for those who need it. While many of the larger VET providers – mostly TAFEs – are able to offer more tailored courses due to economies of scale, they are doing so in an increasingly competitive environment where small private training organisations (RTOs) can offer courses with lower fees, albeit with minimal student support and poorer outcomes. This has been reflected in increasing concerns raised by people RCOA regularly consults about a drop in the quality of support provided to refugee and humanitarian entrants in TAFEs. This is also supported in findings from a recent AEU survey of TAFE teachers, with 63.7% of respondents saying that TAFE institutes were shaving more and more hours off the delivery of courses and teachers were being allocated less time in direct contact with students to cover the course content.⁵

RCOA has and will continue to raise concerns about the lack of regulation or monitoring of the quality of VET providers.⁶ These concerns, increasingly voiced in RCOA's annual community consultations in recent years, are evident in the Productivity Commission's own report entitled *Vocational Education and Training (VET) Workforce: Productivity Commission Research Report*.⁷ Examples of peak body concerns cited in this report include:

³ http://stoptafecuts.com.au/files/5213/7220/1432/Fact_Sheet_The_value_of_TAFE_July_2013.pdf

⁴ Noonan P and Astley R (2011). CEET Conference 2011: Funding VET for Social Inclusion, Competitive tendering and contestable funding in VET: approaches to supporting access and equity, www.education.monash.edu.au/centres/ceet/docs/.../2011/noonan.pptx

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Letter to the Hon Chris Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research, on concerns about [exploitative practices by vocational education and training providers](#) targeting refugee communities, (8 June 2012)

⁷ Productivity Commission (2011). *Vocational Education and Training Workforce*, Research Report, Canberra. www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/108369/vocational-workforce.pdf

“The majority of RTOs do a very good job and put a lot of effort into developing their training courses and ensuring good student outcomes. Unfortunately, there is evidence that some students are graduating with poor quality qualifications making them virtually unemployable. This is not a reflection of the hard work put into the development of the content of the courses by the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council and the aged care industry itself, but the dubious and sometimes unethical behaviour of some [RTOs].”

- Aged & Community Services Australia (p.122)

“In the aged care sector stakeholders have advised the CS&HISC that variability in outcomes of qualifications delivered to aged care workers... means that many of these graduates are effectively ‘un/sub-skilled’ for the job. Qualifications are often delivered over short periods where it is very unlikely that candidate’s skills will have formed to the level described in competency standards... Variability in output of RTOs in the aged care sector is a risk and performance of the VET sector and VET workforce needs to improve to mitigate this risk...”

- The Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council (p.122)

Submissions cited in the Productivity Commission report were not restricted to complaints about training quality only in aged care, but most notably in the disability and children’s services sectors. This is of concern not only because of the vulnerability of clients serviced by these industries, but also because these are the industries which tend to attract a higher proportion of refugee and humanitarian entrants. With refugee and humanitarian entrant job seekers already facing multiple barriers to entering the Australian labour market,⁸ the fact that some employers believe that there are quality issues with VET providers and may not consider job applications from these graduates makes the lack of regulation and monitoring of training quality all the more damaging.

Examples of substandard training and recruitment practices that RCOA is aware of through our community consultations include:

- Courses that cost in excess of \$2,000 and take six months to complete are being offered for \$395 and are delivered in five days.
- Courses in children’s services are being offered without practical components (i.e. work placements) until the end of the course which is not conducive to reflective learning. Students are not being assisted to find work placements or appropriately supported in these, and end up paying fees for courses not completed. Employers are unwilling to take on these students because of the lack of support offered by the RTO, students being unprepared for the requirements and expectations of a work placement and the unacceptable risks associated with taking on an unprepared workplace student in the context of services for young children.
- Courses in aged care are being offered without providing students with training in how to use relevant industry equipment. Equipment was not available to students to access or to use, and training was given only in theory.
- A prevalence of online learning practices without accountability, with particular implications for refugee and humanitarian entrant learners with limited English or computer literacy (an example given by the Australian Education Union (AEU) is of a correspondence course in Diploma of Counselling being offered).⁹
- RTOs cross-selling concurrent certificates (see case study below).

⁸ See: RCOA (2010). What Works, “Chapter 4 - Refugee and humanitarian entrants in the Australian labour market”, pp.14-26. www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/reports/2010_Employment.pdf

⁹ AEU TAFE Teacher Survey 2011. www.tafe4all.org.au/tafeteacherssurvey2011.pdf (accessed 10 April 2012).

"I asked them, it was government funded, there was this program I think, if you haven't done anything above that certificate, so I paid a reduced amount. My intention was aged care and they're like, 'Oh, you know it's \$50, why don't you do both of them (aged care and personal support assistant)?' and I was just, like 'Why not? \$50 for each!' So I paid \$100 which was okay."

- Refugee community member, Melbourne (Vic)

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CASE STUDIES¹⁰

Program	Migrant Youth Access Program, Granville TAFE (NSW)
Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To enable at-risk, disadvantaged, migrant and refugee young people to make a smooth transition from school to work or further study. ▪ To support migrant and refugee young people to develop the confidence, knowledge and skills necessary to operate in their new society. ▪ To develop innovative curricula to engage and support youth at risk; increasing the proportion of 15-21 year olds proficient in literacy, numeracy and technology to enable further study and workforce participation.
Target group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At risk, disadvantaged, migrant and refugee young people aged 15-21 who have limited access to school or further education.
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Migrant Youth Access Program (MYAP) incorporates two eighteen week courses (run twice a year), delivered through a partnership between the Granville College Multicultural Education Unit and two teaching sections – the Adult Basic Education and Vocational Access faculties. ▪ Students enter one of two courses (Level 1 or Level 2) based on their assessed language capabilities. The MYA Program articulates to a range of TAFE pathways. MYAP Group 1 articulates to MYAP Group 2. Places are guaranteed at same level for further semester where needed and appropriate. ▪ Courses are run from 9.30-2.30 Monday to Friday. ▪ A detailed recruitment and selection process is undertaken by MYAP Multicultural Education Co-ordinator, teachers and disability staff and involves gathering information, assessment and interview sessions. This is done to find suitable students and a suitable group for the program. Applicants who settled under refugee and humanitarian program (i.e. most 'at risk') are prioritised, as are continuing MYAP students. Most applicants have exhausted their time at IECs. ▪ Orientation is extensive, including walks around TAFE to introduce students to support services, facilities and staff. ▪ The MYAP features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language, literacy and learning skills development as part of every subject. - A tailored, innovative curriculum and methodology. - Program staff with skills, qualifications and experience in working with refugee young people, working cross-culturally and community development, technology proficiency and numeracy skills development. Most teachers have university qualifications in Adult Education, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or Adult Basic Education (ABE). - Settlement support, including skills development in accessing and understanding Australians systems and cultures, with emphasis on accessing relevant support services

¹⁰ RCOA (2010). *Finding the Right Time and Place: Exploring post-compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW* (www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/rpt/2010-Education.pdf) – Note, these programs may have changed since these case studies were compiled in 2014, however RCOA believes they still demonstrate good models that have been developed in the TAFE system.

	<p>and leisure activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MYAP offers 'Out of Class Learning Experiences' (OCLE) to students. Activities focus on developing young people's confidence, self esteem and skills, such as using public transport and participating in leisure activities in bush settings. OCLE activities are free to students experiencing financial hardship and at a minimal cost (only low cost transport fares) to others. ▪ MYAP encourages student retention by offering incentives (e.g. showcasing achievements), physical and visual activity and learning, regular social interaction and the use of technology. ▪ Barriers to attendance and learning addressed through education and modelling e.g. health, nutrition and conflict resolution strategies. ▪ Supported pathways from MYAP into further education, training and employment through TAFE tasters, a buddy system, mentoring, skills development in pathway planning and individual pathway access support. ▪ Expertise from and network building with supportive staff through TAFE, government and community organisations partnerships. ▪ Joint class activities (Levels 1 and 2) to enable development of social and support networks. ▪ Frequent communication between course co-ordinators and all program staff regarding pastoral care, pathways and other student matters.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funded through SWSI TAFE budget (Social Inclusion Unit, Employment Preparation and Vocational Access Faculties).
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Travel for young women from some cultural backgrounds is an issue when running OCLE activities. ▪ Funding insecurity; having to negotiate regularly for funding to continue (i.e. not part of core work of TAFE). ▪ Working with young people who are dealing with complex issues – depression, trauma etc. Some students behave inappropriately or aggressively on occasions and this can trigger fear and trauma in already traumatised individuals. ▪ Limited resources for teachers to have the time to work holistically; many do so outside of required role due to passion and commitment. ▪ Overlapping of State/Federal services and poor communication between different services/departments.
Successful strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creating hope for young people by providing different experiences (e.g. art, music), particularly where they can achieve/experience success. ▪ Employing teachers who are trained/skilled at working with young people at risk. ▪ Offering a multicultural education program where migrant and refugee young people can mix – this has to be managed, but also pushes young people to succeed. ▪ Providing outdoor learning experiences for which many refugees have never had the opportunity to do so. ▪ Early intervention – allowing refugee young people to gain meaningful skills so that they remain engaged. ▪ The building of harmonious relationships amongst participants through anticipation of systems and procedures that may affect students, monitoring of each students behaviour during lead up sessions to classes, reporting to staff of serious incidents, warning systems for student behaviour, various harmony sessions run by program staff and counsellors, and ongoing pair and group work to foster co-operation. ▪ The mentoring of students principally through the Out of Class Learning Experiences (OCLE).
Contact Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ (02) 9682 0308 Multicultural Education Unit – Granville College ▪ www.swsi.tafensw.edu.au/aboutswsi/colleges/granville.aspx

Program	Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC), Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (Victoria)
Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide ESL and general education classes for newly arrived young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds ▪ Provide further ESL classes for young people who have completed their on-arrival English hours ▪ Offer the opportunity for migrant and refugee young people to attain a Victorian school completion certificate (VCAL¹¹). ▪ Address student settlement and health issues, while improving their social connectedness and access to recreational opportunities. ▪ Prepare students for further study, apprenticeship and training courses and employment through integrating employability skills at all levels of the program. ▪ Provide support, counselling and advocacy to assist students to address barriers to education and to plan career pathways.
Target group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC) provides accredited English as a Second Language certificates and general education courses to young adult migrants aged 15-26 years who have disrupted or no prior schooling.
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The program originated over 25 years ago to accommodate the needs of migrant and refugee young people who could not access secondary school in Australia due to age, English language level, lack of prior education or those who prefer a non-school setting to study. ▪ YAMEC provides a flexible program at 3 class levels from low level ESL literacy to ESL Certificate 3 / VCAL Intermediate. It incorporates studies in Numeracy and Maths, Science, Computers, Current Affairs, Health and Civics and Citizenship. In addition to an ESL Certificate 2 or 3 incorporating the subjects above, VCAL students also study VCAL core modules of Personal Development Skills and Work Related Skills and modules from VET Certificate courses (e.g. First Aid, Food Handling and Hygiene, Retail Communication Skills). ▪ VCAL students participate in community-based projects and volunteer work as part of their course requirements. Along with other YAMEC students, they also complete a 2 week work experience placement with local businesses, agencies and services. ▪ Collaboration and partnerships with local agencies and services enrich the program by providing extra-curricular activities (guest speakers, health education, leadership program, life skills workshops, gym and sports program, mentoring, etc.) ▪ Pastoral support, pathway and career planning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each class has a Home Teacher who has designated time to attend to students' support and advocacy needs. - A MIPs (Managed Individual Pathways) Officer provides pathway and career planning advice for students at each campus. The MIPs Officer also assists students to address any barriers to education that affect their attendance or wellbeing. - Exiting YAMEC students follow a variety of pathways including: Academic English at TAFE, Year 10 or VCE, Pre-apprenticeships, Apprenticeships, Traineeships, TAFE Certificate courses e.g. Maths & Science Bridging Course or Cert 3, Gateway to Nursing, Cert 3 Patient Support Services, Aged Care Services, I.T. Certificate 2 or 3. Some students gain full time employment in industries such as Hospitality, Retail or Manufacturing.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AMEP ▪ LLNP ▪ TAFE global budget ▪ MIPS funding. This allows further services to be provided (e.g. Housing assistance, welfare counselling etc).
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student punctuality and regular attendance is an issue for some classes, but understandable for these students who are dealing with settlement, health, legal and family issues. Support and advocacy with these issues is vital in reducing the students' barriers to attending regularly. ▪ To assist students with the complexity of their needs, teaching and welfare staff need to be

¹¹ Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning - <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcal/index.html>

	dedicated and committed to the program and the students.
Successful strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flexible program delivery and curriculum that respond to changing demographics ▪ Health and settlement issues addressed through integrated curriculum ▪ Appropriate level of education and training ▪ Peer support and interaction in a supportive environment ▪ Vocational counselling, range and accessibility of pathways ▪ Collaboration and participation with community agencies and health services ▪ A stable learning environment includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ongoing and flexible funding - full time YAMEC coordinator and assistance of VCAL coordinator - TAFE setting – range of courses, pathways and facilities - highly qualified and experienced ESL teachers and specialist welfare staff coordinate assistance to meet individual student support needs ▪ Whole of organisation support ▪ Core teaching staff that coordinate class management and activities ▪ Large classrooms, excellent computer rooms and library facilities ▪ Class sizes of fewer than 20 students
Contact Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ YAMEC Program Coordinator, Youth Unit, NMIT ▪ (03) 9269 1775 ▪ www.nmit.vic.edu.au/courses/young_adult_migrant_education_course_yamec