



The Education Needs of Young Refugees in Victoria

REFUGEE EDUCATION
PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

April 2007



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The Education Needs of Young Refugees in Victoria
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Executive summary

THE ISSUES CANVASSED IN THIS DOCUMENT provide a basis for developing a government policy position to improve educational outcomes and enhance emotional well-being for young people from refugee backgrounds.

They are derived from and aligned to existing State policies. *A Fairer Victoria*¹ outlines the Victorian government's commitment to redressing disadvantage and improving opportunities for all Victorians to fully participate in the State's economic and social life. *Growing Victoria Together*² has 'high quality education and training for life long learning' as one of its goals, with a guiding principle of the *Blueprint for Government Schools*³ being that all students are entitled to a high-quality school education and opportunity to succeed. Partnerships involving government, non-government agencies and local communities are crucial to achieving these aims.

While many students from refugee backgrounds achieve success in schools there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that many young people arriving in Australia under the refugee and humanitarian program are also failing to attain a level of education that will ultimately allow for their successful integration into the Australian community. Minimal or no formal education pre-arrival coupled with significant emotional and physical deprivations are proving to be significant barriers for many in attaining outcomes within the mainstream education system. Subsequent high levels of drop out and growing unemployment are highly suggestive of the need to increase the level of support in some areas and to be able to better target existing funding/support in others.

In this context, the development of a refugee education strategy based on a whole of community/whole of school approach allowing for public-private partnerships would significantly enhance the support of particular learning needs of refugee background students.

Currently, student population data identifies those students receiving English as a Second Language (ESL) support; however, no data is collected in relation to refugee background students specifically. An ability to differentiate between the issues impacting on refugee background young people and those of the broader and much larger migrant population group in relation to mainstream education would significantly enhance the quality of responses to these issues. Collection and analysis of refugee specific data in relation to pre-arrival education and outcomes attained at the local level is imperative to enable targeted funding and program responses to more adequately support this highly vulnerable group within the education system.

Funding from the Commonwealth Government under the ESL New Arrivals Program currently provides new arrival students meeting eligibility requirements with 20 weeks of English language tuition in an English Language School or Centre (ELS/C). Severe disruptions to, or an absence of, formal education pre-arrival in Australia is a consistent feature for students from refugee backgrounds and the current level of support is inadequate to their needs. Commonwealth funding for refugee background students needs to be increased beyond this initial 20-week period for appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy to be acquired by students prior to them being placed within the mainstream education system.

Since 2005 Victorian schools have been provided with resources to deliver literacy and language support through Student Resource Package (SRP) Equity funding intended to improve achievement in literacy and numeracy for at-risk students. Schools in some instances have not developed an understanding of the flexibility and options that exist for using SRP Equity resources. In this context, schools require advice and professional development in relation to the use of these resources to more effectively address the language and literacy needs of refugee students.

1. Department of Premier and Cabinet, *A Fairer Victoria*, Victoria, 2005

2. Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Growing Victoria Together: A Vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond*, Victoria, 2001

3. Department of Education and Training, *Blueprint for Government Schools*, Victoria, 2004

Executive summary

SRP Equity funding provided to schools needs to be linked to the *Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools*⁴, a component of the *Blueprint for Government Schools*, to ensure that school activity is targeted for refugee students where needed. In addition, further analysis of the use of funding is required to determine whether resources are being used where intended.

The profile of refugee students, in particular those entering the middle years of schooling (Years 5–9) and above with little previous school experience, has major implications for teaching and learning. Professional development is necessary to expand skill development for school staff in literacy and language support, and in identifying strategies for working with a diverse student population, particularly in relation to understanding and managing the impact of the refugee experience. Professional development coupled with access to spe-

cialised secondary consultation would enhance the capacity of both teachers and students.

Curriculum in relation to working with young people from refugee backgrounds should be included in pre-service teacher training programs.

The transition from ELS/Cs to the mainstream school is a crucial process during which refugee background students are particularly vulnerable. Support in transition needs to address the social connectivity of a student in combination with an understanding of their formal academic capability. There are many issues to be considered, including providing adequate academic and peer support to enhance student connectedness within the mainstream environment as well as engaging and offering information to families about the Australian education system and pathways. Accurate and consistent assessment and support during transition processes will enhance a student's opportunity for success.



4. Department of Education and Training, *Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools*, Victoria, 2005

Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs are perceived as a crucial support structure to complement classroom activities as they provide a mixture of homework support, additional tutoring and/or social support. They are currently coordinated either by community sector agencies, local government, schools, libraries or churches and vary in size from less than 10 to up to 400 students. Little or no planning and coordination across a school region, and varying levels of resourcing across the programs, produces inconsistent levels of outcomes. A coordinated approach is needed to link local schools, communities and relevant service providers and to ensure programs provide quality services to students.

Generally, mainstream schools have difficulties in engaging and sustaining engagement with families in new and emerging culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. At the same time, a school functions optimally when parent engagement is high. Schools require support and resources to engage the families of refugee students and to assist families and students to make informed decisions and to participate successfully in the education system. A combination of professional development, resources, and specialist short-term support to assist schools establish these relationships would significantly benefit both schools and students from refugee backgrounds.

Multicultural education aides (MEAs) play a vital role in supporting the education and well-being of many refugee background students. Many MEAs are, however, inexperienced with the Australian education system and have little opportunity to network and develop their understanding. MEAs, and therefore the school community they work with, would benefit if offered more comprehensive training and the opportunity to network and gain advice/support from colleagues in the field.

Recently arrived students from refugee backgrounds aged 16 years and above with minimal prior education are currently not adequately catered for. They do not have the skills to cope with senior curriculum and, without intensive support, often disengage and leave school without pursuing alternative appropriate education. An initiative bringing together relevant sectors to determine and develop more appropriate pathway options and outcomes for refugee young people of post-compulsory education age is required.

Recommendations

THE ISSUES CANVASSED IN THIS DOCUMENT provide a basis for developing a government policy position to improve educational outcomes and enhance emotional well-being for young refugees. There are clear opportunities to build on the existing initiatives and support systems, and to use local examples of good practice as a basis for developing a stronger system response to the needs of this group of young learners. The following recommendations are proposed as a means of developing such a response.

- 1** That the Victorian Department of Education (DoE) develop a coherent refugee education strategy that draws together responses to meet the learning, welfare and family support needs of refugee students.
- 2** That system data be collected, reported and analysed on an annual basis which tracks refugee student progress throughout their education.
- 3** That the Commonwealth be encouraged to increase per capita funding for the English as a Second Language (ESL) New Arrivals Program to reflect the longer period of time required to assist refugee students with little or no prior education to gain proficiency in English before transition into mainstream education.
- 4** That ESL Index funding continue to be explicitly identified in the Student Resource Package (SRP) and that additional accountability mechanisms for effective use of funds are employed.
- 5** That DoE analyse how effectively schools are meeting the needs of refugee students within existing resources such as Core, Literacy and Student Family Occupation funding.
- 6** That a statewide professional development strategy to develop teacher knowledge and skills in literacy and language support across all subject areas be developed.
- 7** That a statewide professional development strategy, incorporating specialist consultancy support, be designed to assist schools to develop a whole school approach to supporting refugee students.
- 8** That education faculties within tertiary institutions incorporate curriculum about the refugee experience and teaching language and literacy into pre-service teacher education courses for all trainee teachers.
- 9** That specialist consultancy support and resources be provided to assist schools to develop transition programs that increase refugee student connectedness. Good transition models should be promoted and incorporated into Knowledge Bank.
- 10** That additional resources be allocated to provide specialist expertise to assist in engaging families with the transition process.
- 11** That bridging programs and other transition models be evaluated with a view to subsequently identifying, promoting and resourcing exemplar models.
- 12** That a common assessment tool, which encompasses the welfare and educational needs of refugee young people, be developed and used, in particular during transition.

Recommendations

13 That reporting on transitions within the *Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools* focus on transition into the mainstream school, as well as transition from the school, for the refugee student cohort.

14 That the Victorian Government resource a regional initiative to demonstrate and trial a coordinated approach for Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs.

15 That schools demonstrating good practice of parent engagement and involvement be identified and invited to share these strategies through Knowledge Bank and systemic professional development.

16 That schools develop formal linkages with relevant agencies that have a capacity to provide ongoing consultancy support in relation to working with refugee families.

17 That an appropriate accredited training course be developed and promoted for multicultural education aides (MEAs). Regional MEA networks supported by DoE should be established.

18 That the Victorian Government fund an initiative which brings together relevant sectors to determine and develop more appropriate pathway options and outcomes for refugee young people of post-compulsory education age.

1. Introduction

THIS DOCUMENT AIMS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT of a government policy position which would improve existing levels of support for the well-being and educational achievement of refugee students. It has

The Refugee Education Partnership Project

The Refugee Education Partnership Project (REPP) is a partnership between Foundation House – The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, the Victorian Department of Education, the Department for Victorian Communities, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Debney Park Secondary College and a private philanthropic trust. This three year project commenced in 2004 to establish a more coordinated system across community, education and government sectors to enhance the well-being and educational achievements of students of refugee background.

been developed by the Refugee Education Partnership Project (REPP), a collaboration between government and non-government organisations actively involved in policies and programs relating to young refugees.

The document is particularly concerned with the education and well-being of refugee students who have arrived in Australia with no or minimal formal education having suffered severe emotional and physical deprivations. It outlines education policies, programs and practices that are in place as well as some of the challenges schools are facing in providing adequate support for these students. It makes recommendations

which recognise the need for schools to work in partnership with other government areas, non-government agencies and the community to provide a whole school approach that extends beyond regular school hours to enable refugee students to achieve academic success and emotional well-being.

Defining refugees

The focus of this document is young people aged between 5 and 21 years of age who can be identified as:

- refugees by the classification of their visa category
- asylum seekers who have had similar experiences to refugees
- individuals who may have subsequently arrived as part of a humanitarian or family migration program but who have gone through similar experiences as refugees.

Refugees are defined by the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees as people who '*are outside their country of nationality or their usual country of residence and are unable or unwilling to return or to seek the protection of that country due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion*'.⁵

In addition to those young people who enter Australia under visa categories that identify them specifically as refugees, there are others of the same age and backgrounds who have been through similar experiences in those countries, and whose profile is therefore like that of a refugee. They face the same challenges as refugees within the education and training system. For ease of writing, all the young people covered by this document will be referred to as refugees.

5. UNHCR, *The 1951 Refugee Convention*, Switzerland, 2003

Importance of cross-sectoral partnerships

The collaborative Refugee Education Partnership Project provides a practical example of cross-sectoral partnerships. Promoted by the Victorian Government's longer-term vision in *Growing Victoria Together*⁶ first developed in 2001, partnership between government and community, and within communities, is a key element in improving the quality of life for Victorians. The general emphasis on social connection, greater public participation and the capacity to access community support is an important ingredient of this vision, as is the goal of providing high quality education and training leading to life-long learning for more Victorians. Partnerships are critical to achieving this goal, particularly in relation to the educational needs of young people of refugee background.

International practice confirms the benefits of partnerships. *Every Child Matters* is the UK Government's recently adopted holistic approach to working with children and young people. It is based on partnerships of organisations within a local area supporting children and young people to 'be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being'.⁷

A crucial component of *Every Child Matters* is an extension of schools beyond regular school hours so that they can provide access to services all year round. The expansion of schools into community hubs enables provision of support, often delivered by partners, that children and their families need in order to thrive and achieve.⁸ Whilst this is not Australian government policy, a number of schools in Victoria are adopting the 'community hub approach' by bringing services that support families into schools, extending their hours to include programs such as Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs and bringing the community into the school to use their facilities.⁹ In this way they are able to best support all students and their families, and particularly those who are disadvantaged, such as refugees.

National and Victorian education policies and refugee students

Nationally, *The Adelaide Declaration (1999) on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century*¹⁰ by State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education and Training agreed that schooling should be socially just, so that students' outcomes from education are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students' socio-economic background or geographic location.

In Victoria, the Ministerial Statement, *Blueprint for Government Schools*,¹¹ outlines the Government's reform agenda for the government school system. A guiding principle of the Blueprint is that all students have an entitlement to a high-quality school education and a genuine opportunity to succeed, and that the government system has an obligation to respond to the diverse learning needs of students.

6. Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Growing Victoria Together: A Vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond*, Victoria, 2001

7. HM Government, *Every Child Matters*, <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims>, accessed on 1 September 2006

8. Department for Education and Skills, *Planning and Funding Extended Schools: A Guide for Schools, Local Authorities and their Partner Organisations*, <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk>, accessed on 1 September 2006

9. The Victorian Government has shown its support for school facilities being used by the community in *Schools as Community Facilities: Policy Framework and Guidelines*, Department of Education and Training, Melbourne, 2005

10. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century*, Adelaide, 1999

11. Department of Education and Training, *Blueprint for Government Schools*, Victoria, 2003

1. Introduction



The State Government's 2005 social policy action plan, *A Fairer Victoria*,¹² also aims to ensure people have access to the support they need at critical transitions in life, including when young people are at risk of disengagement from education and training opportunities.

While these policies are both necessary and welcome, recent trends in the make up of the refugee population settling in Australia are posing particular challenges for the education and training sector to meet the learning needs of young refugees.

Much of this document is based on the current good practice occurring in some primary and secondary Victorian schools with refugee enrolments. The challenge is to transform these local examples of good practice into a more effective systemic response.

12. Department of Premier and Cabinet, *A Fairer Victoria*, Victoria, 2005

2. Refugee experience and its impact on education

REFUGEES COME FROM DIVERSE CULTURES and backgrounds, but share common experiences of disadvantage that impact on their capacity and readiness to learn. They share this social disadvantage with others from culturally diverse backgrounds. However, in the case of young refugees, these factors of disadvantage tend to cluster together and to be particularly acute.

Key factors identified as leading to social disadvantage may include:

- low levels of skills such as English language skills
- inadequate levels of income due to unemployment or low levels of government benefits
- chronic or severe illness
- discrimination and/or racism
- physical isolation
- the impact of torture and trauma
- living in a family environment that can offer little or low level support due to the impact of the refugee experience
- being an unaccompanied minor without family support.

Not all refugee students have experienced significant disruption to their schooling, and many are making successful transitions to schooling in Australia, but the following learner profile is typical for recent young refugee arrivals.¹³ They frequently:

- have had no or minimal formal schooling in their first language
- have low levels of literacy in English
- may have lived in insecure societies where civil order and services have broken down
- have experienced extreme violence
- may be suffering the after effects of trauma, and in some cases, torture
- may be affected by the loss of family and be without parental support
- may have had disrupted schooling due to movement within and between countries so that literacy skills are not consolidated in any one language
- may have spent long periods in refugee camps or first country of asylum with minimal or no education
- may have come from a language background where writing is a relatively new phenomenon.

Young refugees are a particularly vulnerable population in schools and other education and training settings. Their experiences pose particular challenges for education policy-makers and providers.

13. Department of Education and Training, *Meeting the Needs of Secondary ESL Learners with Disrupted Schooling – Planning Bridging Programs*, 2004

3. The changing profile of young refugees

YOUNG PEOPLE CURRENTLY MAKE UP OVER half of the overall number of refugees settling in Victoria. Many have lost parents and other family members and suffered significant psychological and physical deprivations as a result of the refugee experience. In 2005–06, 52% of the humanitarian entrants assisted under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) were aged 18 and under; an increase from 42% of all entrants in 2002–03.¹⁴

Australia's Humanitarian Program identifies people from acutely vulnerable and at risk population groups for resettlement in Australia. Subsequently, regular changes in the target countries occur with the constantly shifting global geo-political context. Throughout much of the 1990s, a significant proportion of Australia's Humanitarian Program entrants were from Former Yugoslavian countries. Most of these people entered Australia having had prior education in schools within their country of origin and many students were able to maintain their education while living in a first country of asylum waiting for permanent resettlement.

In the 2001 to 2005 period a marked increase in new arrivals from Western, Central and Eastern African countries took place, with the intake growing from approximately 30% of the total in 2001 to around 70% in 2005. The 2005–2006 period saw an increase in new arrivals from the Middle East, South West and South East Asia, reflecting the priorities of the UNHCR.¹⁵

Tables 1 and 2 indicate the country of origin for new arrivals from refugee backgrounds enrolling in Victorian schools in 2006 (compulsory and post-compulsory years). Young people from Sudan comprised 27% and from Afghanistan 25% of total enrolments in the compulsory years with 30% from Sudan and 20% from Afghanistan in the post-compulsory years.

It should be noted that 'country of birth' in this instance does not necessarily reflect an individual's ethnic, cultural or national background. For example, 'country of birth' given as 'Kenya' or 'Egypt' may refer to a child born of Sudanese parents in a refugee camp in Kenya or Egypt; 'Iraq' or 'Turkey' may refer to a Kurdish entrant.¹⁶

Table 1: 2006 Enrolled newly arrived refugees aged under 15

Birth Country	Total	Female	Male
Afghanistan	366	174	192
Burma (Myanmar)	101	53	48
Burundi	10	5	5
Cambodia	55	27	28
Congo	6	4	2
Côte d'Ivoire	11	4	7
Croatia	1		1
East Timor	8	4	4
Eritrea	19	11	8
Ethiopia	64	30	34
Ghana	6	4	2
Guinea	5	2	3
Iran	71	36	35
Iraq	142	72	70
Kenya	61	34	27
Laos	9	7	2
Liberia	12	6	6
Malawi	3	3	
Nepal	23	13	10
Sierra Leone	8	3	5
Somalia	16	9	7
Sudan	399	185	214
Tanzania	21	13	8
Uganda	7	2	5
Yugoslavia (FRY)	14	6	8
Zimbabwe	21	12	9
Total	1459	719	740

Source: Unpublished DoE Data, March 2007

14. Department of Immigration and Citizenship, unpublished data, April 2007

15. Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *National Report, Settlement Needs of New Arrivals 2006*, Canberra, 2006

16. *ibid*

3. The changing profile of young refugees

Table 2: 2006 Enrolled newly arrived refugees aged over 15

Birth Country	Total	Female	Male
Afghanistan	74	22	52
Burma (Myanmar)	30	17	13
Burundi	1		1
Cambodia	26	12	14
Congo	2	2	
East Timor	1	1	
Eritrea	7	4	3
Ethiopia	27	13	14
Ghana	2		2
Iran	18	7	11
Iraq	46	20	26
Kenya	2	1	1
Liberia	3	2	1
Rwanda	1	1	
Sierra Leone	3	2	1
Somalia	15	7	8
Sudan	112	49	63
Yugoslavia (FRY)	5	2	3
Zimbabwe	1	1	
Total	376	163	213

Source: Unpublished DoE Data, March 2007

While many aspects of the refugee experience and the impact on a young person remain the same, a number of differences impacting on the educational needs of refugee background students are apparent with the current cohorts. The majority have:

- spent longer periods of times in refugee camps or in a first country of asylum
- had significant disruptions to schooling and education with considerable numbers of children and adolescents arriving in Australia with limited or no formal education.

Humanitarian Entrants, excluding children five and under, had an average of 7.2 years of prior schooling in 2001–2002.¹⁷ As Figure 1 illustrates, the average number of years of prior schooling of humanitarian entrants in 2005–2006 was less than 5 years. The dramatic decrease is due to the number of refugees from Africa, the Middle East and Europe who have completed few years of schooling.

17. Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Australia's Support for Humanitarian Entrants 2004–05*, Canberra, 2005

Of particular significance for the education system are the figures for school aged children and young people. In the early primary school age group (6–9 years old), the average number of years of schooling is less than a year. Humanitarian entrants aged 10–19 years old from Africa, the Middle East and Europe have completed approximately 4 years of prior schooling with Asian humanitarian entrants having completed just over 6 years on average.

Many humanitarian entrants have spent a long time in refugee camps or in a country of first asylum and/or received little schooling. This contributes to difficulties in settling into Australian schools and classrooms. 2004–05 data shows that 45% of entrants had lived in a refugee camp. More than half of these had been in the camp(s) for more than 5 years, and 32% had been in the camp(s) for more than 10 years.¹⁸ Anecdotal reports suggest that even if they did go to school, the facilities and resources were generally poor and the teachers unqualified. Many of those living in a first country of asylum were unable to access education or received minimal instruction in a language other than their first language.

The level of reading ability at point of entry to Australia has also declined nationally over the last few years. In 2002–03, 27% of humanitarian entrants stated that they read well or very well in their preferred language, but by 2005–06 this had declined to 7% well, with less than 2% very well and 32% not at all.¹⁹ Many of the young new arrivals of refugee background cannot write their own name, have limited English proficiency, and struggle to understand their new school structure and environment, as well as coming to terms with the traumas of their refugee experience.

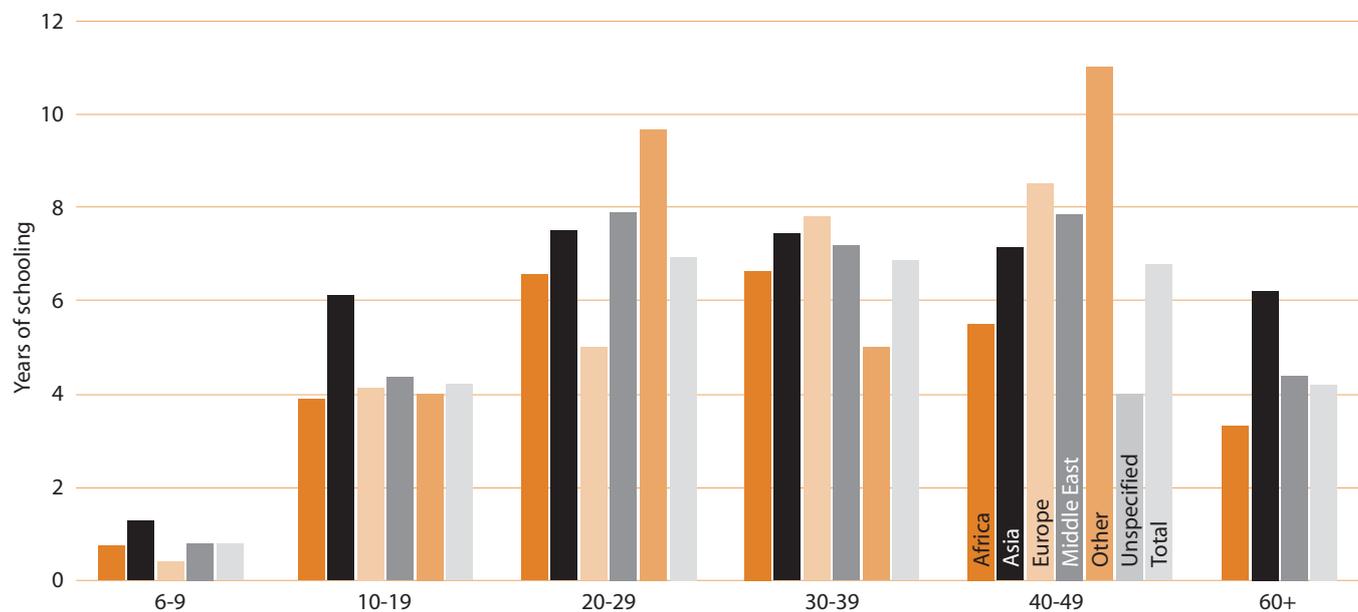
As a result of their pre-arrival experiences and education levels, these students need more time and resources to reach similar educational standards to their Australian peers. In addition, low proficiency in English creates an obstacle for young refugees to participate in mainstream schooling and can contribute to social isolation.

18. Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, *Australia's Support for Humanitarian Entrants 2004–05*, Canberra, 2005

19. Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Settlement Database, accessed 23 March, 2007

3. The changing profile of young refugees

Figure 1: Average number of years of schooling of people assisted under the IHSS by age and source region 2005–2006²⁰



Important notes: 1. Source Regions are derived using Nationality.
 2. Country of Birth is used where indication of Nationality is not available.
 3. 'Unspecified' Source Region refers to situation where both Nationality and Country of Birth is unavailable.

In response to this profile of young refugees with limited prior education, Victorian schools have had to provide more specialised programs for newly arrived students than in the past. Students need more time in intensive English language tuition before moving into mainstream classes. Current resourcing levels are being strained. Schools and teachers may not be familiar with the cultures, backgrounds and experiences of recent humanitarian entrants. They may sometimes be using inappropriate curricula and teaching methods to address the learning needs of these students.²¹

All indications are that a substantial proportion of Australia's Humanitarian Program will continue to be drawn from refugee camps around the world. Many of the younger cohort, such as the recently arrived young refugees from Burma, have experienced disrupted schooling, including lengthy periods of time spent in refugee camps in neighbouring countries.

Recent patterns of resettlement in Victoria contain a profile of young refugee learners

- with little or no previous formal education
- who have not achieved literacy in the language of their homeland or any other language
- without parental support
- who have frequently experienced extreme violence.

Attempting to learn a language without prior literacy skills is only one of the challenges they face.

Their capacity to learn and function in the social environment of schools and other education and training settings is frequently impaired by the trauma many have experienced. They are coping with culture shock in a new country with unfamiliar systems; they may be sleeping poorly and experiencing nightmares causing problems with concentration, lethargy and retention; and they may also have health, sight and hearing problems. Both as individuals and as a group, they have specific needs which require a strategic response from the education and training system.

Difficulties in learning and socialisation can lead to welfare and discipline issues emerging, posing a challenge for teachers and school communities.

20. *ibid*, accessed 22 March 2007

21. Department of Education and Training, *Research on Learning*, Victoria, 2005

4. A system response to the changing refugee profile

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DoE) IN Victoria has an established set of programs and initiatives that attempt to meet particular needs of refugee students in order to raise achievement, reduce disparity and lead to opportunities. These include intensive English language tuition in English Language Schools/Centres (ELS/Cs) for extended periods of time, outposting,²² Isolated ESL Student Support Program, support for ESL programs in mainstream schools, bridging programs and literacy support programs.

Addressing learning, social and welfare needs

Debney Park Secondary College has a literacy focus across the curriculum and all students participate in a specialised literacy program. Class sizes are small and there is intensive ESL support. An Out of School Hours Learning Support program supports classroom learning. The college has a Middle Years Program which groups students across ages with similar learning needs. Staff work together in professional learning teams to develop and implement curriculum which is coherently skills based and responsive. The college has extensive welfare support and a welfare program that runs across the school based on reduction of risk and bridging cultural differences. Regular parent information sessions are run using multicultural education aides and interpreters. Partnerships with organisations and trusts enable many students to stay at school. All students receive individual counselling regarding subject choices, careers and pathways into appropriate further study. The college has high retention rates and an average of more than 85% of year 12 students went on to tertiary education in the years 2003–2005, indicating the success of this comprehensive approach.

There are also strong examples available of school-based approaches addressing learning, welfare, family and discipline issues in a coherent framework. Schools such as Debney Park Secondary College, that have focused on meeting the learning, social and welfare needs of refugee students, have demonstrated that comprehensive student focused strategies can produce effective outcomes. More schools with refugee enrolments need to be encouraged to make the necessary changes to ensure that refugee students feel positive about attending and remaining at school, and are given appropriate support to achieve academic success and to make informed choices about pathways beyond school.

However, schools are currently under-resourced to meet the demands of high needs refugee groups and need partnerships which can help introduce new strategies. A strategy is required based on a framework of partnerships, with an emphasis on a whole school approach to supporting refugee students' educational outcomes and emotional well-being. Foundation House, also known as the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST), has been offering specialised services for refugees since 1987 and has developed a whole school approach based on its experience of supporting refugee young people and their families in a school context. Its 2004 resource, *School's In for Refugees*, documents policies and practices recommended for a whole school approach. Schools and organisations require support to develop these policies and practices within their particular environment.

Initiatives established through other government departments point to the need for a coordinated and strategic response to the needs of refugees. As an example, the Refugee Support Package initiated in 2005 provided for six refugee workers in Melbourne and regional locations to assist newly arrived refugees to access services, as well as increase community participation and obtain employment.

22. The intensive outposting program places primary school teachers from an ELS/C in a primary school or cluster of schools to provide a new arrivals program for students who are learning English as a second language. ELS/C primary teachers visit a number of primary schools in an area where new arrivals are enrolled in the visiting outposting program.

4. A system response to the changing refugee profile

Adopting a whole of government approach would ensure that welfare and related family needs are able to be met through the formation of partnerships between schools and communities, to increase their capacity to address the learning and settlement needs of young refugees. Partnerships that actively facilitate the involvement of parents in their children's education and transitions need to be a prominent feature of a system strategy, given the importance that the government's *Blueprint for Government Schools* places on school engagement with parents and the wider community. The need to involve the parents of refugee students is particularly acute.

A coordinated strategy to meet the needs of refugee students would provide a symbolic focus encouraging schools to develop whole school responses to meeting the needs of refugee students and their families.

The *Blueprint for Government Schools* Flagship Strategy 1, 'Student Learning', has a focus on meeting the needs of individual students and responding to diverse student needs, and provides the platform for developing a more coherent strategy linking system strategies and school responses.

Refugee students' needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests should be better reflected in the learning program. A strategy which supported schools to implement the *Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools*, reporting on student learning, transitions and well-being with particular relevance to students from refugee backgrounds, would be of high value to both schools and students.

Decentralised systems make specialist areas potentially difficult to resource. Within the current decentralised education system, DoE needs to ensure that policies and procedures contain mechanisms which ensure that resource allocation adequately supports minority groups, such as refugee students.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1 That the Victorian Department of Education (DoE) develop a coherent refugee education strategy that draws together responses to meet the learning, welfare and family support needs of refugee students.



5. Data collection and analysis

A SYSTEM RESPONSE NEEDS TO BE BUILT ON an improved knowledge and understanding of how young refugees are faring as a group of learners. Transition coordinators at ELSs support the transition of students from ELCs and ELSs to mainstream schools. However, no systemic data is collected, analysed or reported on the outcomes of transition for refugee students either as they enter, move between or leave mainstream schools. As a result, there is a lack of accurate knowledge on the outcomes of transition, school retention and pathways for refugee students. With no available data, it is difficult to determine the extent to which refugee students are making successful transitions. Such information needs to be collected and analysed.

RECOMMENDATION

2 That system data be collected, reported and analysed on an annual basis which tracks refugee student progress throughout their education.



6. Acquisition of language skills

Support for new arrivals

Students from a refugee background who have experienced significantly interrupted schooling require intensive support over a long period of time to enable them to achieve proficiency in academic language. It is likely to take 10 years for ESL learners with disrupted schooling to reach a stage where they have equivalent English to their peers.²³

In response to the significant increase in the number of new arrival students entering Victorian schools with little, no, or severely interrupted schooling, the Victorian Government has put in place a series of initiatives. These include appointing transition coordinators to ELS/Cs to support the transition of students into mainstream schools, providing additional funding to selected schools to support student literacy needs, and establishing dialogue with Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) to discuss broader partnership responses.²⁴

In recognition of the language and literacy needs of new migrants, the Commonwealth Government funds, and the Victorian Government administers, specialist assistance in the form of the English as a Second Language (ESL) New Arrivals Program. The Commonwealth New Arrivals funding is directed to newly arrived migrants according to visa categories. The Victorian Government extends this assistance to:

- temporary residents who satisfy all Commonwealth eligibility criteria except permanent residency; and
 - other permanent and temporary newly arrived residents in need of intensive ESL support
- thus ensuring that many young people who have had refugee-like experiences can also access ESL support.

Victoria provides ESL assistance for newly arrived students through nine ELS/Cs in the Melbourne metropolitan area. Of these, four are stand-alone facilities that cater for primary and secondary students up to Year 10, while the other five are attached to mainstream primary and secondary schools. In regional Victoria there are also services in Geelong, Shepparton and Ballarat. In other areas the Isolated ESL Student Support Program provides assistance to schools to support newly arrived students.

The ESL New Arrivals Program is funded by the Commonwealth Government at \$5,277 per eligible student (regardless of their particular educational needs). The Commonwealth funds these students for 20 weeks English language tuition in ELS/Cs or through outpostting services. The State Government has recognised that many students require additional time in intensive language tuition, and extends the time, on the basis of a student's need, for up to 12 months. If delivered in schools, it is expected that students will be provided with a minimum of 10 hours of ESL assistance a week through outpostting.

The current level of Commonwealth funding is insufficient for those refugees who have had minimal prior schooling, possess low levels of literacy and numeracy, and have also experienced trauma and possibly torture. This learner profile of typical young refugees is not aligned with Commonwealth resourcing for language skills.

The most disadvantaged refugee students have acquired insufficient language skills to leave the ELS/Cs after only six months. Some ELS/Cs are keeping students enrolled for longer periods depending on need and capacity, but Commonwealth funding only covers the first 20 weeks.

23. Collier, V., How Long? A Synthesis of Research on Academic Achievement in a Second Language, *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 509–531, 1989

24. Department of Education and Training, *ESL Report*, Victoria, 2004

RECOMMENDATION

3 That the Commonwealth be encouraged to increase per capita funding for the English as a Second Language (ESL) New Arrivals Program to reflect the longer period of time required to assist refugee students with little or no prior education to gain proficiency in English before transition into mainstream education.

English language and literacy support in mainstream education

Each of the four metropolitan ELSs provides an outreach service coordinator. The coordinator assists teachers in local schools to assess the English language learning needs of new arrivals, and recommends the most appropriate program, or assists with the development of an ESL program, for the student. The coordinator ensures that the school is aware of the resources available to support new arrivals. An ESL teacher either provides support for the mainstream teacher in the class environment or holds individual or small group sessions.

In addition to the delivery of intensive English language tuition for new arrivals, the Victorian Government has a number of existing strategies that assist young people from refugee backgrounds to acquire English language and literacy skills in mainstream schools.

These include:

- the funding of bridging programs in mainstream schools which support students in need of intensive literacy teaching in their transition from intensive new arrival courses into mainstream education
- the provision of additional multicultural education aides (MEAs) to assist with communication between the school and families, and provide support to students in the classroom
- literacy support programs for ELS/Cs.

While these initiatives have been welcome, ESL provision in mainstream schools is still struggling to meet the needs of all refugee students.

Since 2005 Victorian schools have been provided with resources to deliver literacy and language support within the new resource allocation model of the Student Resource Package (SRP). SRP Equity funding is primarily based on the application of a Student Family Occupation Index to determine the relative disadvantage of the student population in a given school. Equity funding within the SRP is particularly intended to improve achievement in literacy and numeracy for students at risk of not achieving success at school. ESL Index funding, which sits within the SRP, still has a separate funding line, as does the allocation for provision of MEAs. From 2007, the ESL figure in the SRP will combine ESL Index funding and the MEA allocation.

Schools have the flexibility to decide how they will use this funding. However, each school needs to demonstrate through their monitoring and accountability processes that the Equity funding is being used to improve outcomes for targeted students. With the significant shifts in the resources being provided to schools for these purposes there are concerns that some schools may not be making the most effective use of the available funding to meet the language and literacy needs of refugee cohorts. These concerns particularly relate to schools with smaller numbers of young people from refugee backgrounds. Such schools often lack the capacity to respond adequately to refugee student needs and may need to access some flexible resources that provide advice and assistance across a number of schools.

Many schools may also not yet understand the flexibility and options that exist for using the SRP Equity resources. The key challenge is to assist schools to use these resources appropriately and effectively.

6. Acquisition of language skills

The overall SRP Equity funding provided to schools needs to be linked to the new accountability framework to ensure that school activity is focused on improving outcomes for refugee students. Analysis of how funding is being used through the accountability measures in the *Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools* is required to determine whether resources are being used appropriately.

Strategies to provide more intensive support might include appointing:

- additional ESL teachers
- bicultural teachers/MEAs
- literacy/numeracy specialists.

RECOMMENDATION

4 That ESL Index funding continue to be explicitly identified in the Student Resource Package (SRP) and that additional accountability mechanisms for effective use of funds are employed.

RECOMMENDATION

5 That DoE analyse how effectively schools are meeting the needs of refugee students within existing resources such as Core, Literacy and Student Family Occupation funding.

Professional development in teaching language and literacy across the curriculum

The changing profile of students with refugee backgrounds, in particular those entering the middle years of schooling (Years 5–9) and above with little previous school experience either in their home country, in refugee camps or in a first country of asylum, has major implications for teaching.

It is generally recognised that it will take new arrival students from a low literacy background longer than those with intact schooling to reach the same point of proficiency in English. Research indicates that while it is likely to take a student with intact schooling from 5 to 7 years to attain proficiency in English, it is likely to take a student with little or no prior formal schooling from 7 to 9 years to reach the same point.²⁵ This longer pathway is usually the case, whatever the age of the student. The learning challenge for these students relates not only to their need to learn literacy in English, but also to their need to become familiar with formal education, its aims and the culture in which it takes place.

The skills of teaching students to read and write are expected to be dealt with at primary school level, so there are professional development issues for the secondary system if effective literacy support for refugee students is to be provided in mainstream schools. Access to specialist support in learning English will be required for some students even in the later years of secondary school.

A literacy support strategy

Noble Park English Language School has trialled a restructuring of secondary school classes, replacing age-based groupings of students with groups formed according to language and literacy acquisition. They are supplementing this approach with the use of two teachers in each classroom and cross-age tutoring.

25. Collier, V., How Long? A Synthesis of Research on Academic Achievement in a Second Language, *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 509–531, 1989

6. Acquisition of language skills

Refugee background students in Australia learning English must acquire both basic oral communication skills, as well as the oral and written skills necessary to complete tasks required for cognitively demanding academic study.

Strategies that can support all classroom teachers in teaching reading, writing and language skills to refugee students should be a specific focus of a refugee education strategy, within a broader focus on supporting students with low levels of literacy. Such strategies should support a combination of specific interventions and the provision of general classroom support.

Flagship Strategy 5 of the *Blueprint for Government Schools* identifies teacher professional development as necessary to enable teachers to enhance their content knowledge and develop the skills necessary to improve the teacher–learner relationship and student learning outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION

6 That a statewide professional development strategy to develop teacher knowledge and skills in literacy and language support across all subject areas be developed.

7. Assisting with school engagement and recovery from trauma

Professional development

Professional development is needed for teaching and support staff in improving outcomes for refugee students in relation to emotional health. School personnel may require increased understanding of:

- working with cultural diversity
- the refugee experience
- the impact of trauma
- a framework for recovery from torture and trauma
- how the trauma reaction and lack of schooling may impact on learning and behaviour
- how school policies and practices can contribute to recovery and refugee student well-being.

Professional development, coupled with consultancy support, has proven an effective way of assisting

Developing a whole school approach

Foundation House, the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, provides professional development and consultancy support for school staff and school support staff. Professional development raises awareness and understanding of the refugee experience, the impact of torture and trauma, a framework for recovery, and ways in which a whole school approach can offer support to refugee background students. Individual counselling and group programs are also available to refugee young people through Foundation House.

schools to examine and develop their policies and practices to provide a whole school approach to refugee readiness. Access to appropriate professional development and consultancy is particularly an issue in new areas of refugee settlement within the Melbourne metropolitan area and in rural and regional areas.

There are already key resources available to support schools in professional development activity,²⁶ but the awareness of and access to these is not sufficiently widespread.

RECOMMENDATION

7 That a statewide professional development strategy, incorporating specialist consultancy support, be designed to assist schools to develop a whole school approach to supporting refugee students.

Pre-service teacher training

Graduates entering the teaching profession require a good understanding of cultural diversity, the refugee experience and its impact on learning and settlement to enable them to work inclusively in culturally diverse settings. They should also have developed a range of strategies to teach English language and literacy in their curriculum areas in order to address the individual needs of all students, including those of refugee background.

The draft standards of professional practice for graduating teachers, as outlined in the Victorian Institute of Teaching's draft paper, *The Standards, Guidelines and Process for the Accreditation of Pre-Service Teacher Education Courses*, provide guidance to tertiary institutions on the nature and structure of courses they provide.²⁷ While each tertiary institution determines how its students will reach the required standards, the proposed guidelines for the approval of pre-service teacher education courses include an expectation that courses should prepare graduates to respond effectively to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) student groups.

RECOMMENDATION

8 That education faculties within tertiary institutions incorporate curriculum about the refugee experience and teaching language and literacy into pre-service teacher education courses for all trainee teachers.

26. *Moving in New Directions* and *Not a Matter of Choice*, produced by DoE, and *School's In for Refugees*, produced by Foundation House, are examples of such resources.

27. Victorian Institute of Teaching, *The Standards, Guidelines and Process for the Accreditation of Pre-service Teacher Education Courses*, draft paper for discussion by stakeholders in pre-service teacher education, June 2006



8. Transitions

A FAIRER VICTORIA EMPHASISES THE IMPORTANCE of focusing support at critical transitions in life, which can be times of great vulnerability, where existing disadvantage can become further entrenched. One of these major transitions occurs when young people are at risk of disengagement from education and training opportunities.

Supporting student well-being during transition

The importance of careful management of transitions has been recognised within education policy through both the *Blueprint for Government Schools* and in the post-compulsory reforms flowing from the 2000 *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria*.²⁸ Transitions are a key element of the *Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools*.

Transitions for all students, from primary through secondary to further education and training, increasingly occur within a policy framework of individualised support, preliminary orientation to the new environment, active involvement of parents, and tracking of transition outcomes. Refugee students making the transition between primary and secondary schools may need extra support and orientation, depending on the length of time they have been in Australia and their experiences prior to arrival.

Of the series of transitions within the education system that students with refugee backgrounds must make, the most crucial is generally the transition from the ELS/Cs, which they have usually attended for 6–12 months, to the mainstream school in which they enrol.

ELS/Cs offer a safe, supportive environment that is focused on the needs of the refugee student. The transition into the broader school environment can trigger previous feelings of loss and trauma, due to the less certain and focused setting. It can decrease feelings of self-worth and increase anxiety because of the academic expectations placed on students, regardless of prior learning experiences and schooling. Refugee students may need to learn appropriate behaviours, both within the classroom and in the general school setting, if they have limited or no previous formal schooling. It is often at this early point of their mainstream education that student absenteeism increases and they begin to disengage from the education system. Transition for refugee students needs to be particularly focused on both welfare and learning issues, and be well-planned, to minimise stress and enhance the prospects of success.

ELs involve particular transition issues as they are stand-alone and not attached to mainstream schools, unlike the ELCs. As a result, refugee students in ELs are unlikely to be familiar with the mainstream school environment. Transition officers attached to ELs support the transition of exiting students. Some refugee students in ELCs spend time in the mainstream school prior to transferring from the ELC as part of the transition process.

28. Department of Education and Training, *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria – Kirby Report*, Victoria, 2000

Beaut Buddies

Western English Language School, in partnership with Kealba Secondary College and Foundation House, have developed a successful transition model, 'Beaut Buddies', where refugee students and their buddies meet several times prior to the refugee students starting at the mainstream school. They continue to have programmed time together once the refugee students have commenced mainstream schooling.

Refugee students need systematic exposure to transition programs providing a preliminary 'taster' of the mainstream school experience, while still enrolled at the ELS or the ELC. One of the effective ways of doing this is through a buddy or mentoring program during which students meet prior to the refugee students commencing study at the mainstream school. They then continue to meet on a regular basis for several terms.

RECOMMENDATION

9 That specialist consultancy support and resources be provided to assist schools to develop transition programs that increase refugee student connectedness. Good transition models should be promoted and incorporated into Knowledge Bank.

Family engagement during transition

Transitions work most effectively when families, staff and students are all engaged in the process.

Families of refugee students often have little understanding of the Australian education system and may have unrealistic expectations about the time and pathways necessary to achieve goals, given the prior educational and life experiences of their children. They can place pressure on their children to proceed directly to schools rather than developing English language and literacy skills at an ELS/C. Schools are seen by some families to offer opportunities for advancement as well as social and sporting experiences that ELS/Cs are unable to provide.

Some resources have been developed by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) and VFST which provide strategies around general school engagement with families.²⁹ However, there is a need for specialist expertise to assist in engaging families with the transition process and in providing them with appropriate information about the Australian education system.

RECOMMENDATION

10 That additional resources be allocated to provide specialist expertise to assist in engaging families with the transition process.

29. Programs such as those piloted by Foundation House in 2005 with the Sudanese community (*Two Cultures, One Life: Parent Engagement Program*) have demonstrated good methodologies for this process and the direct benefit of parental involvement in schools.

A Guide for Newly Arrived Young People – Understanding the Victorian Education and Training System, funded by DIMIA and developed by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) and the Refugee Young People and Transitions Working Group, provides an introduction to, and overview of, the Victorian education and training system for CALD families.

Opening the School Gate (CMYI) is a resource kit that provides school staff with strategies to encourage CALD parents and families to fully participate in the educational experience of their children at school.

8. Transitions

Education support for successful transition

Nineteen primary and secondary schools received additional funding, whilst some other schools have used their SRP Equity funding, to establish 'bridging programs' that offer transition support to refugees who fit the learners' profile identified earlier in this document.³⁰ Bridging programs offer intensive educational support and pastoral care to refugee students to assist them to make an effective transition into the school.

Several geographically located cluster bridging programs have been established which provide the same intensive support to refugee students, with one program used by a number of schools. Students travel from surrounding areas to a school with a bridging program because their local school does not have enough refugee students to warrant one. These programs assist students' literacy and numeracy development and integrate them into a mainstream school during the period they attend the bridging program. However, at the completion of their time in the bridging program, students generally go to their local school. This means more change and another unfamiliar school environment, which can exacerbate student anxieties. Some refugee students find cluster bridging programs difficult because travelling to a school out of the area may be complicated, and they are very keen to go straight into the local school where they intend to complete their education.

In schools with small enrolments of refugee students, transition models that offer extra assistance within mainstream classes and ESL support in some curriculum areas need to be promoted. Models are particularly required for schools with only a few refugee students.

Mainstream transition principles should be consistently applied to the series of transitions that students from refugee backgrounds must make into, through and from, the school system. Developing suitable options for refugee students with low levels of literacy and interrupted schooling through VCAL, VET and support programs in TAFE, requires tailored support for students.

An approach to supporting senior students

The Transition VCAL program for refugee students at Cleeland Secondary College delivered in partnership with AMES is a good example of the development of tailored post-compulsory education transition models.

RECOMMENDATION

11 That bridging programs and other transition models be evaluated with a view to subsequently identifying, promoting and resourcing exemplar models.

30. Following regional briefings at the end of 2004, schools applied for additional funding to implement bridging programs in 2005 and 2006. The 2007 funding allocation to 32 schools will enable them to implement a range of transition initiatives to support students in moving into mainstream curriculum.

Assessment for education and welfare support

Post-compulsory education transition issues include decision-making processes on where to place students with a refugee background aged 16 and above who have the education levels of much younger students.

When enrolling in ELS/Cs and then making the transition into mainstream schools, students are assessed differently in each setting. Accurate assessment is critical in determining suitable and effective placement for the individual student. Often students are placed in year levels where they struggle to cope with the curriculum as well as with the socialisation of resettlement. The combination of inadequate English language skills together with having to manage complex social and welfare issues relating to their refugee and resettlement experiences, points to the need to have a common assessment tool that is shared across educational settings, ensuring consistency of educational and welfare support.

RECOMMENDATION

12 That a common assessment tool, which encompasses the welfare and educational needs of refugee young people, be developed and used, in particular during transition.

Reporting on transition outcomes

The *Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools* provides the vehicle for improving transitions for refugees by requiring schools to report on programs, support and advice to students regarding appropriate pathways and transitions. Identification of refugees as a specific cohort within schools, and reporting on strategies to improve their transition and well-being outcomes, would provide schools with the incentive to adopt and implement the relevant strategies contained in existing resources.

RECOMMENDATION

13 That reporting on transitions within the *Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools* focus on transition into the mainstream school, as well as transition from the school, for the refugee student cohort.

9. Providing additional learning support out of school hours

OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS LEARNING SUPPORT Programs aim to provide extra support to students who have significant levels of disadvantage. They are a crucial support structure for refugee students, as their parents are frequently unable to provide support comparable to that provided by the parents of other students.

The Study Support National Evaluation and Development Programme, a three year longitudinal study into the impact of participation in out of school hours learning on the academic attainment, attitudes and school attendance of secondary school students in the United Kingdom, examined the effect of groups that offered academic support as well as those that offered sport, musical and arts activities, hobby clubs and men-

toring and peer education programs.³¹ Quantitative research tracked over 8,000 students from 52 schools and was supported by qualitative data from 19 schools and developmental work with a further 83 schools and other study support projects. The research found firm evidence in all the schools studied that students who participate in study support (Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs) do better than would have been expected from baseline measures in academic attainment, attitudes to school and attendance at school. Programs appear to be particularly effective for students from minority ethnic communities. Qualitative studies showed that the voluntary nature of participation in the programs is key to their effectiveness.



31. Department for Education and Skills, *The Essential Guide to the Impact of Study Support*, <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/studysupport/docs/essguide>, accessed on 24 August 2006

9. Providing additional learning support out of school hours

Local experience confirms this international research with anecdotal evidence. It has shown that Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs combine both educational and social components to meet the needs of young refugees, including the important role of connecting refugee students to the mainstream population.³² Effective support programs develop confidence and self-esteem, and provide opportunities for interaction that can help develop social skills, whilst also providing appropriate tuition and academic support.

Good practice Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs have demonstrated the capacity to:

- improve students' feeling of security and confidence, resulting in improved behaviour and attendance at school
- improve the learning outcomes of students
- develop communication skills and social supports
- increase the confidence of parents to allow their daughters to participate
- provide expert help outside the classroom
- offer a program that is valued by students.

Data collected from the 51 programs that responded to a REPP survey in 2005 showed that a minimum of 1,420 students of refugee background regularly attended these programs.³³ As an example, one student discussed her Out of School Hours Learning Support Program in the following terms:

[I come] to do my work. I want the teacher to help and to improve my English. The teacher explain, if it's hard, it will then be easy for me. I wish it was every day. I would come every day even if I didn't have homework I'd ask the teacher to give me more. It's good for us, especially to improve our language. I like the teachers. I like to do my homework. I enjoy it very much. I don't like to stay home (13 year old girl from Ethiopia in Australia for 11 months, attending an Out of School Hours Learning Support Program).³⁴

Currently, Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs in Victoria provide a mixture of homework programs, additional tutoring and/or social support of various kinds. Such support programs are an important strategy that provide additional tutoring for students outside school hours, and have become increasingly important as a means of improving educational outcomes for students from refugee backgrounds with disrupted or little previous formal education. Those that provide social support assist students in understanding and acculturating to the mainstream community.

The extra tutoring provided can include English language, literacy, numeracy, homework subjects, and/or skills in how to study. Additional literacy support is particularly useful for those students in the early stages of schooling or for those who have had highly disrupted schooling.

Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs are coordinated either by community sector agencies, local government, schools, libraries or churches. They can range from small informal programs for less than 10 students to large programs with between 200 and 400 students. Programs are generally offered in schools and community settings by tutors and volunteers at little or no cost to the student.

Over 75% of the 71 Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs identified through the 2005 REPP survey are located in the Northern and Western Metropolitan DoE regions. There are also significant numbers operating in the Southern Metropolitan DoE region. The Darebin, Yarra, Greater Dandenong, Brimbank, and Maribyrnong Local Government Areas (LGAs) are the locations of multiple support programs.³⁵

32. REPP research, documented in *Case Studies of Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs*, yet to be published

33. REPP data, documented in *A Snapshot of Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs*, yet to be published

34. Interview for REPP, documented in *Case Studies of Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs*, yet to be published

35. REPP data, documented in *A Snapshot of Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs*, yet to be published

9. Providing additional learning support out of school hours

Nearly all of the Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs provide homework support, while three-quarters also provide tutoring. Approximately a third provide social activities as well. Participants with Arabic and African language backgrounds comprise the majority of participants in the programs.

Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs are currently funded by a mix of philanthropic grants and trusts, with the support of various government initiatives such as the School Focused Youth Service (SFYS), Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs), LLENs, DoE Low Literacy Grants and Victorian Multicultural Commission Grants. However, in many cases organisations fund their own programs and some programs are run entirely by volunteers.

The main issues identified in relation to Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs are:

- limited resources leading to high reliance on programs staffed by volunteers
- recruitment, training and retention of volunteers
- being able to accommodate the numbers of students who want to participate
- ensuring that the skills of available tutors match the needs of students, especially in maths and science.

Twenty percent of programs provide no training to the volunteer tutors while others provide some training, ranging from one-off induction to ongoing support and training. The 2005 REPP survey of Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs in Victoria found that approximately 20% employed skilled or trained tutors or teachers.³⁶

Strengthening Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs

Refugee students need access to well-resourced and appropriate learning support programs. All schools and ELS/Cs with enrolments of refugee students should have the ability to establish accessible homework programs, either themselves or through other providers.

Many Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs currently depend on well-intentioned but untrained volunteers. Programs lack basic infrastructure and quality assurance mechanisms. Dependence on volunteering can result in increased program instability, and can be difficult to sustain in the less affluent areas, where refugees tend to reside. Program stability is particularly important for students from refugee backgrounds.

Current arrangements also lack the capacity to ensure that programs meet student needs. Instead they tend to reflect what the school or facility is able to provide. While there is high demand for mathematics and science tutors, these are often in short supply. The use of paid tutors can help to meet more students' needs by selecting appropriate tutors to provide the support required.³⁷

The lack of system endorsement and management of programs can lead to poor connections between some schools and local Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs. Many of the programs are not conducted by schools, and school staff need to have confidence in the quality of programs in order to endorse them and refer students to them.

In some cases, communication between local schools and community based Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs is reported to be ad hoc. The lack of clear referral mechanisms from schools to locally available Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs can result in students missing out on the support that should be automatically received.

36. *ibid*

37. The "Aim High" program at Debney Park Secondary College provides such an example.

The current fragmented arrangements of provision through Adult Community Education (ACE) providers, libraries, and various church and community groups and schools would benefit from being actively linked to schools through formalised referral arrangements.

While Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs are generally staffed by volunteers, the needs of the refugee students enrolled in the post-compulsory years are complex, and require professional and systemic support. Full reliance on a volunteer program to provide the crucial support to supplement school-based learning for this cohort in Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs is likely to produce inconsistent levels of outcomes.

In New Zealand and New South Wales, governments have established after school and homework support programs for refugee students, with a strong emphasis on ensuring that programs are delivered by trained staff and meet the needs of refugee students. The New Zealand programs are delivered through school locations, while the NSW government funds after school programs for refugee students in four Intensive English Language Centres. The NSW program targets refugee students who have exited from the ESL New Arrivals Program into secondary schools.

In both cases, government involvement ensures equity of access to programs, the availability of trained tutors, and the collection of data that enables subsequent evaluation to occur. The New Zealand homework programs are exclusively for senior students of refugee background, but the 11 study support centres are designed for all underachieving students, of which refugees make up a significant proportion.

Promoting programs to families

One of the factors that creates such a strong need for Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs arises from the lack of knowledge and capacity of refugee families to support their children's learning. An important element of strengthened coordination would be promoting strategies to inform parents and families about programs and encourage participation in their children's education.

Working with parents and their children

Albion North Primary School piloted a 10-week after school program with Vietnamese parents and students. Staffed by school teachers and school support staff, it was designed to:

- assist the parents to support their children and promote understanding of the Australian school system
- develop parents' knowledge, skills and confidence in supporting their children's homework and education
- promote positive community and school relationships
- highlight the importance of play in developing a child's academic and social skills.

RECOMMENDATION

14 That the Victorian Government resource a regional initiative to demonstrate and trial a coordinated approach for Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs.

10. Engaging refugee families and communities

WHILE FINDING WAYS TO ENGAGE parents in Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs is one area that requires attention, parents need to be engaged in a much wider sense. Research indicates that the active involvement of parents in their child's education has a significant positive effect on students.³⁸ The Victorian education system is built around an expectation that parents should and will be involved in schools and education. Generally, students do better at school if their parents/guardians are actively engaged.

It is generally the case that in new and emerging CALD communities, parental involvement in all levels of schooling is low. The families of refugee students are also likely to have reduced capacity to provide support for their children, lacking the language skills and sufficient knowledge of the culture and education system to support their children, and advocate on their behalf.

Families sometimes place unrealistic expectations and pressures on young people, given their children's previous levels and experience of schooling. It may be difficult to provide appropriate study space at home. Intergenerational tensions can develop, due to the students' exposure to Australian cultural norms regarding the treatment of young people, that may conflict with traditional cultural approaches.



38. Hill, P., Rowe, K. and Holmes-Smith, P., *The Victorian Quality Schools Project: A Study of School and Teacher Effectiveness*, Centre for Applied Educational Research, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1996

10. Engaging refugee families and communities

A fundamental principle in planning for the education of young refugees is family inclusiveness. Programs are required that build the capacity of new arrival communities and families to participate and integrate into school and wider community settings.

Schools need to engage the families of refugee students as well as provide extra assistance to strengthen family support. Educational materials, professional development and school based resources all need to be developed, to assist refugees and their families to participate successfully in the education system.

Programs to support refugee background students in schools must have the capacity to facilitate parental/community involvement in school structures including:

- school councils
- school based extra curricular activities
- parent teacher meetings.³⁹

Relevant resource material for engaging families is available.⁴⁰

However, a single focus on producing and distributing resources and materials will not be sufficient to achieve engagement and develop understanding. Families need orientation and familiarisation about the Australian education system and the school culture. Teachers and school staff equally need to develop culturally inclusive practice in engaging with refugees in order to develop supportive relationships that can lead to more effective learning.

Engaging parents/guardians is a major issue for mainstream schools, but is a critical issue to be addressed for refugee students if they are to be provided with adequate support and assistance. Families need to be assisted to provide support for their children who may struggle to overcome their lack of previous formal education, the language barriers and the challenges of unfamiliar ways of studying.

Many ELS/Cs have good parent engagement strategies due to their recognition of the needs of refugee students and their families. Maintaining this focus on engaging parents in the transition process between ELS/Cs and schools would be assisted if strategies were developed to inform parents about pathways and careers education, particularly in relation to viable alternative pathways in the post-compulsory education years (such as VCAL, VET and New Apprenticeships).

A combination of professional development to help schools develop genuine partnerships with parents and their communities and to learn about resources, and the provision of specialist short-term support to assist schools establish these relationships through a community liaison role would be of significant benefit. There are already examples of both primary and secondary schools demonstrating good practice that can be more widely promoted.

39. Programs such as those piloted by Foundation House in 2005 with the Sudanese community (*Two Cultures, One Life: Parent Engagement Program*) have demonstrated good methodologies for this process and the direct benefit of parental involvement in schools.

40. *A Guide for Newly Arrived Young People – Understanding the Victorian Education and Training System*, funded by DIMIA and developed by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) and the Refugee Young People and Transitions Working Group, provides an introduction to, and overview of, the Victorian education and training system for CALD families.

Opening the School Gate (CMYI) is a resource kit that provides school staff with strategies to encourage CALD parents and families to fully participate in the educational experience of their children at school.

10. Engaging refugee families and communities

Partnerships with parents

Debnay Park Secondary College provides a model at the secondary level on strategies to communicate with refugee families, based around the use of interpreters, sharing information in low-key ways, and adopting approaches that facilitate parents to raise concerns.

Brunswick Secondary College and English Language Centre, in partnership with the Victorian Arabic Social Services and Foundation House, ran the *Parents Learning Together Program* for refugee parents from Arabic speaking backgrounds.

The parent engagement program, *Two Cultures, One Life*, run at St Albans' Primary School in partnership with Foundation House for 28 Sudanese parents/guardians, enabled the school to gain valuable insight into the Sudanese community's previous educational experiences and their expectations of Australian education. Senior school staff delivered a program designed to assist parents understand the education system in Victoria, student's rights and responsibilities, methods of teaching and learning, and how parents can be involved in their children's schooling (e.g. school council). Training was conducted on school premises over 4 weeks and included classroom visits and activities to observe how students learn. One parent was mentored by the school principal and became a member of the school council.

RECOMMENDATION

15 That schools demonstrating good practice of parent engagement and involvement be identified and invited to share these strategies through Knowledge Bank and systemic professional development.

RECOMMENDATION

16 That schools develop formal linkages with relevant agencies that have a capacity to provide ongoing consultancy support in relation to working with refugee families.

11. Support for multicultural education aides

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AIDES (MEAs) play a vital role in the emotional well-being and educational outcomes of many refugee background students. They assist with communication between the school and families, support students and teachers in the classroom and are often a trusted person in the school for students of refugee background. Their role is designed by the school and can vary considerably between schools.

Many MEAs have their first experience of the Australian education system in their role as an aide. They are dependent on the school for guidance and support. They are generally quite isolated with little opportunity to network and receive collegiate support from other aides in similar positions.

DoE offers MEA training days annually which are very well received for the professional content and networking opportunities they offer. MEAs can participate in an accredited online training program offered to all School Services Officers (SSOs); however, it is not widely taken up. DoE is currently undertaking a review of SSO training and development needs and the accredited online training program.

The SSO training has been based on a Certificate III from the Public Sector Training Package. This qualification includes a number of elective competency units from the Community Services Training Package. The Community Services Training Package is currently being reviewed. The review presents an opportunity for the education sector to ensure that the revised training package includes competency units that describe the skills and knowledge required by MEAs.

MEAs would benefit enormously from having the opportunity to participate in an accredited training course where they can receive professional development and achieve a recognised qualification with pathways into further training and employment. They would also benefit from meeting with other MEAs to share good practice and concerns.

RECOMMENDATION

17 That an appropriate accredited training course be developed and promoted for multicultural education aides (MEAs). Regional MEA networks supported by DoE should be established.

12. The post-compulsory education age group

THE BENEFITS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT and of education and training should be extended to all young people. Life-long learning and continuing skill development has been identified as a requirement for a future fair Victoria and a smoothly functioning economy in key government reports.⁴¹ However, access to ongoing opportunities for learning and skill development will be particularly important for many refugee young people to be able to achieve their career goals. The education system needs to be able to equip refugee young people with the skills and confidence to cope with the stress of

critical life transitions, which are likely to include various forms of training and employment. This requires an approach that reaches beyond the classroom to developing personal and social support systems that will build the resilience of refugee students for life.

Recently arrived students from refugee backgrounds aged 16 years and above with educational levels of much younger students are a group of particular concern. Literacy remains a significant barrier for many of these young people upon completing their time in an ELS/C.



41. *A Fairer Victoria*, 2005; *Maintaining the Advantage: Skilled Victorians*, 2006; *Ministerial Review of Post-Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria*, 2000

12. The post-compulsory education age group

Secondary schools which agree to enrol these students often have difficulty in placing them in an appropriate year level as they do not have the academic skills to cope at senior level, but there are negative impacts on socialisation and self-esteem if they are placed with significantly younger children. As a result, the refugee student can easily become disengaged with the school system.

If the post-compulsory education refugee cohort is not carefully assisted through education and training, there are likely to be long term social consequences for the community. This potential can be seen in the high levels of youth unemployment in LGAs that have been receiving large numbers of people from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds.

The responsibility of the education sector to provide equitable outcomes for refugee young people represents a commitment to providing both the necessary skills as well as clear pathways to further education, training and employment.

Traditional pathways will not meet the needs of some groups of refugees such as those with a learner profile of interrupted schooling. These students need more flexible learning programs that can combine work and study and contextualise learning and curriculum. Accredited vocational training outcomes delivered in non-literate modes, such as the social enterprise training programs developed by AMES, should be more widely available to refugee students of post-compulsory education age.

There may also be value in developing certificate programs conducted in the refugees' original language that could enable further training and study to be undertaken and relevant skills developed.

Specifically designed pathways can be developed through partnerships. Eight of the Victorian LLENs have developed a Memorandum of Understanding with CMYI to work together to improve pathways for young refugees. For schools, a key practical challenge is in working with the local communities and industry to create links to a range of post-compulsory education and vocational options for their refugee students.

Young people of refugee background with little or no previous education who arrive in Australia as teenagers are at much more risk than those arriving at a younger age, with less time to adjust to the demands of a new language and a new culture. In addition, as discussed earlier, the expectations of their families regarding pathways and career aspirations can be unrealistic. While viable alternatives to the VCE, such as customised VCAL and VET are available, there needs to be considerable promotion and education of both the system and of families.

The Victorian Government has taken the first steps by providing funding for the previously Commonwealth funded VCAL Foundation courses in schools for recently arrived refugee young people aged 16 and over who arrive in Victoria with little or no formal education.

The Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) has also been undertaking work in this area, scoping the relevance of current qualifications to refugees. A number of other initiatives to improve post-compulsory education transition support for young refugees have been identified within TAFEs, universities, migrant education providers and relevant areas of DoE. However, system-level knowledge and data is lacking.

RECOMMENDATION

18 That the Victorian Government fund an initiative which brings together relevant sectors to determine and develop more appropriate pathway options and outcomes for refugee young people of post-compulsory education age.

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