
FINAL REPORT

PATHWAYS TO WORK – VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS FROM AN ARABIC SPEAKING BACKGROUND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Pathways to Work: Vocational Education and Training for Young Australians from an Arabic Speaking Background (Pathways to Work)* project was funded by the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET) to support disengaged young people from an Arabic speaking background to access vocational education and training and employment in areas of skill shortage and employment demand.

The project was implemented from September 2006 to August 2007 by TAFE Strategy in collaboration with TAFE NSW – South Western Sydney Institute and other key stakeholders, in particular Arabic community and employer organisations, and Group Training Organisations.

Young people from the target community who have left school early had been identified as being less likely than their peers to achieve comparable benefits from their access to vocational education and training, less likely to participate in employment based training and more likely to be unemployed.

The project entailed the implementation of an information and communication strategy through the services of a transition coordinator with the relevant cultural and linguistic skills to support the target group.

This project demonstrates that a culturally and linguistically targeted model of service provision makes a positive contribution to the take up and completion of vocational education and training programs and the achievement of employment outcomes by disengaged young people.

The project supported 150 people from an Arabic speaking background. The key achievements for project participants are: 42 people engaged in post-school vocational education and training, 10 young people in apprenticeships or traineeships and 23 participants in other forms of employment. In addition 21 young people 'at risk' of leaving school early successfully completed their academic year and 19 of these indicated that they would be returning to school in 2008.

The report recommends sustained provision of the transition coordinator model of support to the target group, and the application of this model to young people from other ethnic minority groups who are not faring as well as their peers in terms of participation in vocational education and training and access to employment based training opportunities.

Most of the young people participating in the project were early school leavers and many had not developed effective job seeking skills for the industry in which they

were seeking work. The report reinforces the value of pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship programs as a means of addressing barriers to work for these young people.

Participants engaged in the project expressed a keen interest in apprenticeships and traineeships in skill shortage areas. Participants also expressed a preference to pursue these opportunities through Group Training Organisations. Those who were successful however (13 young people) all gained employment through direct contact with employers and mainly with employers from an Arabic speaking background.

Members of the Arab business community expressed the view that this is not the most desirable outcome as the number and range of employment based training opportunities available through small business employers from Arabic background is limited.

The need to consider models of group training provision that can effectively support small business owners and young people from ethnic minority communities is highlighted in the report.

The transition coordinator also provided information and referral services for a small number of people seeking recognition of their overseas qualifications, skills and experience.

Some of these participants required gap training and identified that refresher/bridging programs such as English for Specific Purposes programs that offer both gap training and integrated English language and communication skills training need to be more widely available, including for those in full-time employment.

The project received strong support from all stakeholders. The report also recommends that future strategic interventions build on the willingness of key stakeholders to work collaboratively to assist disengaged youth by supporting partnership arrangements between employers and employer support services, TAFE NSW as the largest provider of vocational education and training, non-government agencies and ethnic minority communities.

INTRODUCTION

Project Background

Overall young people (15-24 year olds) from an Arabic speaking background are not achieving comparable outcomes with their peers in terms of their participation in education and training. While their participation in TAFE NSW continues to improve¹ and they are well represented at Certificate III level and above qualifications² they experience low module completion rates compared with all students and with other students from a non-English speaking background.³

Young people from Arabic speaking communities also continue to be under-represented in apprenticeships and traineeships.⁴ Moreover they are part of communities which experience much higher unemployment rates than the Australian-born.⁵

Young people from the target community are also more likely to disengage from school without adequate preparation for the world of work and with limited knowledge of the programs and support services that can assist them to re-engage in further education and training.

In August 2006 the NSW BVET approved a NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) project proposal that sought to improve young people of Arabic speaking background's access to vocational education and training and employment in areas of skill shortage.

The project *Pathways to Work: Vocational Education and Training for Young Australians from an Arabic Speaking Background (Pathways to Work)* was implemented from September 2006 to August 2007. It was managed by TAFE Strategy, through the TAFE NSW Multicultural Education Unit.

Project objective

¹ TAFE NSW enrolments by 15-24 year olds who indicated they spoke Arabic at home of Arabic were 7178 in 2005 and 7356 in 2006 (DET unpublished statistics, TAFE Data Warehouse).

² In 2006, 15-24 year olds from Arabic speaking background enrolled in Certificate III level and above qualifications (4606 in number) comprised 22.4 per cent of all TAFE NSW enrolments by students from non-English speaking background at these levels (DET unpublished statistics, TAFE Data Warehouse).

³ In 2006 TAFE NSW average module completion rates for 15-19 and 20-24 year olds respectively were: 78.7 per cent and 80.0 per cent for all students; 74.0 per cent and 76.0 per cent for students from non-English speaking background; and, 68.0 per cent and 71.7 per cent for students from Arabic speaking background (DET unpublished statistics, TAFE Data Warehouse).

⁴ As at the Census 2001 young people aged 15-19 years and 20-24 years respectively who indicated they speak Arabic at home comprised 3.3 per cent of all 15-19 year olds and 3.4 per cent of all 20-24 year olds in the New South Wales population. However, they accounted for only 2.7 per cent (389 in number) of all apprenticeship commencements in 2006 by all 15-19 year olds and 2.3 per cent (65 in number) of all apprenticeship commencements in 2006 by all 20-24 year olds (Source: DET 2006 unpublished data).

⁵ Arabic speakers born in the Middle East and North Africa (including in Sudan and Lebanon) had an unemployment rate in 2005 of 11.2 per cent which is more than double that for those born in Australia (DEWR 2005 ABS Labour Force Survey unpublished data).

The project sought to provide and reinforce vocational education and training pathways and employment outcomes in areas of skill shortage for people of an Arabic speaking background primarily in the Canterbury, Bankstown and Auburn Local Government Areas.

Methodology

A Project Reference Group was established to oversee the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project. The reference group comprised representatives from the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training, Arab Council Australia, the Australian Arab Business Network, TAFE NSW – South Western Sydney and Sydney Institutes and the NSW Department of Education and Training. Details are provided at Appendix 1.

Engagement of a transition coordinator with the requisite cultural and linguistic skills to liaise with key stakeholders and engage young people from the target group.

The project utilised a service model whereby a transition coordinator with the relevant cultural and linguistic skills works with key stakeholders to provide assistance and support to the target group to access appropriate vocational education and training and employment. This model of service provision had been successfully trialled in a 2005 NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training funded project – *Improved participation in apprenticeships and traineeships by young people and employers of Arabic speaking background* which was also managed by the TAFE NSW Multicultural Education Unit.

The young people targeted in the *Pathways to Work* project were those who had:

- recently left school and had limited understanding of vocational education and training pathways in skill shortage areas;
- withdrawn from post-school study or were identified as being at risk of discontinuing study, as a result of inappropriate vocational pathway choices; or,
- required gap training in order to have their overseas skills and qualifications recognised.

Implementation of a culturally linguistically appropriate information and communication strategy targeted at the Arabic speaking community.

The information and communication strategy incorporated:

- information and referral services provided to young people and parents in one-on-one and group situations;
- dissemination of information to the broader community through the Arabic media, community organisations and networks; and,
- presentations to community and youth workers.

Key areas addressed in the implementation of the information and communication strategy were:

- areas of skill shortage and employment demand and related vocational education and training pathways; and
- employment based training opportunities associated with skill shortage areas and related employment services including Group Training Organisations.

Young people supported during the project were followed up by the transition coordinator at the end of the project (end July to early August) to determine project outcomes. In addition, between November and December 2007 a project officer was engaged to establish post project outcomes for the young people assisted by the transition coordinator.

STRATEGIES

Community engagement

In the first stage of the project the transition coordinator focused on building relationships with Arab community agencies so as to promote the project and engage young people and parents from the target community. The project was well received. However, in the aftermath of the war between Lebanon and Israel and with the intense media focus on the Muslim community in South Western Sydney, following local reaction to international and local events, community attention was firmly focused on community relations issues.

Young people from the community proved to be more difficult to reach and engage. Moreover, the capacity of many Arab community organisations to support the project was more limited.

A review of the project deliverables was undertaken by the *Pathways to Work* Project Reference Group and a revised strategic plan for the second stage of the project (April to August 2007) was developed. The revised plan focused on the implementation of outreach strategies in collaboration with local community agencies to engage more young people from the target group. These include Arab organisations and networks, youth and refugee networks and Community Settlement Support Services workers assisting migrants and Iraqi and Sudanese refugees.

Information and referral services

Information and referral services were provided to individual participants over the phone, via email and in face-to-face interviews. This was an ongoing activity.

The support provided incorporated:

- provision of career and course information to reinforce appropriate vocational pathways;
- referral to pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship programs offered by TAFE NSW;
- follow-up support and referral to career and counselling services as required; and,
- referral to employers, particularly Group Training Organisations.

The services of Group Training Organisations and their recruitment processes were

highlighted. Young people were encouraged to identify apprenticeships and traineeships advertised. They were also encouraged to take personal responsibility for approaching the Group Training Organisations.

Specific pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship programs were also promoted to the young people as a means to improving their chances of gaining an apprenticeship.

Group information sessions were conducted with the support of key stakeholders. These were mainly for young people though some sessions also targeted parents and migrants and refugees with overseas qualifications.

One-on-one interviews and group information sessions were held at venues which were convenient for project participants. This was mainly in Bankstown with the Arab Council Australia.

Information packages for young people targeting their specific needs were developed and distributed to project participants. The packages included TAFE NSW Institute specific course lists; relevant pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship courses; materials in Arabic on apprenticeships and traineeships, group training and recognition of overseas qualifications.

Information and support was also provided to young people and parents at information stalls set up at community events and employment expos e.g. at Wiley Park during Youth Week 2007 and at the Auburn Employment Expo. This expo was particularly successful in attracting newly arrived migrants and refugees, including those with overseas qualifications.

Collaboration with Arab community agencies, industry networks and employers

The transition coordinator reinforced links with a range of organisations, networks and personnel, mainly in South Western Sydney to promote the project and to identify and engage young people from the target group. These included Arabic organisations, youth and refugee networks, Community Settlement Support Services workers assisting migrants and Iraqi and Sudanese refugees, and counsellors and multicultural education coordinators from some TAFE NSW Institutes.

Partnerships were formed with Group Training Organisations, TAFE NSW – South Western Sydney Institute and Arab Council Australia to deliver six industry specific information sessions to young people from the target group and their parents.

The Arab Council Australia and Centrelink were actively engaged in the recruitment of young people into these information sessions. Centrelink forwarded information about the activity to its clients and the Arab Council Australia identified young people who had participated in its youth programs and had follow up contact with these young people and their parents to encourage their attendance.

Information sessions targeting parents and people with overseas qualifications were organised through the Outreach section at TAFE NSW – South Western Sydney Institute and another for Iraqi refugees in partnership with the Arab Council Australia.

Reinforcement of key messages through community networks and channels

Presentations on areas of skill shortage, apprenticeships and traineeships and related vocational education and training programs and support services were delivered for members of youth networks and inter-agencies, including the Arabic Workers Network. This strategy sought to promote supported referrals to vocational education and training programs and employment support services by community and youth workers.

Direct contact with employers from an Arabic speaking background was maintained by the transition coordinator to increase understanding of the apprenticeship and traineeship system and reinforce links to employment support services, particularly Group Training Organisations and Australian Apprenticeship Centres.

Information was also communicated through the Arabic media. Messages were tailored to the particular media's key audience, including recent arrivals from Iraq and Sudan as well as young people born in Australia.

Nine advertisements promoting the project and employment and training in areas of skill shortage were placed in the EI Telegraph newspaper. The paper also supported the project by publishing editorial articles on this topic, based on interviews with the transition coordinator.

Interview programs on SBS radio were also organised. This included interviews with the Group Training Organisation - Electro Group and an apprentice of Arabic speaking background. Information about apprenticeships in the electrical area was provided and the young apprentice gave a personal account of his experience in gaining and sustaining an apprenticeship.

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

An overview of achievements against each of the major intended project outcomes is outlined below. Information provided for project participants is primarily based on outcomes reported to the project officer undertaking post project follow up of the participants (November – December 2007).

1. 160 people will be supported through this project.

The *Pathways to Work* project provided information on vocational education and training options and apprenticeships and traineeships to 194 people of Arabic speaking background. One hundred and fifty of these individuals provided their personal details, expressed a need to have follow-up contact with the transition coordinator and agreed to be contacted as part of the project evaluation. Outcomes provided in this report relate to these 150 individuals.

Table 1: Participant profile by gender

Gender	Participant group						
	Target group			Other			
	15 – 24 years Out of school			15 – 24 years In school		25+ years Overseas qualifications	
	No	%		No	%	No	%
Male	72	72.0		18	66.7	15	65.2
Female	28	28.0		9	33.3	8	34.8
Total	100	100.0		27	100.0	23	100.0

Participation by young males in the project was more than double that of young females. This reflects the lower school retention rates experienced by young males from the target community and the greater likelihood of males being attracted to promotional material targeting employment and vocational education and training options in the traditional trade areas.

One hundred people supported by the transition coordinator were from the target group. They were aged up to 24 and not in full time education, training and employment. Further, 62 of these young people were from the Canterbury, Bankstown and Auburn Local Government Areas.

Of the remaining 50 people supported by the transition coordinator 27 were young people who were intending to leave school early and 23 were migrants and refugees with overseas qualifications and skills. Those with overseas qualifications were all over 25 years of age.

1.1 Participant outcomes

At the time of post project follow up (November/December 2007) 105 participants were still contactable, including 66 young people from the target group.

Table 2: Participant outcomes - November/December 2007

Outcome	Participant groups						
	Target Group			Other			
	15 – 24 years Out of school			15 – 24 years In school		25+ years Migrant/refugee Overseas qualifications	
	No.	%		No.	%	No.	%
Post-school VET	33	50.0		-	-	6	33.3
Apprentice/trainee	10	15.2		-	-	-	-
Working	15	22.7		-	-	8	44.4
Unemployed	5	7.6		-	-	1	5.6
In school – completed academic year	N/A	N/A		19	90.5	N/A	N/A
Other	3	4.6		2	9.5	3	16.7
Total	66	100.1		21	100.0	18	100.0

Fifty-eight of the 66 young people from the target group (87.9%) had achieved vocational education and training and/or employment outcomes.

- Thirty three young people had undertaken vocational education and training

programs and three others were intending to commence vocational education and training programs in 2008.

- Ten participants reported having gained an apprenticeship or traineeship in an area of skill shortage and employment demand.
- Fifteen participants indicated that they had gained employment in other areas. One had entered the Police Academy. The 14 other participants had found employment in the retail sector in the main. For these 14 young people this employment was identified as a 'stop gap' measure to provide them with income while they were deciding their career options or applying for an apprenticeship or traineeship in their chosen field.
- Five young people continued to be disengaged having been unsuccessful in gaining work or being placed in a course in their area of vocational interest.

Of the 150 individuals who expressed the need to have follow up-contact (Table 1), 27 of them were in Years 9 - 12 and intended to leave school without a clear vocational pathway or employment. These young people were provided with information about careers in areas of skill shortage and employment demand, apprenticeships and traineeships, VET in schools and TVET programs. They were also advised by the transition coordinator to discuss their options with their career adviser at school and encouraged to remain at school to complete either Year 10 or Year 12.

At the time of post project follow up, 21 of the 27 young people who intended to leave school were still contactable:

- Significantly, 19 were still at school. This included six who had completed Year 10 and wanted to go on to complete their HSC. One student had undertaken a VET in Schools program in 2007 and indicated his intent to apply for a TVET program as part of his HSC. Four others wanted to pursue an apprenticeship or traineeship and two of these young people indicated that they were only staying at school because they not yet been successful in securing an apprenticeship.
- Two young people were identified as being at risk of not completing Year 10 and were referred to the Youth Pathways Officer based at TAFE NSW – South Western Sydney Institute, Bankstown College.

The 23 newly arrived migrants with overseas qualifications and experience were assisted with information and support towards recognition. Many required and were assisted with information about English for Further Study. Others were referred to recognition bodies, including to the NSW Vocational Training Unit to have their trade skills assessed. The people in this category are primarily Iraqi refugees and newly arrived migrants from Lebanon and all were over 24 years of age.

By November/December 2007, 18 of these migrants and refugees were still contactable. Three were working in their area of expertise, four were undertaking or needing to undertake gap training, two needed extensive English language training,

one required local experience to work in his field, three were still awaiting the outcome of assessment of their qualifications by recognition bodies and two wanted to retrain. Three others had given up, having found the process of recognition frustratingly long and expensive.

2. Increased participation in vocational education and training programs associated with employment, particularly in areas of skill shortage by young people from the target communities.

In July/August 2007, 42 young people from the target group (Table 1) reported that they had applied for or taken up vocational education and training programs in 16 vocational areas. Study was in areas of skill shortage and employment demand.

At post project follow up in November/December 2007, 36 of the 42 young people were able to be contacted. 33 participants confirmed that they had enrolled in vocational education and training programs. Almost all enrolments (29 of the 33) were in TAFE NSW delivered programs.

- Fourteen participants had course completed. These young people had undertaken Certificate Level II or III studies in business, community services, financial services, film, television, radio and multimedia, hospitality, nail technology and tourism and pre-apprenticeship programs in plumbing, carpentry and joinery and metal fabrication.

Five of these young people, including two who had undertaken training with private providers, were intending to enroll in higher level vocational education and training qualifications at TAFE NSW in 2008. Three others were seeking to continue studies in a different vocational area: two of these participants had undertaken hospitality and management studies and were going to do qualifications in engineering and information technology. The third who had studied nail technology with a private provider wanted to go to TAFE but was unsure of her career goal. She was referred to the careers and counselling service at her local TAFE campus. All other young people who had course completed were actively seeking work.

- Twelve young people were continuing study to complete their vocational education and training qualifications at TAFE NSW.
- One young person had applied for a university place and another had been accepted into the Police Academy at Goulburn.
- Five participants had withdrawn from their course. One young person who had commenced a pre-vocational course in carpentry and joinery was intending to do a pre-vocational program in electrical and another who had withdrawn from a course in plumbing was intending to enroll in a course in management. Three others were seeking work and indicated they would seek support from a careers and counselling service at TAFE NSW if they decided to resume study.

An additional three young people were to commence study in TAFE NSW in 2008

and undertake programs in computer servicing and hardware and either child studies or community services. The third was seeking to complete Year 10 at TAFE NSW.

- 3. Enhanced understanding of broader career and related vocational pathways available to young people from the target community and enhanced understanding of employment based training by young people and the Arabic community more generally, including parents and employers.*

Over 180 people participated in vocational education and training and industry sessions information sessions. The Electro Group, HTN - Hospitality Employment Network and Australian Industry Group (AIG) Training Services Group Training Organisation and TAFE NSW – South Western Sydney Institute participated in six industry specific information sessions for young people organised by the transition coordinator.

About 40 young people participated in the industry sessions and 30 others requested information about pre-vocational programs that would be available in the following semester. The participants at the industry specific sessions commented on the valuable insights provided into the industry areas, the benefits of clarifying employer expectations and of receiving pathways information.

The industry specific information sessions also attracted four refugees of Sudanese background and seven people with overseas qualifications and experience in the trades.

Fifty two young people were provided with initial information on vocational education and training pathways at information stalls conducted by the transition coordinator e.g. at the Wiley Park Youth Festival.

Forty youth and community workers and 27 parents from Arabic speaking background also received information on vocational education and training and employment-based training opportunities available to young people from the target group in five group information sessions conducted by the transition coordinator.

- 4. Increased number of young people of Arabic speaking background participating in traineeships and apprenticeships.*

At the end of the project (August 2007) six young people from the target group at Table 2 had commenced employment and were awaiting registration as apprentices. Three apprenticeships were in plumbing, and the others in refrigeration and air conditioning, glass cutting and glazing and automotive (panel beating).

27 of them who were seeking apprenticeships had been referred to relevant Group Training Organisations and were awaiting the outcome of their application.

At post project follow up in December 2007, nine young people confirmed employment in apprenticeships and one other in a traineeship. Five apprenticeships were in plumbing, two in carpentry and joinery and two were in metal fabrication. The traineeship was in business (sales). Outcomes for the three young people who had gained employment in refrigeration and air conditioning, glass cutting and glazing

and automotive (panel beating) were not available as these young people were no longer contactable.

The apprenticeships and traineeship had been gained through Arabic community contacts and relatives in the main. No participant reported was successful in gaining an apprenticeship through a Group Training Organisation.

One of the young people undertaking an apprenticeship in carpentry and joinery reported being very satisfied with the outcome as he had persevered even though he had made many unsuccessful applications for an apprenticeship.

Two young people from the nine mentioned earlier had withdrawn from their apprenticeship. One had been injured at the workplace and the second had been dissatisfied with the *'low pay and difficult working conditions'*.

5. Increased number of Arabic led businesses participating in apprenticeships and training programs.

Project activities were focused on supporting employers of Arabic speaking background in a sustainable manner. Links between the Australian Arab Business Network, Group Training Organisations and employer support service providers were reinforced.

A meeting was held with Group Training Australia and four Group Training Organisations providing services in the Bankstown, Canterbury and Auburn areas to explore strategies to increase participation of Arabic led businesses in apprenticeships and traineeships.

Group Training Organisations expressed a strong interest in engaging directly with employers of Arabic speaking background. Group Training Australia was linked to the Australian Arab Business Network and would conduct presentations at its Network monthly forums.

Information on incentives and the broad vocational options available through apprenticeships and traineeships were promoted by the transition coordinator at the monthly forums of the Australian Arab Business Network.

Direct links with Arabic speaking staff from an Australian Apprenticeship Centre were also reinforced. The Arabic speaking officer was introduced to the network and would now participate on a regular basis.

PROJECT FINDINGS

Elements of the project that were identified as particularly beneficial in achieving the project outcomes are outlined below. Interventions and strategies that might assist more disengaged young people to access vocational education and training and employment in areas of skill shortage and employment demand are also provided.

The benefits of a culturally and linguistically targeted model of service delivery

Cultural knowledge and being recognised as a member of the Australian community of Arabic speaking background were crucial in establishing trust and facilitating a working relationship between the transition coordinator and young people, parents and the broader community.

The capacity for parents to communicate with the transition coordinator in their first language ensured that they could access information and later engage in dialogue with their children regarding their career options and decisions. For these parents being able to give informed advice and support to their children was considered critical and they commented positively on the role of the transition coordinator in facilitating this.

Similarly, people with overseas qualifications, who were mainly refugees from Iraq, expressed their gratitude for the assistance and support given by the transition coordinator throughout the months. They commented on the significance of getting the appropriate cultural and linguistic support to understand the recognition process and to be able to access appropriate recognition bodies and support services.

Parental expectations

It is commonly accepted that ethnic minority communities, including the Arabic community in Australia prefer their young people to pursue an academic pathway and that vocational education and training is less highly valued.

Comments made by parents to the transition coordinator suggested that the status of vocational education and training was not the primary concern of parents seeking to support their children who were at risk of disengaging from education and training. The primary issue was whether their children would be able to secure employment as an apprentice or trainee.

All parents who contacted the transition coordinator wanted assistance to find their children a job. There was an expectation that the transition coordinator would either secure an apprenticeship for their children or provide a referral to an employer which would result in an apprenticeship in the short term.

Parents were particularly keen that their children be engaged in either full time education and/or employment. They did not want their children to undertake part-time study, nor did they want them to undertake short courses where there was no guarantee of an employment outcome. They did not want their children to have a lot of 'spare time' on their hands, particularly given the community relations issues that had arisen as a result of international and local events such as the Cronulla riots.

Parents also expressed some scepticism regarding the capacity of their children to perform well in post-school vocational education and training when their children had been assessed as not doing well at school. Communicating the availability of TAFE NSW learner support services was a very important message for many of these parents as was increasing their understanding of the nature and availability of pre-vocational programs as an option for their children.

Role of community workers

The project attracted a significant response from community, youth and refugee workers seeking vocational education and training options for their clients. Approximately 30 young people were assisted through these intermediaries. These workers, particularly those supporting more recently arrived groups and young refugees expressed an interest in receiving training on vocational education and training pathways so that they could provide referrals for their clients. Concern was expressed that many clients do not take up options available to them if community sector workers were not able to reinforce key messages about the nature and value of available options.

Targeted use of Arabic media

Responses to initial radio interviews indicated that this medium was more effective in engaging young people, including those born in Australia whilst the Arabic print media was more effective in raising awareness of apprenticeships and traineeships and related vocational education and training programs among recent arrivals from the target group, parents and grandparents.

Project sustainability

A number of short term project initiatives were implemented in South Western Sydney during the implementation of the project that targeted young people of Arabic speaking background.

Community members commented on the need to support long term community solutions and capacity building. The work with the Australian Arab Business Network in particular highlighted their interest in initiatives that would provide meaningful and sustainable employment for young people from the community.

Issues impacting on employment outcomes

For some young people who are unused to travelling beyond their local area, the proximity of jobs and courses was an issue that they conceded they needed to address.

The issue of discrimination for young women wearing hijab was also raised. One young woman who was very skilled in office administration reported not being able to find work though she was applying for many positions where her skills were required. This young woman commented that she would be granted interviews after the assessment of her resume but in each instance she was turned down at interview. While it was not possible to verify that this young woman was being discriminated against on the basis of her religion, more people from Muslim communities have expressed such concerns post September 11.⁶

People with overseas qualifications, skills and experience

When following up people with overseas qualifications and skills the project officer was left with a strong impression that many people with overseas skills, whether in

⁶ *Unlocking Doors Project* HREOC 2007. Discrimination in seeking employment was identified as the most common area of discrimination experienced by members of Muslim communities who participated in consultations conducted for the *Unlocking Doors Project* conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in June 2006.

the trades or in professional areas, spent many months and sometimes years not getting beyond the assessment of their credentials.

Different people who had been assisted said that the process of getting overseas skills and qualifications assessed was too expensive both in terms of time and money. One person, an overseas trained electrician said of the process:

“They make the process too hard and I can’t do it”. HR

A small number of people were able to achieve full recognition and were working in their profession. However for the majority it was a different story. Even those with many years of experience had difficulty in proving their length of experience. This was particularly difficult for refugees or those whose employers in their country of origin were no longer in business or where they had been self-employed overseas.

Many with overseas qualifications, skills and experience hoped that they would be able to get into their area of expertise in the future. However they commented on being ‘held back’ by either the need to do refresher/bridging programs at TAFE NSW or university, or by the many years required to achieve the level of English language proficiency which will allow them to practice their profession. For most, full-time study was not an option as they needed to work to support a family.

Participants suggested that more English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs be offered in a greater range of vocational areas and that they also be available on a part-time basis.

Pre-vocational programs and employability skills training

Most of the young people who participated in the project were identified by the transition coordinator as requiring access to employability skills training to achieve their vocational goal. These young people had not developed effective job seeking skills. Literacy and numeracy issues were also impacting on the capacity of some participants to gain employment. For young people from refugee backgrounds English language skills were also an issue as was their lack of familiarity with the concept of vocational education and training and employment based training.

These young people would benefit from an increased availability of pre-vocational programs with integrated English language, literacy and numeracy skills training.

Links to employers

The primary motivation expressed by young people who contacted the transition coordinator was assistance with and links to employment opportunities particularly in apprenticeships and traineeships.

Moreover, most of the young people supported by the transition coordinator expressed a preference for employment with a Group Training Organisation, indicating that they valued the additional support and guidance that Group Training Organisations provided to apprentices and trainees as well as to employers.

Most of these young people later indicated that they had made contact with the relevant Group Training Organisation, attended an interview and completed the

relevant tests. However no one reported being successful in accessing employment with a Group Training Organisation.

The 13 participants who had gained an apprenticeship, including the three who could not be contacted during the evaluation of post project outcomes, all reported that they had gained their apprenticeship or traineeship through direct contact with an employer. Moreover most indicated that their employers were of Arabic speaking background. This reinforces existing practice in the community.

Several young people in fact expressed disappointment and frustration in their dealings with Group Training Organisations. They informed the project officer that they had made appointments to visit Group Training Organisations, complied with requests to submit resumes and other information, never to be contacted again, even after being told by the Group Training Organisation's representative that someone would be in touch. Two young men's experiences reflect these sentiments:

"GTO's are not helpful, they tell you they will call you in a week's time and they don't. When you visit them they tell you to come back in another week. I didn't want to be involved with them when they said that". DMN

"I sent them my resume just like they wanted after I contacted them and they said they will contact me. They didn't so I contacted them and they said they will call me in a week and they didn't after that". MM

This frustration with Group Training Organisations was also experienced by some parents. One father commenting on his son's distress at not getting an apprenticeship and obtaining no help from Group Training Organisations said:

"Nothing happen at all, now very upset about not getting a job".

This young man is now intending to stay at school not because it is his first choice but because he feels he has no other choice.

Membership of the Australian Arab Business Network (AABN)

The transition coordinator became a member of the Australian Arab Business Network and continued to liaise with members of the network through their formal monthly meetings. This provided a valuable opportunity to promote awareness of the range of vocations in which apprenticeships and traineeships were available as well as the incentives available to employers taking on an apprentice.

The Australian Arab Business Network has supported both NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training funded projects managed by TAFE Strategy that have sought to increase the participation of young people from an Arabic speaking background in employment based training. They played a critical and on-going role in the community by linking young people with employers through their formal membership and informal business network. Links to the network need to be reinforced in any future initiatives targeting young people from Arabic speaking background.

It is also significant to note that the transition coordinator identified the Australian Arab Business Network as providing a valuable forum to consult and learn about issues related to the Australian Arabic business community.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Collaboration and support for the project initiative

The *Pathways to Work* project reinforced the value and willingness of key stakeholders to work in partnership to assist disengaged young people to access employment and vocational education and training. The project was implemented in collaboration with: the Australian Arab Council, Australian Arab Business Network, Group Training Organisations and TAFE NSW – South Western Sydney and Sydney Institutes.

The project was undertaken in a context of skill shortages and an increased demand for apprentices in the traditional trades in particular. Employers, in particular Group Training Organisations expressed a keen interest in the initiative as did Arab community and employer organisations.

Similarly, young people engaged in the project were keen to take up apprenticeships and traineeships and vocational education and training that could improve their chances of gaining an apprenticeship. Parents also responded positively to their children undertaking employment based training and related vocational education and training programs.

What needs to be done?

1. The preparedness of key stakeholders to work cooperatively to support marginalised young people needs to be reflected in future policy and program development in this area. In particular, consideration needs to be given to resourcing sustainable programs involving partnerships between ethnic minority communities, non-government agencies, employers, employer service providers and TAFE NSW as the largest provider of vocational education and training.

Role of Group Training Organisations

It is significant that while young people engaged in the project expressed a preference for employment with a Group Training Organisation, the majority of young people who obtained apprenticeships did so primarily through friends and family. No participant gained employment through intervention or assistance from a Group Training Organisation.

Comments made to the transition coordinator indicated that employers of Arabic speaking background were regularly approached by parents seeking employment opportunities for their children and they assisted whenever possible.

In most cases, employers of Arabic speaking background, particularly small business employers have limited capacity to engage an apprentice. Further they indicated to the transition coordinator that when they did take on an apprentice they struggled with the administrative requirements of the apprenticeship system or found

themselves with limited capacity to provide the intensive mentoring support many young people, irrespective of their ethnic background require.

A number of suggestions were made by different members of the Australian Arab Business Network that they felt might improve the capacity of small business to engage and achieve sustainable employment outcomes for apprentices. These were:

- provision of a wage subsidy for employers for the first two weeks to enable the employer to assess the suitability of the young person;
- provision of post placement support for both employers and apprentices, with more intensive support being provided for those taking on disengaged young people; and,
- ensuring disengaged young people have access to opportunities to complete pre-vocational programs that incorporate relevant 'soft' skills.

Other members of the Australian Arab Business Network expressed a preference for government intervention that would support and improve their capacity to link young people to employment opportunities. Two suggestions provided as to how this could be achieved were:

- having access to an employment service that they had sufficient confidence in to refer young people, parents and employers to for employment related services; and,
- linking young people from an Arabic speaking background to large businesses that take on apprentices and trainees, such as Multiplex.

Many issues identified by the members of Australian Arab Business Network were addressed by the Group Training Organisations contacted in this project. This included improving the capacity of the Australian Arab business community to:

- access suitable employees through an effective and flexible recruitment service;
- receive post placement support following engagement of an apprentice;
- access government incentives under the apprenticeship program; and
- ensure apprentices are provided with training opportunities to enhance their performance in the workplace.

2. Initiatives that can extend the group training model to small business owners of Arabic speaking background and other ethnic minority communities need to be further explored.

Importance of pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship programs

The value of pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship programs for young people, and disengaged young people in particular, could not be underestimated. Young people undertaking pre-vocational programs would have the satisfaction that they were in their chosen vocation and at the same time gaining credentials to compete for an apprenticeship. Furthermore, as they began their first year of apprenticeship, support for those with learning difficulties and literacy and numeracy would also be available.

The project officer spoke to several young people who were employed but were unhappy in their jobs. They were mainly employed in the retail sector and working in supermarkets, clothing stores etc as a 'stop gap measure' while they were waiting to find the apprenticeship they really wanted. These young people were unable to find an apprenticeship in their area of vocational interest. Pre-apprenticeship programs would assist such young people to achieve more satisfactory employment outcomes.

3. The availability of pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship programs needs to be expanded including provision of customised programs for disadvantaged young people, including refugee youth.

The success of the transition coordinator model

The project demonstrated that support provided by the transition coordinator for disengaged young people enabled some of them to achieve vocational education and training and employment outcomes in areas of skill shortage and employment demand.

The young people engaged in this project had been assisted to develop clear employment goals and to work out further options and strategies to deal with the difficulties they experienced in achieving their goal. Moreover, those who engaged in pre-apprenticeship courses or who eventually found apprenticeships through family and friends recognised that the transition coordinator had played a crucial role in assisting them to move forward.

For those young people assisted by the transition coordinator to make an informed choice, very few withdrew from their studies. Furthermore, during the evaluation phase few indicated that their area of vocational interest had changed. The intervention and assistance provided by the transition coordinator appeared to have tempered the 'volatility' evident in the study choices made by many young people.

The support provided by the transition coordinator to young people who were identified as being at risk of leaving school early also appeared to have assisted them to focus on their educational and vocational aspirations and to stay at school.

A few of the young people who decided to stay on at school to complete their HSC are doing so because they believed that it was too difficult to find an apprenticeship in their chosen vocation. In a sense this was a forced choice. In more encouraging circumstances they would be engaged in vocational education and training.

Feedback to the project officer from the young people who had decided to complete the HSC indicated that they felt the accomplishment of finishing the School Certificate (Year 10) in 2007. This sense of achievement might have given them the confidence to stay on at school and undertake HSC studies.

As part of the transition coordinator's role, young people were assisted to work out options for the future that they might not have otherwise considered. This project contributed to these young people being more informed of their choices, and feeling supported in those choices. This contributed to the greater self esteem and sense of direction that almost all participants expressed to the project officer during the evaluation of the project outcomes.

The commitment of the New South Wales Government and the NSW Department of Education and Training to provide quality vocational education and training in schools through VET in schools programs and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships is assisting more school leavers into employment and further vocational education and training.

Young people who have already left school, particularly those who have not completed Year 10, will however continue to be disadvantaged in their access to sustainable employment and related vocational education and training.

4. The culturally and linguistically targeted transition coordinator model of service provision should be sustained and applied to young people from a broader range of ethnic minority communities who are not achieving comparable outcomes with their peers from their participation in education and training. This includes young people from African communities with a high number of refugee and humanitarian entrant arrivals (e.g. those from the Sudan).

Vocational education and training programs for people with overseas qualifications, skills and experience

Some of the individuals with overseas qualifications and skills needed to undertake additional training i.e. refresher/bridging programs to be able to practice their profession or trade in Australia.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs were identified as being extremely useful by individuals assisted by the transition coordinator. These programs can offer gap training for people with overseas qualifications and skills as well as employability skills training for the Australian labour market. Concern was expressed by participants that very few programs were available under the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program and that those that were available were offered on a full-time basis. For individuals with overseas qualifications, this was not an option as they needed to earn an income to support their families. Participants suggested that more ESP programs be offered in a greater range of vocational areas and that they be available on a part-time basis.

5. Resources need to be applied to sustainable vocational education and training program initiatives that can support under-employed migrants and refugees to use their overseas gained qualifications and skills in the Australian labour market.

The policy and program issues outlined in this section were not the responsibility of one jurisdiction, government department or sector. For instance, matters related to refugees and migrants impact on Federal Government agencies including the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the Department of Education, Employment and Work Place Relations as well as the NSW Department of Education and Training.

Effective and sustainable program responses to the issues identified in this report need to be designed, implemented and evaluated in collaboration with Federal government agencies as well as employers, employer service providers and the community.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Pathways to Work Project Reference Group

Appendix 2

Names and details of all people with significant involvement in the project.

Pathways to Work: Vocational Education and Training for Young Australians from an Arabic Speaking Background

Project Reference Group

Terms of Reference

The Reference Group will inform the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a project designed to reinforce vocational education and training pathways and employment outcomes in the areas of skill shortage for people of Arabic speaking background primarily in the Canterbury, Bankstown and Auburn Local Government Areas.

The Reference Group will also evaluate the project outcomes and benefits to the project participants; and,

- assess the application of the project model to other ethnic minorities or marginalised community groups; and
- provide strategic advice to support project transferability.

Chair: Jude Stoddart, Associate Director, TAFE Equity

Members: Randa Kattan, Executive Director, Arab Council Australia
Jason Mourad, Australian Arab Business Network Inc.
Paolo Totaro, NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training (NSW BVET)
David Michaels, A/ Senior Manager, Skills Strategy Unit – NSW BVET
Di Riddell, Manager, Industry Initiatives, NSW DET
Kevin Heys, Faculty Director, Vocational Access, TAFE NSW - South Western Sydney Institute
Amir Salem, TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute Multicultural Education Coordinator
Loukia Zinopoulos, Manager, TAFE NSW Multicultural Education Unit
Ramsey Jebeile, Transition Coordinator, Pathways to Work Project, TAFE NSW Multicultural Education Unit

Pathways to Work: Vocational Education and Training for Young Australians from an Arabic Speaking Background Project

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Danny Trevisiol, Regional Executive Officer, South West Sydney Industry Education Partnership Inc.

Chris Dunstan, Client Services Manager, AGT Automotive

Justin Dwyer, General Manager, Sydney Training & Employment Ltd

Greg Combes, Business Development Manager, Sydney Training and Employment Ltd

Youth Services

Julie Kapselides, Multicultural Street Worker, Bankstown Multicultural Youth Service

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Government

Amal Taki, Multicultural Service Officer, Centrelink

Paul, Tait, Portfolio Manager, Centrelink

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Randa Kattan, Executive Director, Arab Council Australia

Jacqueline Dallal, Community Social Service Worker, Melkite Welfare Association

Rana Bablitz JP, Community Settlement Services Officer, Australian Arabic Community Welfare Centre

Ali Abdallah, Venue Co-ordinator, The Islamic Friday Sermon Program New South Wales

Ali Abdallah, Lebane Moslem Association

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