

Stronger futures for all young Victorians

Discussion paper on the youth transitions system

PREPARED FOR:

**Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and
Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development**

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Introduction

AMES welcomes the opportunity to respond to Stronger Futures for all young Victorians: Discussion Paper on the youth transitions system.

AMES response focuses on the refugee youth who participate in programs delivered by AMES as part of their transition to post compulsory education, vocational training and/or employment. The paper outlines:

- the profile of refugee youth with whom AMES works
- issues facing refugee youth in successfully making the transitions outlined in the Discussion Paper and
- responses implemented by AMES that have proved effective in addressing these issues.

AMES response notes the significance of:

- applied learning approaches to strengthen development of life skills, language, literacy and numeracy skills, study skills and vocational skills
- partnerships in generating positive and multiple outcomes for young people and
- programs which establish and support social connections for young refugees including mentors, and the importance of these links in achieving successful transitions.

AMES has responded to the following questions from the Discussion Paper.

1. In what other ways can the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills be strengthened in the post compulsory years?
2. How can business/industry be more involved in assisting students' career choices?
3. How can student transition to the VET sector, higher education and full time employment be improved?

Who are new and recently arrived refugee young people?

AMES works with young refugees aged between 16 and 24 years old through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS)¹, as families arrive and are settled in metropolitan Melbourne. Currently settlement is concentrated in Greater Dandenong, Casey, Hume, Brimbank, Maribyrnong, Maroondah and Wyndham².

AMES also works with young refugees (16 - 24 year olds) in the delivery of English language programs and specialist youth programs in the Special Preparatory Program (SPP)³ and Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)⁴. The majority (88%) of

the young people with whom AMES works in these programs are 20-24 year olds⁵.

AMES also delivers VCAL programs in partnership with Debney Park Secondary College (in the West), and Dandenong High School (in the South East) for refugees of school age.

During the recent past AMES has been working with refugee families from Afghanistan and Myanmar (Burma) as well as smaller numbers from Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Burundi, China, Middle East, Ethiopia, Sudan, Chad, Congo, Nigeria, Liberia, Somalia and Sierra Leone.

Educational backgrounds

Recently arrived young refugees have varying levels of literacy and spoken English, and educational backgrounds. These are largely dependent on the level of development and stability in their countries of origin or transit, and the period of time spent in refugee camps prior to arrival in Australia. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of the 16 - 24 year olds in AMES AMEP in 2009⁶ arrived in Australia on Humanitarian Visas.

Of these

- 26% had completed 6 years or less of formal education
- 42% had completed 7 to 10 years of schooling
- 28% had completed 11 to 12 years schooling
- 32% were assessed as Band A on entry to AMEP and 53.5% Band B⁷.

¹ IHSS provides settlement services to refugee and humanitarian program arrivals during the first 6 - 12 months in Australia, including linking clients into education and training most appropriate to their needs.

² Refugee and Special Humanitarian arrivals to metropolitan Melbourne October 2009 - December 2009. Source: IHSS settlement data published by Settlement and Multicultural Affairs Branch, DIAC Victoria in Settlement Planning Update March 2010

³ SPP provides up to 400 hours tuition for refugee youth with less than 7 years formal education and very low English and literacy skills prior to the AMEP. SPP is funded by Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIAC).

⁴ AMEP provides up to 510 hours English language tuition to eligible new arrivals with less than "functional English." AMEP is funded by DIAC.

⁵ AMES and its TAFE Consortium partners worked with 1,691 16 - 24 years olds during 2009 in AMEP tuition. Source: DIAC data ARMS database

⁶ Source: DIAC data, ARMS database

⁷ Entry level band is projected learning pace determined by education background and literacy level. For example Band A learners have very low levels of formal education and literacy in first language and English and are therefore placed in classes where the instructional pace is slower, compared to Band C learners who have high levels of formal education and literacy and expect to manage a much faster pace of instruction and learning.

These young people (including those who arrive having completed 10 - 12 years education) will face difficulties in the Victorian education system as a result of low levels of spoken and written English.

For example: The majority (83%) of new arrivals in the 2009 cohort detailed above had little or no proficiency in spoken English, defined as 1 or below on ISLPR scale⁸. 49% of these were at 0/0+.

In terms of literacy

- 85% had an ISLPR for Reading of 1 or below, 42% of these at 0/0+.
- 90% had an ISLPR for Writing of 1 or below, 46% of these at 0/0+.

Other young arrivals with whom AMES works arrive on Family and Temporary Visas. These groups also have a number of people who will have “refugee- like” educational experiences,

such as disrupted schooling; and similarly low levels of English language, literacy and numeracy.

For all these young arrivals the expectations, methodologies and content of schooling is likely to differ significantly from their source (or transit) countries in comparison to that provided in Victoria. In many instances this education relates very poorly or not at all to the goals, demands and expected transitions through education and training in Victoria.

Nevertheless AMES experience is that this particular group of young people are not reluctant students who are disengaged from education and training. Rather, most are highly motivated to participate and succeed. Likewise, the families of these young refugees place a high value on education and training and are particularly concerned that their children engage successfully with all available educational opportunities.

Achieving successful transitions

In addition to a number of issues to do with the circumstances of resettlement, the single most outstanding issue in relation to education and training transitions for newly arrived young refugees (of secondary or immediate post compulsory education age) is that they do not have the experience of 10 years in the Victorian education system as their basis for post compulsory education, vocational training, higher education and employment, as other young Victorians have.

A newly arrived young person from a refugee background receives up to one year of English language tuition in a secondary language centre, prior to entering the mainstream system at a level commensurate with their age. This means, for example, that a young person 16 years of age on arrival will be exited from the language centre into year 11, a course of study for which Australian born young people receive 10 years of training and preparation to undertake.

Similarly young refugees of post compulsory school age aiming to undertake further study or vocational training will have significant

knowledge, language and skills gaps to be addressed in order to make successful transitions in these areas.

This “missing” experience for both these groups includes literacy and numeracy skills, vocational skills, independent study skills and IT skills development, as a result of interrupted schooling, inadequate prior schooling or schooling that bears little or no relationship to the Victorian education system.

The missing experience also includes the development of life skills and significant social supports, community connections and peer networks as would be usual for other young people in this age group. These are essential to effective participation for all young people and include social connections and links to mainstream activities gained for example, through part time jobs, sports and recreational clubs.

These factors are significantly compounded by no or low levels of spoken and written English.

⁸ *International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR)*. The ISLPR scale ranks English as a Second Language proficiency on a scale of 0 - 5, zero being no proficiency in English and 5 being “native like” proficiency. ISLPR are used to assess new arrivals’ proficiency in English and to place them in classes appropriate to their level of English. ISLPR assessment of speaking, listening, reading and writing is undertaken. AMEP classes are for those at level 2 and below.

Issues specific to refugee young people in the context of their communities

Aside from previous educational experiences a number of other issues have potential to adversely impact on young refugees' long term success in the transitions to effective social and economic participation. These include:

1. lack of understanding by newly arrived families, communities and young people themselves of the range of options in post compulsory education and vocational pathways in Victoria
2. high aspirations and unrealistic expectations of educational success on the part of older adult family and carers due to this lack of understanding
3. extra responsibilities to support extended family, greater than is usual for people in this age group such as interpreting or providing financial support
4. inter-generational conflict due to older adult family members or carers' expectations around cultural maintenance and fears of exposure to perceived negative influences
5. trauma and the impact of prolonged periods in refugee camps on physical and mental health
6. lack of economic supports from within communities or family in the initial settlement period
7. family dislocation and breakdown prior to or post arrival.

Chances of successful transition for young people from refugee backgrounds

The transitional milestones outlined for 15, 19 and 24 year olds in the Discussion Paper are very challenging for young refugees, but not because these young people are disengaged from education and training. They are challenging in the context of their re-settlement in Victoria, and the educational, social, family and community issues described above.

For young refugees who arrive in Australia at an age when they would normally be entering senior secondary or early post compulsory schooling, they have missed the foundations to enable successful transitions at each of the milestones and are therefore significantly disadvantaged.

These milestones are:

At 15 years of age, young people about to enter the senior secondary years need to be engaged in education and have the literacy and numeracy skills to successfully complete senior secondary or initial vocational qualifications. They also need sound knowledge of career options and the education and training pathways that lead to them.

At 19 years of age, young people should have attained (or be in the process of attaining) an initial qualification that provides a strong basis

for further education or employment. This enables them to emerge from the initial phase of education as successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

By 24 years of age, young people should be establishing strong career paths. An increased proportion should have attained higher level vocational education and training (VET) or higher education qualifications. Additionally, it is preferable that those who did not achieve an initial qualification at 19 have re-engaged with education and training.

Given that "young people have the best chance of a successful transition if they achieve this sequence of milestones"⁹ alternative options for refugee young people are needed.

Importantly, these approaches build on the motivation and eagerness to learn which characterise the many young students from refugee backgrounds with whom AMES works.

Responses implemented by AMES that have provided effective transitions for refugee young people are outlined below in answer to specific questions from the Discussion Paper.

⁹ Stronger futures for all young Victorians: Discussion paper on the youth transitions system. State of Victoria 2010 p3

Discussion Paper: responses to specific questions

1. *In what other ways can the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills be strengthened in the post-compulsory years?*

Approaches used by AMES with learners from refugee backgrounds in post-compulsory years support the effectiveness of literacy and numeracy skills training integrated with life skills and vocation training as proposed in the Discussion Paper.

While some young people educated through Australian primary and secondary systems may lack the literacy skills to succeed in post-compulsory education, many newly arrived refugees have the added complexities of no or limited English language skills and/or limited formal schooling.

Therefore young refugees aged between 16 and 25 when they arrive will often need a higher intensity of language and literacy support and a stronger focus on life skills to equip them for life, study and employment in Australia.

Approaches used successfully by AMES include applied learning in which content and skills development are highly contextualised in situations that are important to young people.

Integrating language, literacy, numeracy with vocational and life skills

Proficiency in English, life skills and access to social support/connections are critical to successful settlement and subsequent educational achievement and transition for refugee young people who have just arrived in Australia.

Life skills for young people include a broad range of areas: financial literacy and budgeting, health and personal safety, participation in social networks (including online), participation in recreational activities, personal time management and organisational skills relevant to life, study and work are examples.

To understand more about the client groups and to develop programs that meet their needs, AMES is conducting a Longitudinal Study¹⁰ of 246 clients who commenced their AMEP in 2008. Of these, 27% (66) were aged between 16 and 24.

The findings from this study show that:

- 18% of the youth cohort did not know anyone in Australia before they came here
- 29% of the youth cohort did not have any information about Australia before they came here
- 52% were on a Refugee/Humanitarian visa

When asked to name areas for learning from a list of 16 topics and language skills, young participants rated topics in the following order of importance. These results indicate what recently arrived young people need to learn about and need to learn to do.

Table 1– Learning in the AMEP

Language for	% Very important	% important	% Total
Australian customs and culture	76	24	100
Finding a suitable job	73	23	96
Understanding the internet	67	29	96
Making friends/socialising	71	24	95
Using the health system	68	27	93
Talking to Centrelink	64	29	93
Understanding the TV/radio	61	32	93
Using the banking system	62	30	92
Using the transport system	58	32	90
Shopping	52	36	88
Finding a suitable house/flat	50	35	85

¹⁰ AMES Longitudinal Study 2008-2010, Interim Report, December 2009, AMES Research & Policy

Knowledge of these topics and mastery of the language, literacy and numeracy skills inherent in these activities are necessary pre-requisites for settlement and participation in schools and training settings as well as broader community and social settings.

The fact that 24% of these young people were also seeking casual or part time work presents a further opportunity for contextualising language, literacy and numeracy skills development.

The approach

AMES supports the approach outlined in the Discussion Paper that language, literacy and numeracy knowledge and core skills (such as occupational health and safety) be included in qualifications at Certificate III and above.

Undertaking an accredited vocational qualification concurrently with language, literacy and numeracy skills development provides an ideal context for acquiring both language, literacy and numeracy and vocational skills.

AMES has applied this approach in its Foundation VCAL programs to include modules from

Certificate I level qualifications, for example, Certificate I in IT, and Certificate I in Vocational Preparation.

In addition to integrating language and literacy with vocational skills training AMES has integrated generic employability skills within classroom learning and activities. Attributes that are important in the workplace such as punctuality, being organised and taking initiative are modelled and expected in the classroom and contribute to preparing young people for the transitions to both VET, higher education and employment.

2. *How can business/industry be more involved in assisting students' career choices?*

One way business/industry can be more involved in assisting students' career choices is by working in partnerships with senior secondary schools and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) delivering vocational training to young people.

AMES has worked with business and industry in a number of ways to increase students' awareness of career choices. Two approaches are described.

1. Employment Pathway Programs
2. Workplace visits

1. Employment Pathway Programs

AMES and its TAFE delivery partners have delivered Employment Pathways programs since October 2008. These pilot programs target recently arrived migrants and refugees participating in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and are funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

They provide a model for assisting all new arrivals, particularly young people, make choices about careers and future employment.

Employment Pathways Programs specifically aim to:

1. assist recently arrived migrants and refugees make the transition to employment and further study
2. help students become familiar with Australian workplace, culture and practices
3. contextualise English language tuition within a specific industry
4. focus on employability skills, OH&S, employment preparation and
5. provide vocational counselling.

Students are assisted to make choices and transition to further training or work because they get a realistic picture of the types of jobs and skills needed to work in a particular industry, some specialised and generic industry skills, knowledge and language, and the opportunity to link with local employers through work experience.

Employment Pathway Programs provide 120 hours for preparatory classroom work and 80 hours work experience.

A wide range of industries has been targeted, including building and construction, community services, horticulture, hotel and kitchen hospitality, office administration and retail.

AMES works very closely with local employers, businesses and industry to provide opportunities for new arrivals to experience the culture and demands of the workplace and the specific jobs available in industries first hand.

A partnership with South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance Inc (SEMMA) demonstrates this approach.

SEMMA is based in Dandenong and represents more than 150 manufacturers located in Melbourne's South East. To reach employers and workplaces which could provide learning opportunities for students AMES worked in partnership with SEMMA.

Businesses and industries provided information and contexts for language, literacy, numeracy and basic technical skills training as well as practical work placements. Employers provided:

1. input to course content: For example for language, literacy and numeracy tuition, employers were asked: What do employees in their workplace have to listen to and understand? What do they have to say? What do they have to read? What do they have to write? Do they need to understand diagrams, pictures or symbols? What maths calculations do they need to do? What specific information do employees need to operate in this workplace? What technical skills will they be required to perform?
2. work site visits
3. work experience placements
4. feedback to course participants.

The direct involvement of the employer in course content meant the preparation leading up to the practical work experience placement was very focused and relevant to the workplace. This preparation enhanced the work experience for both the student and the employer.

Career Adventure Tours

AMES works with the Local Learning and Employment Network in South Eastern Melbourne (SELLEN) to provide Career Adventure Tours which help young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds understand the range of career options available to them. Many of the careers included in such tours were not available in their home countries. Career Adventure Tours include a day visiting major employers in the sector so that young people can see the working environments of particular jobs, learn the key English language associated with employment in the sector and ask questions of employers and young apprentices in the workplace. As well as the tour, this program features discussion and

learning activities around employment in this sector such as types of jobs in the sector, promotional opportunities, pay scales and related careers. An accompanying booklet provides related industry websites so students can further research the industry.

In 2008-09, AMES youth clients attended Career Adventure Tours in Manufacturing, Nursing & Allied Health, Building and Construction, Transport & Logistics, Children's Services, Hair & Beauty and careers in the Navy. Selection of the career tours was based on class discussion and interests of the young people.

An example: Knock on Wood

The Knock on Wood career adventure day provided students with a first-hand look at careers in the construction industry. The day was organised in partnership with the Regional Industry Career Advisor and SELLEN and involved AMES youth students going through Pakenham's Lakeside Estate with students from Carwatha and Hillcrest Secondary Colleges.

The tour included organised visits to Devine Homes, Metricon Homes, Keystone Developments and Bellbird Building supplies. Students had the opportunity to listen to various speakers, all of whom spoke about individual pathways and the opportunities available to young people in the industry.

Students also viewed commercial and industrial building sites and a roof manufacturing site. At these sites employers spoke about employability skills that they look for when seeking new apprentices and about skills shortages within the industry. Students gained an insight into the wide range of trades and jobs in the construction industry through the tour.

3. *How can student transition to the VET sector, higher education and full time employment be improved?*

Three approaches to improving student transition to the VET sector, higher education and employment are outlined below. Transitions for young refugee students can be improved by:

1. Providing accessible information to newly arrived students, families and communities to enable informed choice
2. Co-location of ESL/literacy delivery staff and vocational trainers within technical VET training facilities
3. Working in partnerships

1. **Making informed choices**

Successful transitions and subsequent retention in the VET, higher education or employment are characterised by:

- sufficient preparation to enter a course of study
- sufficient information to understand post secondary study options

Successful transitions are based on making well informed choices appropriate to interests, aptitudes and skills.

Young people who have attended primary and secondary schools in Victoria, and their parents, build up knowledge of available career options over many years as well as an understanding of the training or study demands of particular career choices. This knowledge is built for example, from contact with other parents, teachers, careers counsellors and other students (including siblings) who have made the transitions to further study and/or full-time employment.

This is not the case for new and recently arrived young people from refugee backgrounds who may not have clear or realistic ideas of what they want to do in terms of training and work. Recently arrived young people need accessible, accurate information and opportunities to experience study/work place realities for themselves, backed up with vocational/career counselling on which to base career choices. Similarly, their families and wider communities need information about education and training options, systems, expectations and demands.

Bilingual support and approaches that involve the newly arrived communities are needed to ensure effective communication of information and exchange of concerns. This is particularly important because of the very high aspirations families may have for their children, often formed in the absence of understanding all available options and/or the study demands of particular courses. For example many communities aspire for their children to go to university rather than to other post-compulsory education options.

AMES experience is that delivering key information and messages through trusted community leaders is the most effective way of providing information and assisting students and their families to make realistic choices around post-compulsory schooling, training and further education.

AMES has well established relationships with key people in refugee communities and organises regular community consultations. These sessions are opportunities to provide information and get input from the communities. They are an opportunity to broaden understanding.

This approach has potential to improve transitions of young refugees by achieving better understanding by parents and families of post secondary school destinations, including VET at the higher certificate levels as a pathway to future employment.

AMES is in a position to assist government in communicating with newly arrived communities across Victoria.

An example: Trade Tasters

AMES piloted Trade Taster courses in partnership with Goulburn Ovens TAFE and Victoria University during 2009 as part of DIAC's Employment Pathway Program. The objective was to assist young people who were undecided about what they wanted to do, or did not know what options were available, to experience a range of trades first hand. The program also demonstrated to participants the skills and language and literacy levels required to gain entry to certain industries.

Trade Tasters were offered in a range of different jobs and work places:

- Painting and Decorating
- Horticulture
- Hospitality (food preparation and service)
- Warehousing

Students observed TAFE classes in the particular industry area, and subsequently undertook work experience placements with local employers to get a feel for the job. Observation of trade classes in TAFE allows students to gain an understanding of the language demands and training approaches leading to a VET qualification.

These activities were followed by vocational counselling to assist with further information about apprenticeships and pathways to apprenticeships. Students with sufficient language and literacy skills to manage such courses were assisted with application processes.

2. Co-location of language, literacy and numeracy and vocational skills training

There is potential for Registered Training Organisations delivering English language, literacy and numeracy training to work in partnerships with TAFE Institutes (delivering hands on vocational training) as a way of improving the transition of young refugees to VET, higher education and employment.

This idea builds on the notion of integrating VET content into an ESL program (as outlined in the Discussion Paper) to physically locating the ESL/literacy provision in TAFE Institutes' VET departments. In this way new and recently arrived young people would have access to the hands on, technical VET facilities (not currently available in TAFE Access Departments and smaller ACE providers) at the same time as having the ESL/literacy training and support on site. This arrangement directly supports the transition from language centre to VET.

In this scenario the ESL/literacy teacher is not working in the Access Department away from the vocational training departments and facilities,

but is co-teaching with the TAFE trade teacher in the specialist VET training facility.

This arrangement offers potential for language and literacy support to continue while the young person begins hands on vocational training. This approach can contribute to retention and the completion of initial VET qualifications (e.g. Certificate II level) by young recent arrivals who may otherwise not manage the language and literacy demands of the course independent of ESL/literacy support.

It also maximises opportunities for applied learning approaches which are very motivating for young people and which provide relevant and supported contexts for learning both technical skills and language. The young person becomes aware of and familiar with VET arrangements and demands, thus strengthening potential for direct articulation into subsequent programs such as pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs.

An example: MIG Welding

The approach is demonstrated by an Employment Pathways Program AMES delivered in partnership with Swinburne in 2009. A MIG welding course was conducted for a Chin speaking group of 14 refugee men and one woman who were keen to begin work as soon as possible. With low to intermediate levels of English, little formal education and no background in manufacturing or welding they lacked the language, technical and job seeking skills to enter the labour market successfully. The program combined English with technical skills training in the welding workshop, and language skills, resume development and job seeking skills with the ESL teacher.

It was necessary in this program to develop an alternative model of work experience due to issues of OH&S in an industry with potentially high risks of injury. Small employers couldn't take on work experience people and construction companies required the Construction Industry Card (white card) even for work place visits. A work experience program was therefore developed to take place on site in the welding workshop. The welding trainer acted as the employer, and the participants were engaged to work full days to produce hand tools which would eventually be sold at the regular horticulture market. Participants learnt technical skills through this process as well as incidental lessons about flexible responses to problems, promotion and niche marketing. The trainer used the idiomatic language that workers would be exposed to in a normal workplace.

The team teaching approach

The TAFE trainer delivered half of the units needed for Certificate II in Welding and advised participants that they would need to complete the other half if they were interested in an apprenticeship or a job in welding.

The ESL teacher developed classroom activities to assist participants to use the internet to locate classes in Certificate II and to find job search sites. Lessons in map reading to find out how to access the locations by public transport, and in planning and teamwork (e.g. to arrange to visit the TAFE sites as a group) were also incorporated into the program.

To develop and embed valued employability skills (such as communication, teamwork, problem solving and taking initiative) and to introduce new ways of learning and working, the ESL teacher devised a program based on practical activities, always making explicit the particular workplace skills practised in any activity. Communication skills and OH&S language were specific and relevant to the welding workshop.

The outcomes of this simultaneous technical and language skills development in a facility with hands on training equipment and a VET trainer were very positive with high rates of retention in the program and low absenteeism. Some students gained employment at the end of the program and many went on to further VET training.

For young refugees the co-location described in the above example has the additional benefit of putting the new or recently arrived young person into a setting where there are large numbers of other young people with whom to build social connections, develop language skills and participate in extra curricula activities such as recreational activities, sports, arts and music programs and leadership development programs.

Finally the co-location of ESL and VET affords access for newly arrived young people to the industry specific training and links with industries and employers which characterise Victorian TAFE Institutes. This will directly impact on the transition of this particular group of young Victorians to employment opportunities.

3. Working in partnerships

Models that support transition to post-compulsory education for young refugees

AMES delivers AMEP Youth Programs where there are large numbers of young refugees. These programs incorporate English language, literacy and numeracy with:

- supported pathways
- pastoral care and career counselling
- preparation for work
- work experience
- community connection

The programs provide supported pathways to secondary school, TAFE or employment and the social and community connections important to young people wanting to participate in the broader community.

The retention rate is very high (close to 100%) and students usually complete at least one full certificate at the appropriate CSWE level.

The AMES Youth Program model uses a blended funding model to enable courses to run for a full year and to mirror a Secondary College time-frame. This ensures that students are engaged until the end of the calendar year and can transition into TAFE or other schooling the next year at the same time as other secondary students.

The Youth Program model relies on accessing and coordinating funding from a number of different sources: for example YPAP, VCAL, AMEP, State profile funding, as well as one-off grants.

AMES uses AMEP and State funding to enable young refugees to be supported into mainstream education post-AMEP. AMES, in consultation with the Victorian Department for Education and Early Childhood Development, has developed an ESL stream of the Foundation Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning (VCAL) which is delivered in two metropolitan Victorian high schools. AMES liaises with these two schools to facilitate articulation into mainstream VCAL programs in a school setting.

The Youth Program model also relies on committed individuals and organisations to create programs and pathways which provide additional support for young refugees in the initial stages of adjusting to education in Australia.

AMES works with organisations such as VicHealth, Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), SGP services, local schools and Language Centres, and the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture to provide holistic youth programs which integrate language learning with a number of extra-curricula activities, excursions and projects. Extra curricula activities include sport programs, creative and artistic programs and leadership programs. They help provide young people with peer support and a social network as well as helping them to acquire life skills which will enhance their independence and capacity for further learning.

The elements of the UCan2 program demonstrate an approach that could have wider application in supporting young refugees to transition to post-compulsory education and/or employment.

Ucan2 is a partnership of youth focussed organisations led by the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST) which contributes to the recovery and integration processes of young, newly arrived refugees in Australia. The program uses the complementary skills of AMES, VFST and CMY to provide holistic and well integrated services.

The program has three key components with each partner responsible for providing its expertise in relation to one or more of these. The components are:

- Curriculum - a curriculum model that develops the skills needed to undertake part time work and engage with mainstream Australian young people. AMES and Noble Park English Language School provide this component of the program.
- Psychological support in the form of a group work program that addresses any mental health issues resulting from the young people's histories prior to arriving in Melbourne. VFST provides this component of the program.
- Mentoring support - formal access to successful young people from mainstream Australia. CMY provides this component of the program.

These short term and targeted interventions for young refugees result in long term dividends. Young refugees are equipped to manage in schools and are then able to transition successfully to post-compulsory education and employment.

Young AMEP clients in AMES Youth Programs transition to:

- The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) Foundation Program
- Intermediate VCAL
- Victorian Certificate of Education
- TAFE advanced English (to prepare for vocational courses)
- TAFE vocational certificates
- Employment – apprenticeship or casual work

While these programs and interventions achieve successful transition to post-compulsory education for young refugees in AMES programs, they are largely reliant, as noted above, on individuals and organisations who can (i) source funding and (ii) blend the different funding sources to create programs and pathways for young refugees.

An improved approach to refugee student transition to the VET sector, higher education and full time employment would be a systemic model that incorporates the elements of the programs describe. This would ensure no young refugees ‘fall through the gaps’, as can happen when the young people live in areas where Youth Programs are not part of the AMEP, or other ESL delivery, or at times when additional funding is not available to supplement core ESL programs.