



## **Review of Funding for Schooling**

**Submission by the Multicultural Development  
Association Inc.**

**April 2011**

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# 1. Executive Summary

Education, and the development of English language skills through education are critical to the successful settlement of refugee and CALD youth in Australia. Upon settling in Australia refugee students confront unique educational challenges through a combination of historical, environmental, cultural and social factors, resulting in barriers to accessible, equitable, quality education responsive to their needs. As such, many refugee students experience multiple dimensions of disadvantage.

As Queensland's largest settlement agency for refugees and migrants, the Multicultural Development Association observes daily the ongoing challenges refugee students and their families experience in relation to schooling in Australia. The unique and often complex educational and support needs of refugee students are compounded by inadequate funding and resourcing arrangements for English as a Second Language (ESL) and refugee specific educational support in Queensland.

Increased funding and resourcing for ESL and targeted refugee programs, and appropriate resource allocation is critical to improving educational outcomes for refugee students and reducing the disadvantage and inequity they currently experience in schooling.

To ensure equitable access and better educational outcomes for refugee students, the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments must work in partnership to share leadership and responsibility for funding, policy, and program and service delivery around education and ESL.

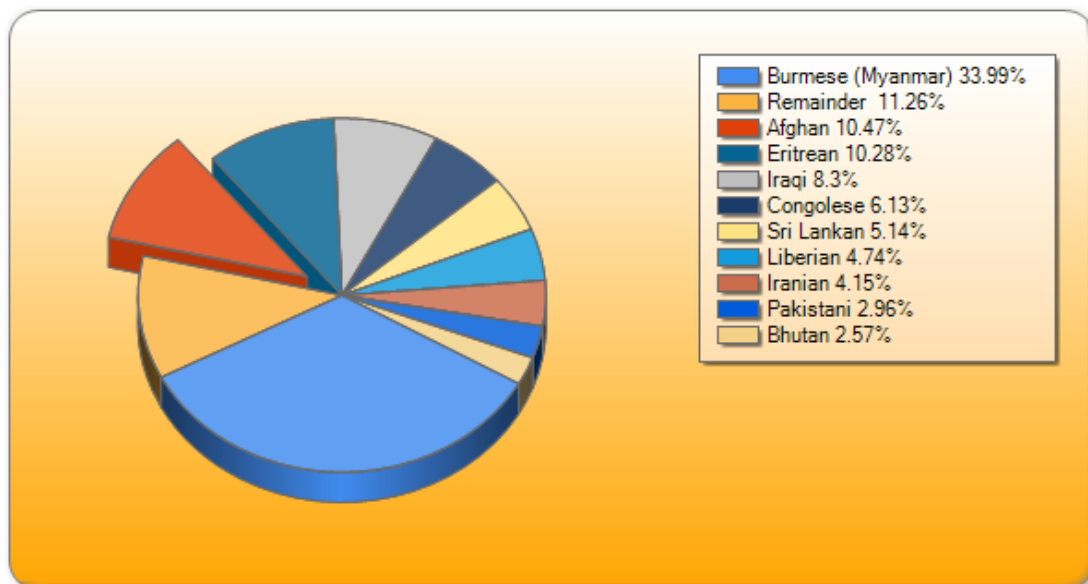
This submission provides:

- a comprehensive overview of the unique and complex educational and support needs of refugee students, the multiple layers of disadvantage they experience and the inadequacies of current ESL and refugee funding and resource allocation in Queensland; and
- 26 recommendations about future funding allocation and resources for ESL and refugee student support in Queensland to alleviate disadvantage and improve the educational outcomes of refugee students in primary and secondary schooling.

## 2. The Multicultural Development Association

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) was established in May 1998 to promote multiculturalism and empower people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds through advocacy, community and multicultural sector development, and the delivery of client services. As Queensland's largest settlement agency for refugees and migrants, MDA works with individuals, families and communities to achieve a society which values justice, diversity and equality. MDA settles approximately 1,100 newly arrived refugees annually and currently works with 3,500 migrants and refugees. Most of MDA's clients are from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Table 1 below shows the cultural composition of new arrival clients serviced by MDA through its Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy work from March 2010 – March 2011.



*Approximately 11.26% of MDA clients during this period were from a broad range of countries and cultures including Ethiopia, Failsi Kurds, Togo, Rwanda, Somalia, Iran, Sudan, Sierra Leone and Burundi.*

Improved access to education is a key systemic advocacy priority of MDA's Advocacy and Social Policy Unit. MDA supports the right of all refugees and people from CALD backgrounds settling in Australia to enjoy accessible, equitable and quality education which addresses their learning and social needs in supportive, responsive and flexible learning environments.

In delivering settlement services to refugees and migrants and in undertaking its community development and advocacy functions, MDA is uniquely placed to understand and comment upon education for refugee and CALD youth.

### 3. Scope of MDA's submission

As a provider of settlement services under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy and the Settlement Grants Program MDA's response will focus primarily on the experiences of students from a refugee<sup>1</sup> background in primary and secondary schooling. For the purposes of this submission 'refugee students' includes those students aged 5 to 16 years who have arrived under Australia's Humanitarian Program and Special Humanitarian Program and asylum seekers.

This submission will not address the unique needs of newly arrived refugees aged 16 and over who are required to attend Adult Migrant English Program and Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program rather than undertake secondary schooling.

The majority of refugee students in Queensland attend government schools and accordingly this submission will not comment upon education provided by independent or non-government schools.

MDA's submission will:

1. Outline key barriers and challenges for refugee and CALD students in relation to education.
2. Explore English Second Language (ESL) funding allocation, policy and program and service delivery in Queensland.
3. Inform the Panel for Review of Funding for Schooling and the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments, in accordance with the Review's Emerging Issues Paper December 2010 and Review Terms of Reference 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6, about the significant unaddressed education needs of refugee students.
4. Provide recommendations about future funding allocation and resources for ESL and refugee student support in Queensland to alleviate disadvantage and improve the educational outcomes of refugee students in primary and secondary schooling.

This submission has been informed by consultation with MDA clients and staff, community leaders and members of Brisbane's refugee and CALD communities, and key stakeholders in the education and multicultural government and non-government sectors in Queensland. MDA wishes to thank the individuals and organisations who have informed this submission.

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<sup>1</sup> The *1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, to which Australia is a signatory, defines a refugee as: Any person who owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country: UNHCR, *1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*.

MDA recognises that many of the issues raised in this submission reflect the educational barriers experienced by students from CALD and migrant backgrounds across Queensland. These issues are explored in depth in the Community Action for a Multicultural Society's (CAMS) submission to this review. As a member of CAMS (a Queensland-wide network of multicultural community workers undertaking systemic advocacy<sup>2</sup>), MDA has contributed to and endorses CAMS' submission.

Throughout the submission the 'Queensland Department of Education and Training' and the former 'Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts' are used interchangeably. The former Department became the Department of Education and Training in approximately 2008.

## **4. Educational challenges for refugees in Australia**

Education, and the development of English language skills through education are critical to the successful settlement of refugee and CALD youth in Australia.<sup>3</sup> As noted by the Australian Human Rights Commission, 'education is a key determinant in predicting health and well-being, longevity, employment, housing and economic stability, and ensuring good outcomes in life generally'.<sup>4</sup>

Upon settling in Australia refugee students confront unique educational challenges through a combination of historical, environmental, cultural and social factors, resulting in barriers to accessible, equitable, quality education responsive to their needs. As such, many refugee students experience multiple dimensions of disadvantage.

Given the Review Panel's interest in the disadvantage experienced by students from non-English speaking backgrounds and their educational needs, this section will provide an overview of key educational barriers and challenges for refugees in Australia's education system including historical experiences; English language proficiency; age appropriate education; English as a Second Language (ESL) support; and settlement and cultural factors.

### **(a) Historical experiences**

Refugee students frequently arrive in Australia against a background of war, conflict, instability and persecution. Some have endured extreme violence, spent long periods in refugee camps, suffered torture, trauma and malnourishment, and are

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<sup>2</sup> For further information about CAMS, see its website at <http://www.camsqld.org.au/>.

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Pathways and Pitfalls: The Journey of Refugee Young People in and around the education system in Greater Dandenong* (2004) 21; Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants* (2003) 78, 89, 91.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *African Australians: human rights and social inclusion issues project: A compendium detailing the outcomes of the community and stakeholder consultations and interviews and public submissions* (June 2010) 62.

affected by separation from and loss of family members.<sup>5</sup> These experiences can have a lasting and profound effect on the ability of refugee students to settle into the Australian school system and life in Australia generally.

As a result of these experiences many students have experienced significant disruption to their education or may never have had access to formal education in their country of origin. As such, refugee students often have the following characteristics:

- Low levels of English literacy.
- Limited or no literacy in their first language.
- Be experiencing ongoing effects of trauma and/or torture and health problems (including malnourishment and physical health issues as well as emotional difficulties such as grief, fear, anxiety/depression, sadness, lack of motivation, isolation, etc).
- Be separated from family or without parental support.
- Have spent lengthy periods in refugee camps.
- Have no written language.<sup>6</sup>

These experiences have a significant impact on the ability of many refugee students to learn, adapt to mainstream Australian schools and attain positive educational outcomes. As noted by Brown, Miller and Mitchell:

*‘Research confirms that those new arrival students who enter school with minimal prior formal schooling, little or no literacy in their own language, refugee trauma experiences, weak or disrupted family ties or physical/sensory impairments experience a ‘double disadvantage’ and are typically several years behind their ESL new arrival peers in attaining comparable literacy skill levels’.*<sup>7</sup>

## **(b) English language proficiency**

It is widely acknowledged that one of the most significant barriers to education and successful learning outcomes for refugee students is limited English proficiency.<sup>8</sup> Sufficient knowledge and comprehension of the English language underpins all Australian school curriculum and is an essential prerequisite to learning, comprehension, writing and completion of tasks and assessment. Proficiency in English not only facilitates students’ social inclusion and the formation and maintenance of relationships with teachers and peers, but is essential to perusing

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<sup>5</sup> The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc, *School’s In for Refugees – Whole-School Guides to Refugee Readiness* (2007) 29.

<sup>6</sup> Refugee Education Partnership Project Victoria, *The Education Needs of Young Refugees in Victoria* (2007) 10.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, Miller and Mitchell, *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 29(2) (2006) p 150 – 162 cited in Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Strengthening Outcomes – Refugee Students in Government Schools* (2008) 9.

<sup>8</sup> Youth Affairs Network of Queensland, *Cultural Chasm: The changing cultural and linguistic demographic in Queensland schools and the need for reform* (2004) 7.



future vocational and employment pathways and successfully settling in the broader community.

Many refugee students will have had little or no formal schooling prior to their arrival in Australia due to the historical experiences noted above. Statistics obtained from the former Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs indicate that in 2004 – 2005 humanitarian entrants assisted under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy aged 6-9 year old had completed on average less than a year of schooling, while 10 – 19 year olds from Africa had completed on average approximately 1 year of schooling.<sup>9</sup>

Against this background, many young people arrive in Australia with some English language proficiency but with variable levels of skills. In 2006, approximately 40% of Humanitarian Program Migrants across Australia were under 20 years of age.<sup>10</sup> 33% of all migrants under the Humanitarian Program reported they did not speak English at all, or did not speak English well.<sup>11</sup>

Further, some students may be illiterate or have low levels of literacy in their first language which impedes their learning of English as a second language, particularly for some African and South East Asian cultures whose languages are oral, not written.<sup>12</sup>

Research indicates that it can take three to five years for second language learners to acquire oral proficiency, but between four to seven years to gain academic English proficiency.<sup>13</sup> For refugee students with disrupted or no education due to experiences in their countries of origin, it may take up to ten years to acquire academic proficiency.<sup>14</sup>

English language is not the only learning skill refugee students may need to acquire. In many cases the Australian school system, classroom language, cultural understanding and expectations, study practices, learning within a classroom setting, and 'how to be a student' must also be learned, creating further significant

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<sup>9</sup> Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Australia's Support for Humanitarian Entrants 2004 – 2005* (2005) 22.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Settlement outcomes for Humanitarian Program Migrants – Experimental estimates from the migrants statistical study* (June 2010) <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3416.0Main+Features2June+2010>> at 20 March 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *African Australians: human rights and social inclusion issues project: A compendium detailing the outcomes of the community and stakeholder consultations and interviews and public submissions* (June 2010) 67.

<sup>13</sup> J Miller, J Mitchell and J Brown, *African refugees with interrupted schooling in the high school mainstream: Dilemma's for teachers*, Monash University, <[www.tesol.org.au/.../131\\_African\\_refugees\\_with\\_interrupted\\_schooling\\_in\\_the\\_high\\_school\\_mainstream.doc](http://www.tesol.org.au/.../131_African_refugees_with_interrupted_schooling_in_the_high_school_mainstream.doc)> at 24 June 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

challenges.<sup>15</sup> For those who have a language background which is oral only, or lack literacy in their first language, learning to write can be particularly confronting.<sup>16</sup>

The pace at which classroom lessons are taught and the different methodologies of teaching and learning in Australian schools means that refugee students often struggle to keep up with their peers, have difficulty understanding mainstream curriculum, and have limited or no opportunity to improve their English skills. Many refugee and newly arrived migrant students, particularly those in mainstream schools, struggle to communicate with teachers; understand and complete tasks, homework and assessment; work in groups; and cope with the structure and expectations imposed within a classroom setting. Often refugee parents and families do not have the ability to provide support to their children due to limited education and English skills, exacerbating student's difficulties with English language learning.<sup>17</sup>

These difficulties may result in students experiencing poorer physical and mental health outcomes due to undermined confidence and self-esteem, enhanced social isolation through inability to communicate with peers and students, poor motivation, truancy and emotional issues.<sup>18</sup> The impact of social exclusion can be particularly profound for students who have experienced prolonged isolation or separation from family due to traumatic experiences in their country of origin.<sup>19</sup>

Difficulties communicating effectively and comprehending school curriculum due to limited English proficiency may cause students to feel embarrassment and frustration, which can generate misbehaviour and ongoing behavioural problems. Some students have become disengaged with the schooling process altogether and have dropped out of the education system.

These issues particularly impact upon refugee and humanitarian entrant children from Africa, who tend to have greater educational, welfare and support needs than other refugee and migrant groups due to their unique experiences in their countries of origin, including trauma, torture, time spent in refugee camps, conflict/war, poor physical and psychological health and nutrition, and poverty.<sup>20</sup> This may lead to the health difficulties mentioned above, as well higher levels of poor behaviour, and consequently disrupted progress in English language learning and development.

As noted in the pie chart above, the majority of MDA's recently arrived clients are from Burmese ethnic groups including the Rohingya, Karen and Chin. Many of these

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *African Australians: human rights and social inclusion issues project: A compendium detailing the outcomes of the community and stakeholder consultations and interviews and public submissions* (June 2010) 67.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *In our own words - African Australians: A review of human rights and social inclusion issues* (June 2010) 15.

<sup>19</sup> The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc, *School's In for Refugees – Whole-School Guides to Refugee Readiness* (2007) 30.

<sup>20</sup> Sandra Taylor, 'Schooling and the settlement of refugee young people in Queensland: '... the challenges are massive' 27(3) *Social Alternatives* (2008) 59.

clients have also spent years isolated in refugee camps, and generally have very limited or no English, as well as complex settlement needs. Accordingly, many students from these groups also have high and ongoing ESL and settlement support needs in schooling.

Refugee students' challenges around English language are particularly prevalent when undertaking standardised literacy and numeracy testing, including NAPLAN testing. These barriers are detailed in MDA's *Submission to the 2010 Senate Inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing (Appendix A)*.

Although some bridging programs and specialist intensive language teaching schools exist, students are generally exited from intensive schools and programs after a defined period of teaching (generally 6 – 18 months). Often the hours of intensive English language teaching provided will not be sufficient for some students to develop the levels of proficiency required to complete mainstream school curriculum, deterring students from completing their education. Homework clubs and after-school tutoring programs provide vital support to some students, but most are underfunded or are dependent on volunteers. Students who are exited prematurely from intensive programs may have limited opportunities to acquire the basic literacy and numeracy skills necessary to participate in mainstream schooling.

### **(c) Age appropriate education**

Problems associated with language barriers and low levels of English proficiency are also exacerbated by the issue of age appropriate education. Many students from CALD backgrounds, particularly those who were refugee and humanitarian entrants have experienced disrupted education for the reasons noted above. Upon arrival in Australia, they are placed in a grade appropriate to their age, rather than their level of education or ability. Consequently, the syllabus covered may be several grade levels beyond their ability, creating significant barriers to learning.

For many African students in particular, this system of age appropriate placement may be confusing and unfamiliar as in their home countries students are generally placed in grades which reflect their previous learning and ability, regardless of age.

These difficulties are also compounded by the absence of intensive language schools and programs for primary school aged children from refugee and CALD backgrounds. Without ongoing intensive support, many students struggle to cope with the curriculum and to attain the standard of literacy and numeracy skills appropriate to their age group, impacting on their overall ability to adequately learn, perform, participate and keep up with their peers.

### **(d) English as a Second Language Support**

The language difficulties experienced by refugee and CALD students are often compounded by inadequate and limited English as a Second Language (ESL) support and services in schools.

The learning needs of refugees significantly differ from most other students. Not only do many refugee students require intensive support with English language learning, other educational, social and emotional support is often required due to the unique experiences of students prior to arriving in Australia (detailed at (a) above).<sup>21</sup> As such, students may require social and life skills support to address settlement needs (see section (e) below). Often students require assistance to learn how to be a student – for example, how to learn in a classroom environment, how to hold a pencil and write, how to study, how to change classrooms, and the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students. This is particularly so for students who have never attended school in their home countries, or who have a first language which is oral, not written.

While the Commonwealth Government funds each State and Territory to deliver ESL at various schools, there is concern that the current levels of ESL support provided in Queensland do not sufficiently address the learning needs of many refugee students. Issues around ESL support in Queensland will be explored in detail in the remainder of this submission.

#### **(e) Settlement and cultural factors**

Settlement in the Australian community is often a stressful period for individuals and families who are newly arrived. Competing settlement needs, including accessing housing, employment, income-support, transport, health services and trauma counselling; coping with a new language and cultural values; and learning to perform the tasks of daily living in a foreign environment can affect the ability of refugee students to effectively learn and settle into schools.

Other issues which commonly arise during the settlement process can also adversely impact on educational outcomes including family relationship issues, social exclusion and isolation, and racism and discrimination

Often parents and families of students will experience additional challenges around language acquisition and understanding. As a result, some refugee parents and families rely heavily on their children as their interpreter and guide through the settlement process. This 'reversal of roles' means that students may miss school to assist their families, creating additional responsibilities and burdens for students.<sup>22</sup>

Cultural factors can also contribute to educational challenges for refugee youth, including intergenerational conflict, changing gender and family roles, challenges in living between two cultures, confusion and uncertainty around identity and different values systems.

Parents from a refugee background often have very high expectations of their children, placing additional pressure on young people to perform and succeed.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Adele Rice, 'Issues from newly arrived young people from language backgrounds other than English', *New Transitions* (May 2008) 1.

Equally, some refugee students have unrealistic expectations around aspirations and achievement.

Despite the above challenges teachers and educators note that refugee students are motivated, resilient and eager to learn, achieve, participate and contribute to their school and community. Through its daily work MDA too witnesses the extraordinary resilience, strength and courage shown by refugee students to make a new life, belong and fulfil their aspirations. Access to equitable, quality education facilitates this.

## **5. Refugees in the Queensland State school system**

The majority of students from refugee backgrounds in Queensland attend government schools.

### **(a) Numbers of refugee and ESL students**

MDA has been unable to confirm the precise number of refugee and CALD students currently receiving ESL support in government schools in Queensland. It is understood that this information is not available due to inadequate and inaccurate data collection at the State level (further information in relation to data collection is noted in the response to Term of Reference 6 below).

In relation to ESL students, information from November 2007 suggests that approximately 15% of students in Queensland were of first and second generation non-English speaking backgrounds, with 9000 funded ESL students.<sup>23</sup> The table below (page 17) provides some information around ESL student numbers in Queensland based on the most recent data reported through the Department of Education and Training's annual reports.

With respect to refugee students, in 2005 – 2006 the Queensland Department of Education and Arts supported approximately 1837 refugee and humanitarian entrant students, an increase of 252 students from 2004 – 2005.<sup>24</sup> In the past 5 years the number of refugee students in Queensland eligible to attend primary and secondary schooling is likely to have exceeded this given continued government commitment to settlement of refugees and humanitarian entrants throughout Queensland.

This is supported by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's statistics around Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program arrivals to Queensland which indicate that from 2004-2005 to 2008 – 2009 approximately 7,800 refugees and humanitarian arrivals settled in Queensland with approximately 2,500 aged between

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<sup>23</sup> Education Queensland Curriculum Division, *The changing context of education in Queensland: implications for learning support Discussion Guide* (November 2007)

<<http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/area/literacy/docs/discussionpaper.pdf>> at 14 March 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Queensland Department of Education and the Arts, *Annual Report 2005 – 2006* (2006) 62.

6 and 17, and approximately 1200 aged between 0 – 5.<sup>25</sup> These figures do not include individuals who arrived under the Family stream with a ‘refugee-like background’ and are eligible for ESL support.

From 1 July 2010 to the end of February 2011 approximately 31% of a total 1257 new humanitarian arrivals in Queensland were aged 5 – 17 years. Approximately 42% were from Asia, 27% from Africa and 31% from the Middle East (which includes Afghanistan).<sup>26</sup> 10% of new arrivals were aged 0 – 4, and are therefore likely to attend primary schools in Queensland over the next five years.

The above figures demonstrate high levels of need for ESL support in Queensland, particularly for refugee students, however in the absence of accurate data it is impossible to quantify the level of demand and need.

## **(b) ESL programs in Queensland**

### ***(i) Intensive English Language Support***

Upon arrival in Brisbane, refugee and migrant students aged 12 – 18 years are eligible for enrolment at Milpera State High School, a state secondary school in Brisbane’s Western suburbs which provides intensive English language and settlement support services to prepare students for transition into mainstream secondary schools in Brisbane.<sup>27</sup> Settlement support is provided to Milpera through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and non-government organisations in the Brisbane region including MDA. Students from over 30 countries are generally enrolled at Milpera for up to 18 months (based on individual need). Milpera is the only intensive English language state school in Queensland, and accordingly is able to cater for students in Brisbane and Brisbane’s outer regions only.

There is no Milpera equivalent for primary school students in Queensland. Accordingly, primary school students who require intensive English language support are assisted through the Queensland ESL program.<sup>28</sup>

Upon exiting Milpera, students are transitioned into a mainstream high school where they continue to receive ESL support, or to TAFE to undertake the LLNP course or other mainstream courses.<sup>29</sup> In the Brisbane, Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast regions approximately 8 mainstream high schools provide post-new arrival intensive language programs. For example, Woodridge State High School has a post-New Arrival Intensive Learning Program which offers intensive English language classes.

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<sup>25</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Settlement Arrivals Queensland SGP Funding Round 2010 – 11* (2011) 5.

<sup>26</sup> Statistics provided to MDA by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship in its Queensland IHSS Arrivals Report 2010 – 2011.

<sup>27</sup> See Milpera State High School’s website at <http://www.milperashs.eq.edu.au/> accessed 14 March 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Education Queensland, *ESL Handbook for Schools* (2006/2007) 8.

<sup>29</sup> Pathways for students on completion of their studies at Milpera are detailed on Milpera State High School’s website: <http://www.milperashs.eq.edu.au/pathways.htm#> accessed 14 March 2011.

In Brisbane primary schools ESL support is generally provided by ESL teachers and teacher aides based either full or part-time at individual schools with large numbers of refugee or CALD students, or by visiting teachers who visit multiple schools each week. At Stafford State School on Brisbane's Northside a weekly 'cluster class' is offered for ESL students in years 6 – 7 whereby ESL students with intensive language needs from other local primary schools will attend that school to receive one day of intensive ESL support. MSA is not aware of similar intensive support offered at any other Brisbane primary schools.

In other areas of Queensland, including the key humanitarian settlement regions of Toowoomba, Cairns and Townsville, refugee students with intensive support needs are provided with ESL support through intensive language classes (available at some schools in some regional areas of Queensland only) or visiting ESL teachers. In Cairns for example there is a primary intensive language class at Cairns West State School and a secondary intensive language class at Trinity Bay State High School. Other state schools in Cairns offer ESL support through visiting ESL teachers at the request of individual schools.

### ***(ii) The ESL Program***

In Queensland's mainstream state schools, *'all permanent residents and temporary residents (except for fee-paying students), including students born in Australia, from a language background other than English and who require support to develop their English language proficiency are eligible for ESL Program support'*.<sup>30</sup>

In metropolitan Brisbane students are generally eligible for ESL support for their first three or five years of schooling, depending on their year level. Students born in Australia with one or both parents born in a non-English speaking country and who use a language other than English at home may be supported in Years 1-3 if they have identified second language learning needs.

## **6. Funding of education for refugees in Queensland and ESL policy**

### **(a) Funding of ESL and refugees in Queensland**

Until 31 December 2008 funding for ESL was provided by the Commonwealth Government to the Queensland Government under the English as a Second Language – New Arrivals Program and Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs Funding (LNSLN).

Under the New Arrivals Program specific funding was allocated to state government schools as a per capita grant and on a one-off basis to assist with costs of initial intensive English language tuition for eligible migrant and refugee students.<sup>31</sup> These

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<sup>30</sup> See <http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/inclusive/cultural/esl/enrolling.html> .

<sup>31</sup> Education Queensland, *ESL Handbook for Schools* (2006/2007) 8; Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Answers to common questions* (2011)

funds could be directed for purposes such as employment of ESL specialist teachers, interpreters, bilingual workers, teacher aides and school-community liaison officers; curriculum and resource development; and equipment.<sup>32</sup>

The LNSLN provided funding for ESL support in the post intensive period i.e. participation in mainstream schools.<sup>33</sup>

Since the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) restructuring of school funding in late 2008, Commonwealth funding for Queensland government schools has been paid to Queensland Treasury under the *Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations* and the *National Education Agreement* (NEA) to 'provide greater flexibility for states and territories to allocate Commonwealth funding to areas they believe will produce the best outcomes for students'.<sup>34</sup> It is understood that as a result government schools no longer receive 'tagged' funding for ESL through the ESL New Arrivals Program. Instead, each State and Territory government is responsible for allocating ESL funding from the sum provided to the states and territories under the NEA. It is further understood that some funding continues to be provided to Queensland by the Commonwealth Government independently of the NEA for refugee-specific programs.

In Queensland, it is understood that funding for ESL support is determined through an index-based allocative model with schools (based on visa subclass and time in Australia<sup>35</sup>). Information available to MDA confirms that presently Queensland's seven education regions are provided ESL resources based on numbers of ESL and refugee ESL learners but that the current resourcing methodology for ESL in Queensland will be reviewed during 2011 for implementation in 2012.<sup>36</sup> It is understood the regions are able to apply resources flexibly to support ESL students' needs, and that individual schools and regions make decisions around ESL staffing.<sup>37</sup>

Since approximately 2005 the Queensland Government has provided additional resources to Queensland state schools under its Refugee Program to support the needs of refugee students. To access this funding it is understood schools are required to contact their Regional Offices to apply, who distribute funds based on identified need.<sup>38</sup> MDA welcomes the Queensland Government's ongoing commitment to the Refugee Program, which provides targeted funding and support for refugee students including language tuition, homework assistance, counselling,

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<<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Programs/EnglishasaSecondLanguageNewArrivalsProgram/Pages/FAQ.aspx>> at 14 March 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Education Queensland, *ESL Handbook for Schools* (2006/2007) 8.

<sup>34</sup> Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Answers to common questions* (2011)

<<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Programs/EnglishasaSecondLanguageNewArrivalsProgram/Pages/FAQ.aspx>> at 14 March 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Education Queensland, *ESL Handbook for Schools* (2006/2007) 8.

<sup>36</sup> Information from Department of Education and Training October 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



interpreter services, intensive teaching support, salaries for teaching and support staff, and resources.<sup>39</sup> MDA notes however that ongoing increases in Refugee Program funding are necessary to meet the needs of increasing numbers of refugee students settling in Queensland.

In Queensland funding is also provided to some schools with refugee and migrant students under the *National Partnership Agreement on Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities*. It is understood that this funding may be applied for purposes at the discretion of individual schools (not necessarily ESL related) with Queensland to receive a total of \$171 million from 2008 – 2013.<sup>40</sup>

The following table provides an overview, containing information from Education Queensland annual reports<sup>41</sup>, of ESL funding and identified refugee and ESL student numbers in Queensland from 2004 to 2010:

| Year        | Number of ESL students in QLD                              | Funding for ESL Programs (reported) | Number of refugee students in QLD | Funding for the QLD Refugee Program in state schools (reported)             | Other relevant funding                                            |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2004 - 2005 | 12,000                                                     | Not reported                        | 1,700 approx                      | \$895,000 (Semester 1, 2005)                                                |                                                                   |
| 2005 – 2006 | Not reported                                               | Not reported                        | 1,837                             | \$1.6 million                                                               |                                                                   |
| 2006 - 2007 | 12,000                                                     | \$6.7 million                       | Not reported                      | \$2 million (additional support services and programs for refugee students) | \$86,250 to community organisations for Homework Clubs            |
| 2007 - 2008 | Not reported. Other departmental information suggests 9000 | \$3.58 million                      | Not reported                      | \$2.38 million                                                              | 184 full time equivalent (FTE) teachers, 2,500 teacher aide hours |
| 2008 - 2009 | Not reported                                               | Not reported                        | Not reported                      | \$2.5 million                                                               | 173 FTE teachers and 2351 teacher aide hours                      |
| 2009 - 2010 | Not reported                                               | Not reported                        | Not reported                      | \$2.5 million                                                               | 189.8 FTE and 2576 teacher aide hours                             |

<sup>39</sup> Education Queensland, *Refugee Program* (2011) <<http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/grants/state/targeted/refugee-program.html>> at 14 March 2011.

<sup>40</sup> COAG, *National Partnership Agreement on Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities* (December 2008) 5, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Education and Training, and Department of Education, Training and the Arts, *Annual Reports 2004 – 2005, 2005 – 2006, 2006 – 2007, 2007 – 2008, 2008 – 2009, 2009 - 2010* <<http://deta.qld.gov.au/publications/annual-reports/index.html>> at 14 March 2011.

MDA has been unable to confirm the current amount of funding for Queensland's ESL program and this information does not appear to be published in recent annual reports. Enquiries have revealed that many teachers and schools throughout Queensland are unaware of the amount of ESL funding provided, how funding for ESL is determined or the precise number of ESL and refugee students in Queensland. MDA is anecdotally aware that in previous years New South Wales and Victoria have matched and exceeded ESL funding received from the Commonwealth Government, however it is not believed that a similar contribution of funds was made by the Queensland Government to ESL programs in Queensland.<sup>42</sup>

## **(b) Queensland's ESL and school policy environment**

Queensland is a signatory to the *2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* through which it has committed to promoting equity and excellence in schooling and ensuring that all young Australians becoming successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens.<sup>43</sup>

The State Government's 2020 vision in its *Towards Q2, Tomorrow's Queensland* strategy on education seeks to deliver world class education and training by providing Queensland students with the best start to learning and life.<sup>44</sup> The Queensland Department of Education and Training *Strategic Plan 2010 – 2014* includes a focus on improving literacy and numeracy as well as improving students' educational outcomes, including those in disadvantaged communities.<sup>45</sup> Through its *Multicultural Action Plan 2007 - 2011* the Department has also committed to support the education and learning of CALD students through actions including:

- Developing an ESL policy and enhancing access to quality service delivery for ESL clients across Queensland;
- Delivering multicultural awareness training to teaching and administrative staff; and
- Continuing community engagement strategies to enhance migrant and community understanding of ESL.<sup>46</sup>

It is understood that Queensland has never had an ESL Policy or Refugee Policy to guide consistent policy, program, resourcing and service delivery to ESL and refugee students. In September 2009 the Department released a draft ESL Policy for consultation, with a view to the policy becoming effective from Term 1 2010<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> For example, in 2008 the Victorian Government spent up to \$66 million to supplement existing ESL programs and support strategies: Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Strengthening Outcomes – Refugee Students in Government Schools* (2008) 15.

<sup>43</sup> *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians 2008* (2008) 7 – 17.

<sup>44</sup> Queensland Government, *Towards Q2, Tomorrow's Queensland* .

<sup>45</sup> Department of Education and Training, *Strategic Plan 2010 – 2014* (2010) 7.

<sup>46</sup> Department of Education, Training and the Arts, *Multicultural Action Plan 2007 – 2011* (2007) 1-3.

<sup>47</sup> MDA's submission on Queensland's draft ESL policy can be accessed at [http://www.mdainc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/response-to-the\\_draft\\_esl-policy.pdf](http://www.mdainc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/response-to-the_draft_esl-policy.pdf).

(MDA's response to this consultation can be accessed at [http://www.mdainc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/response-to-the\\_draft\\_esl-policy.pdf](http://www.mdainc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/response-to-the_draft_esl-policy.pdf)). To date the policy has not been implemented, however it is understood it will be introduced in Semester 2 2011.<sup>48</sup>

## **7. Response to Review Emerging Issues Paper**

MDA notes and strongly supports the views reported in the Reviews' Emerging Issues Paper 2010 in relation to the educational and multiple disadvantage and inequity experienced by students from non-English speaking and low SES backgrounds.<sup>49</sup> In particular, MDA agrees that current funding arrangements do not adequately support students or effectively support strategies to address social exclusion; and that a targeted and needs-based funding model is needed to better support students from non-English speaking backgrounds, including refugee students.<sup>50</sup>

## **8. Response to Review Terms of Reference**

### ***Term of Reference One: Supporting educational outcomes***

#### **(a) Barriers and challenges for refugee and ESL students, and schools in Queensland**

In Queensland appropriate funding and resourcing of ESL and refugee programs, and appropriate and effective allocation of resources is critical to improving educational outcomes of ESL students and addressing current barriers to educational achievement, particularly for refugee students who arguably have more complex learning and support needs than other ESL learners.

Information obtained through MDA's consultations with relevant stakeholders indicates there are significant barriers around ESL and equitable access to education for refugee and CALD students in Queensland, which inhibit improved educational outcomes for students and contribute to ongoing educational disadvantage. These include challenges relating to:

#### ***(i) Specialist ESL staff and support***

As at October 2010 there were 189.8 full time equivalent staff and 2576 teacher aide hours across state primary and secondary schools throughout Queensland. Although the precise number of ESL students, including refugee students, is not known, teachers and schools consistently report that current need and demand for ESL tuition is not able to be met by existing numbers of specialist ESL teachers and teacher aides, and that there is a shortage of specialist staff across Queensland.

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<sup>48</sup> Information from the Queensland Department of Education and Training February 2011.

<sup>49</sup> DEEWR, *Review of Funding for Schooling Emerging Issues Paper* (December 2010) 23.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

MDA is also anecdotally aware that in recent times, due to budgetary constraints, funding has not been available to purchase ESL resources.

Currently in the Brisbane region there are Community Liaison Officers employed by Education Queensland whose role in relation to parents and families includes:

- Providing appropriate assistance to students and their parents/caregivers in school, including support in transitioning to mainstream schools and further education and /or employment
- Liaising between members of the school community such as parent, students, teachers and administration to create and improve cultural awareness and to ensure more positive educational outcomes for students.
- Home visits with students and their families to provide strategies for more positive educational experiences. Home visits are essential for many families who do not have personal transport or access to public transport, and have no other means to access information about their child's school or education.

In addition to these responsibilities CLOs are also responsible for assisting students around other issues including difficulties at school or home; career pathways and subject selection; ESL planning; behavior management and transition through learning.

As an intensive English language school for refugee and migrant students, Milpera State High School has a Home School Liaison Officer dedicated to addressing welfare issues of students who are deemed most at risk and involving student's families in school-related matters and welfare concerns. The role also provides an essential link with communities to ensure that the families are well supported not only through the school but through their own cultural communities.

CLOs, Home School Liaison Officers and bicultural workers are integral to social inclusion, engagement and participation of families and communities in student's education and the school community. However, at present there are only 3 CLO positions across some primary and secondary schools in Brisbane, with workers visiting multiple schools with large refugee student populations in Brisbane each week. It is understood there are similar positions in some other Queensland regions, however exact numbers are not known. Brisbane CLOs' time is currently stretched and they do not have capacity to support the substantial numbers of students and parents/families requiring assistance. It is also understood that CLOs are funded on a semester by semester basis and are therefore not permanent positions.

### ***(ii) Time for ESL learning***

Teachers report that the current funding periods for on-arrival and ESL support for refugee students are inadequate to support refugee students, particularly for primary aged students with limited or no previous schooling and refugee students

from African backgrounds who may require additional language support by comparison to refugees from other countries and other migrant groups.

Students in intensive English language schools (i.e. Milpera) are entitled to on-arrival programs of up to 18 months. The Australian Council of TESOL Associations notes that most States have reported that African students stay in on-arrival programs for at least 12 months (the average stay is 6 months) and that in some cases this time frame is insufficient to enable students to attain the proficiency of other migrant students.<sup>51</sup>

Secondary students are often exited prematurely due to the limited availability of spaces, lack of eligibility for funding and the need for schools to accept new arrivals into their programs. Students who are exited are transitioned into mainstream secondary schools, where many struggle and experience considerable difficulties with the standard curriculum due to limited English language and the inability of some mainstream schools to appropriately support those students. MDA is anecdotally aware that due to limited numbers of ESL teachers and teacher aides some students in Queensland may receive only 1 – 2 hours of ESL support each week, which is insufficient to address their learning needs.

Upon exceeding the 3 – 5 year limit for ESL support in mainstream schools, it is understood schools are not entitled to additional funding under Queensland's ESL Program, even where individual students have additional language learning needs. Primary schools in particular report ongoing high support needs for students who entered school in year one, have had their three years of ESL support, and subsequently enter years 4 – 7. In practice some schools choose to continue to support students in this situation from their own funds, but will not receive additional support under the ESL program to do so.

International research and data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development indicates the value of targeted ESL support, and that programs which best promote equitable outcomes for ESL students are those which include, among other things, intensive ESL support followed by continuous ESL support provided by qualified ESL teachers.<sup>52</sup>

Significantly the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority has acknowledged that learners of English as an additional language or dialect '*Require additional time and support, along with informed teaching that explicitly addresses*

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<sup>51</sup> Australian Council of TESOL Associations, *An overview of the issues around the settlement and provision of services for new arrivals from Africa* (31 January 2006) <[www.tesol.org.au](http://www.tesol.org.au)> at 14 March 2011.

<sup>52</sup> G Christensen and P Stanet,, *Language Policies and Practices for helping immigrants and second-generation students succeed* (2007) at <<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/ChristensenEducation091907.pdf>> in Department of Education, Training and the Arts, *Curriculum Guidelines for ESL Learners*, 37 - 38 <<http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/framework/p-12/esl-learners.html>> accessed 16 March 2011.

*their language needs, and assessment that take into account their developing language proficiency*'.<sup>53</sup>

Funding and resourcing for additional intensive English language support and learning time is therefore crucial to improve literacy, numeracy and English language skills, and to improve the educational outcomes of refugee students.

In the absence of appropriate and continuing ESL support to improve literacy and numeracy skills, ESL students and refugee students will continue to experience disadvantage in accessing standardised curriculum, and performing in standardised assessment, such as NAPLAN. The 2010 NAPLAN testing results indicate that currently students from language backgrounds other than English are falling well below national literacy benchmarks and averages in other states and territories, reflecting the disadvantage and inequities experienced by Queensland refugee and CALD students around literacy and numeracy.<sup>54</sup>

The barriers and disadvantages experienced by refugee students in relation to NAPLAN testing are detailed fully in MDA's submission to the 2010 Senate Inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing (**Appendix A**).

### ***(iii) Unrecognised ESL needs***

MDA is anecdotally aware of Queensland schools and policy makers experiencing difficulties in identifying which students have ESL needs.

It is understood that the difficulty in identifying ESL learners is two-fold. Firstly, as detailed under Term of Reference Six below, inconsistent and inadequate data collection around ESL students, at the point of enrolment and following enrolment, has resulted in some students not being identified as having an ESL need.

Secondly, there is confusion for some teachers and schools as to (a) who is defined as an ESL student and (b) who has an ESL support need and is therefore eligible for funding and support, particularly given the cultural diversity and varying English language proficiency of students from refugee and non-English speaking backgrounds across Queensland. As a result, students with a strong ESL need may not be identified to receive appropriate support, generating significant learning disadvantages.

The former Department of Education, Training and the Arts also acknowledged the difficulty in identifying ESL students in its *Curriculum Guidelines for ESL Learners*,

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<sup>53</sup> ACARA, *The Australian Curriculum Factsheet: Diversity of Learners*

<[http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/Information\\_Sheet\\_Diversity\\_of\\_learners.pdf](http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Information_Sheet_Diversity_of_learners.pdf)> at 28 March 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Report on Government Services 2010 Volume 1: Early Childhood, Education and Training; Justice; Emergency Management Steering Committee, Review of Government Service Provision, Section 4.47-4.5- Commonwealth of Australia 2010 Melbourne

stating 'Many ESL learners in Queensland schools are currently 'unidentified' as such and so may have no access to any ESL support including targeted ESL support.'<sup>55</sup>

MDA is also anecdotally aware of schools mistakenly identifying students for ESL tuition who do not have a genuine need, on the basis those students have one parent from a non-English speaking background. As a result those students may be supported through ESL funding unnecessarily.

As is the case in the general school population, a small number of refugee and CALD students may have a disability which affects their learning ability. Schools may experience difficulties in identifying students with disability due to lack of diagnosis, language and communication difficulties and other factors. Mechanisms to improve identification of those students are needed to ensure refugee and CALD students with a disability receive appropriate support through special needs programs and are not disadvantaged in schooling.

#### **(iv) Intensive English language schools**

There is a lack of intensive English language schools and intensive language classes in mainstream schools in Queensland, particularly in key regional humanitarian settlement areas.

Milpera State High School in Brisbane's outer Western suburbs is the only school in Queensland dedicated specifically to the provision of intensive education and settlement support programs for refugee students. Increasingly in Brisbane and the greater metropolitan area, refugee and CALD families are being settled in the far northern and southern suburbs. As such, students must travel considerable distances in order to access the services offered at Milpera.

For refugee students in regional areas throughout Queensland there are no intensive language support schools similar to Milpera. Presently in Queensland a small number of intensive English language classes operate in some schools in regional and remote areas, such as Toowoomba, Cairns and Townsville, where large proportions of refugees and CALD communities are settled.

As there are no intensive language support primary schools operating in Queensland, there is also a substantial gap in education service provision for primary aged school children from refugee backgrounds. While ESL support is available at many Queensland primary schools, and some primary schools provide 2 – 3 weeks of intensive language tuition, this is not available at all schools; and is not comparable to the level of support received at an intensive language school such as Milpera, or to the level of ESL support received in mainstream high schools. Often this is provided by visiting teachers who visit multiple schools, rather than permanent

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<sup>55</sup> Department of Education, Training and the Arts, *Curriculum Guidelines for ESL Learners*, 37 < <http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/framework/p-12/esl-learners.html> > accessed 16 March 2011.

teachers based at individual schools. ESL is not available to students in Preparatory schooling (4 – 5 year olds).

Refugee primary school students who need ongoing intensive support to develop their English language, literacy and numeracy skills are therefore less likely to have those needs addressed. This is particularly so for those primary school aged refugee students who have received no previous education or only limited schooling, and who are placed in year levels according to their age rather than current ability.

**(v) Programs for transition to mainstream schools**

Presently in Queensland there is limited support available to students from refugee backgrounds to transition from intensive language learning into mainstream education.

Generally students transition from Australian intensive language schools six to 12 months post-arrival. The flexible and supportive learning environment in intensive language schools, where students are able to adjust to school life in Australia and are supported around resettlement, is considerably different to the more rigid structure of mainstream high schools and the age appropriate education system. As such, some mainstream schools are unable to cater for the more complex educational and ongoing support and settlement needs of refugee students.

Transition to mainstream schools can be challenging and distressing for some refugee students. Research indicates that many refugee students struggle to cope with mainstream education, particularly due to limited English language proficiency, and subsequently have poorer educational outcomes or disengage from school entirely.<sup>56</sup> Many do not feel ready or prepared and experience feelings of frustration, uncertainty, anxiety and failure, which may be exacerbated by family pressure and expectations of success.<sup>57</sup> In some cases transitioning from one school to another has aroused old feelings of dislocation, grief and trauma, creating further learning challenges.<sup>58</sup>

**(vi) ESL in Regional Queensland**

Refugee and humanitarian arrivals are settled by community organisations funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship throughout Queensland, including the regions of Toowoomba, Cairns and Townsville. Queensland also has a significant CALD population across the State.

Teachers and community organisations in regional Queensland have consistently reported ongoing inequity around access to ESL funding and support as a significant

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<sup>56</sup> Centre for Multicultural Youth and the South East Local Learning and Employment Network, *Pathways and Pitfalls: The journey of refugee young people in and around the education system in Greater Dandenong* (2004) 23 – 24 <[http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/189/1/Sellen\\_ESLreport.pdf](http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/189/1/Sellen_ESLreport.pdf)> at 16 March 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



issue for families being settled in their regions. It is understood the need for ESL in these regions exceeds the support currently able to be provided by schools, that there are limited numbers of specialist ESL teachers and teachers' aides and inconsistency in ESL delivery across the State. Accordingly, there is reportedly considerable unmet ESL need for refugee and CALD students in regional Queensland.

Intensive English language support classes may only be offered in one or two primary or secondary schools in larger regional areas such as Toowoomba and Cairns (in smaller areas without intensive language classes schools are reliant on visiting ESL teachers for support). As few schools offer intensive language support to refugees and new arrivals families are restricted in the areas in which they can reside, and are unable to send their children to closer local schools for intensive support. Alternatively, families who live far away have little choice but to incur additional financial costs in transporting and accompanying students to and from school. Some refugee families report considerable challenges due to poor regional transport systems, absence of school bus routes and having to transport multiple family members by bus to childcare, primary, high school and TAFE on the same day.

Many refugee and CALD students in regional areas attend mainstream primary and high schools which provide ESL support through visiting teachers. However, due to restrictions on visiting ESL teachers' availability and time, particularly where teachers visit multiple schools, students may receive very few hours of ESL support each week or month, which may not meet their individual needs.

Fluctuating refugee and humanitarian settlement patterns also impacts on ESL and intensive language support delivery in regional Queensland. Settlement in those regions is often varied and thus where there is an increase of refugee arrivals schools might not be resourced until up to a year after their arrival, during which time ESL teachers are stretched beyond capacity in order to support the new arrivals in addition to their existing students.

These issues are discussed in detail in the Community Action for a Multicultural Society's submission to this review.

***(vii) Improved support for mainstream teachers and cultural competency***

The majority of ESL student's time in mainstream schools is spent in classrooms with teachers who are not specialised in ESL teaching.<sup>59</sup> However, mainstream teachers are often not well equipped or supported to assist refugee and ESL students. Many *'are unfamiliar with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of these learners and lack training in meeting their specific educational and social needs'*.<sup>60</sup> It is understood in Queensland this is particularly so in regional areas due to factors including lack of funding and program support, and absence of specialised ESL staff. Appropriate models for schools to ensure integration of ESL into mainstream curriculum and

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<sup>59</sup> Department of Education Victoria, *The ESL Handbook: Advice to schools on programs for supporting students learning English as a Second language* (2006)18.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

classrooms is fundamental to enable refugee and ESL students to access the standard curriculum and achieve better educational outcomes.

Given the small amount of time ESL teachers are able to allocate to a student each week, mainstream teacher education and skilling around ESL is critical to better supporting teachers to modify curriculum and plan individual programs for students. Further, mainstream teachers must be better supported to understand individual students needs and to use strategies best suited to refugee and ESL students.

There is also currently inadequate cultural competency training and development for Queensland teachers around working with refugee and CALD students, families and communities. Some teachers and school staff have limited cultural competence and awareness/understanding, particularly in relation to refugee students and their historical experiences. While it is understood the Department of Education and Training is currently developing a web-based learning tool to provide cultural competency training to teachers through learning on a needs basis, it will not be mandatory professional development.<sup>61</sup>

It is understood that teachers and school leaders appointed to schools with significant numbers of ESL students will be provided with professional development specific to student needs from 2011 as part of a long term professional development priority for Queensland state schools.<sup>62</sup> MDA welcomes the Department's intention to introduce these programs, but considers the promotion and implementation of ongoing cross-cultural training programs across Queensland schools for all teachers and education staff vital to achieving improved learning outcomes and educational experiences for refugee and CALD students.

***(viii) ESL programs and support to recognise and address refugee students' needs***

Queensland ESL programs have traditionally been designed for migrant children with significant prior schooling.<sup>63</sup> There is growing research which indicates that pedagogical practices used for traditional ESL students (often migrants and Indigenous students) have limited success when applied to refugee students, and do not necessarily meet their often complex and varying needs.<sup>64</sup> This is particularly the case where those reliant on ESL support are increasingly from refugee backgrounds, have had disrupted, limited or no previous education and have suffered trauma and instability. Ongoing social and emotional support, in addition to specialised, continuous intensive learning programs is required as a foundation for many refugee students for satisfactory and meaningful participation in education. There is

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<sup>61</sup> Information from the Queensland Department of Education and Training October 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Department of Education and Training, *Education Queensland Professional Development Plan for State Schools 2010 – 2012* (2010) 4.

<sup>63</sup> Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Strengthening Outcomes – Refugee Students in Government Schools* (2008) 17.

<sup>64</sup> R Sidhu and S Taylor, Educational provision for refugee youth in Australia: left to chance? (2007) 43 *Journal of Sociology* 283.

therefore a need to distinguish the educational, ESL and social needs of refugee students from other migrant groups.

ESL support offered in primary and secondary schools is also sometimes viewed as a separate learning component, rather than an integral learning strategy, and is offered at limited times (generally only several hours each week) depending on the level of funding and resourcing provided to schools. Furthermore, the importance and priority accorded to ESL programs in schools is highly dependent on the level of commitment and interest of individual schools rather than as part of a consistent broader education policy for refugee and CALD students.

Emotional and health barriers are also an impediment to learning for refugee students. Sometimes these difficulties may not manifest until several years following arrival in Australia. Counselling and support services, such as Milpera State High School's HEAL Program, and QPASTT's outreach service, as well as trained bicultural support workers are essential to assist refugee students in recovery from trauma and loss.

It is understood however that in most Queensland schools there are no specialised staff qualified to assist students to address such issues, and that guidance counsellors may not be well-equipped to support refugee students. In some cases where student needs are not met there is potential for behavioural problems which may prevent students from participating positively and productively at school.

Funding and resourcing for increased out-of-school learning support, such as homework clubs, tutoring and social support is also required.<sup>65</sup> These measures would significantly contribute to the development of improved literacy, numeracy and English skills of refugee and CALD students, leading to better educational outcomes.

#### ***(ix) Social inclusion***

Students from a refugee and CALD background experience multiple barriers to access, equity and social inclusion within school environments, generating further disadvantage and hindering educational opportunities. Common examples of social exclusion in the broader context of education include<sup>66</sup>:

- Racism, discrimination and prejudice from students and others.
- Negative attitudes from some teachers and others about the ability of refugee and migrant students to succeed.

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<sup>65</sup> Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Strengthening Outcomes – Refugee Students in Government Schools* (2008) 36.

<sup>66</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *In our own words - African Australians: A review of human rights and social inclusion issues* (June 2010) 14-16.

- Lack of sense of belonging in the Australian school environment. This may be exacerbated by lack of familiarity with teaching methodology and learning styles of Australian schools.
- Lack of understanding and knowledge by schools and teachers about the culture and background of refugee and migrant students.
- Lack of participation in school extra-curricular activities including sports and recreation due to financial disadvantage experienced by refugee parents and families.

Many parents involved in MDA consultations around education have raised concerns about the lack of progress and the inability of the current Queensland education system to address the needs of their children. They believe that this has prevented many students from becoming active participants and contributors in activities and programs.

With respect to ESL, the inability of students with ESL needs to access appropriate support for language learning contributes to social exclusion through<sup>67</sup> :

- Isolating students in English speaking classrooms,
- Generating feelings of confusion, shame, inadequacy, frustration and embarrassment, particularly in the classroom, and
- Motivating poor behaviour and disengagement from the classroom and sometimes schools altogether.

### **(b) Recommendations**

The barriers and challenges for refugee and CALD students noted above reveal key areas where funding and resourcing is required in Queensland to overcome the disadvantage and inequities experienced by refugee and CALD students; enhance student performance and improve access to education and educational outcomes.

Improved funding and resourcing of quality and targeted ESL programs and support is particularly critical to improving educational outcomes for refugee and CALD students through:

- Improving their English and academic proficiency and therefore their ability to settle, function and participate independently in Australia;
- Ensuring access to employment opportunities and further education and training, thereby enhancing economic productivity;

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<sup>67</sup> Department of Education, Training and the Arts, *Curriculum Guidelines for ESL Learners*, 38 - 39 < <http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/framework/p-12/esl-learners.html>> accessed 16 March 2011.

- Enabling students to participate equitably and improve their performance in standardised testing (including NAPLAN);
- Providing support for students who have experienced trauma and distress in their home countries;
- Improving student retention rates and reducing disengagement;
- Alleviating poverty and vulnerability to poverty;
- Improving health outcomes;
- Providing a forum for students to learn about their rights and responsibilities in Australia; and
- Ensuring social inclusion and participation.<sup>68</sup>

Accordingly, MDA recommends that enhanced funding and resourcing be directed in Queensland to:

1. ***Increase the numbers of specialised ESL staff and introduce additional specialist staff to support all refugee and CALD students with ESL needs, including:***
  - ***ESL teachers, bilingual teachers and teacher aides (including bicultural teacher aides).***
  - ***Permanent Community Liaison Officers, Home School Liaison Officers and specialist staff from a variety of cultural backgrounds to provide individual support to refugee students in classrooms and to link schools, families and communities. This should be prioritised for Queensland primary schools in particular, which currently have limited numbers of Community Liaison Officers. Recurrent funding should be allocated to maintain CLOs on a permanent basis within schools with high refugee populations.***
  - ***Staff to support students around health, welfare and social inclusion issues, such as the Welfare Officers and Student Welfare Coordinators currently operating in Victorian primary and secondary schools.***<sup>69</sup>
  - ***Specialist staff with mental health expertise to work in schools with large refugee settlement populations in order to provide specialised support for refugee students with complex trauma and emotional support needs.***

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<sup>68</sup> Australian Council of TESOL Associations, Why do immigrants require quality ESL classes? (2008) <<http://www.tesol.org.au/Why-do-immigrants-require-quality-ESL-classes>> at 14 March 2011.

<sup>69</sup> Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Strengthening Outcomes: Refugee Students in Government Schools* (2008) 27.

2. ***Establish primary and secondary intensive learning centres, similar to Milpera State High School, in key settlement areas in Brisbane and regional settlement centres throughout Queensland, including Logan, the Gold Coast, Toowoomba, Townsville and Cairns, to better prepare refugee students for participation in mainstream schools and accelerate their English language learning.***

***Alternatively, provide intensive English language support classes in mainstream schools in key settlement regions of Queensland to enable all refugee and new arrival students with complex language needs to access intensive language support. Such support should be provided on an individual needs basis until students attain sufficient competency to participate in mainstream classes.***

3. ***Establish transition programs for refugees exiting intensive language schools to mainstream schools to improve support to transition, better equip them to cope and to reduce disadvantage. Transition programs could include:***

- ***Bridging programs in mainstream schools to provide intensive literacy teaching and targeted support to refugee students not yet ready to fully enter mainstream classrooms (such programs have been introduced in Victoria<sup>70</sup>).***
- ***Transition coordinators in intensive learning centres and mainstream schools with high populations of refugee students (transition coordinators have been successfully adopted in Victoria<sup>71</sup>).***
- ***Linking programs to encourage collaboration and information sharing among schools.***
- ***Peer mentoring among refugee students in mainstream schools.***
- ***Funding to track the progress of students who have transitioned into mainstream schools, to address current and future resourcing and support needs.***

***Funding should be able to be applied flexibly to enable the establishment of transition programs to meet the diverse needs of individual students. For example, at some schools a combination of transition approaches may be optimal to cater for varying student needs.***

4. ***Increase the amount of ESL support refugee and CALD students with ongoing ESL needs are eligible to receive. This could be achieved by***

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<sup>70</sup> Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Strengthening Outcomes: Refugee Students in Government Schools* (2008) 21.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

*allocating funding through a targeted individual-needs based approach to fund students until they achieve competency, rather than using the current time frame for eligibility (i.e. 3 – 5 years).*

*Additional time for ESL support is particularly necessary for refugee students in years 4 – 7 who have already had their three years of ESL support, to continue to appropriately support them at an early stage in their educational development.*

- 5. Provide ESL support to refugee and CALD students with ESL needs in Queensland Preparatory schooling.*
- 6. Improve standard ESL programs and program models in regional and rural Queensland to alleviate the current disadvantage experienced by refugee and CALD students in those areas through inadequate funding/resourcing and geographical location, to better accommodate the needs of those regions.*
- 7. Provide additional intensive language and ESL support to appropriately cater for sudden increases in refugee and new arrivals under the Humanitarian Settlement Program.*
- 8. Improve the integration of ESL into mainstream classrooms. Mechanisms to achieve this include the implementation of professional development programs to empower mainstream teachers to incorporate ESL learning strategies across a mainstream classroom and to differentiate and adapt curriculum to cater for diverse learning needs.*

*For example, the Teaching ESL Students in Mainstream Classrooms training and development course operates in Victoria to improve the capacity of mainstream schools to respond to refugee students' needs and improve transition of new arrival students.<sup>72</sup>*

- 9. Implement cross-cultural training for all teachers and school/education staff across Queensland to assist them in performing their duties in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner; and to better support them to teach students from refugee and CALD backgrounds. In particular, teachers should be resourced and trained around:*
  - Cultural backgrounds of students and the refugee experience.*
  - The educational backgrounds (or lack thereof) of students.*
  - The settlement process, including organisations which work with refugee communities and support available.*
  - Working with students who have experienced extraordinary trauma.*

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 28.

*Cross-cultural training should be provided as part of tertiary curriculum for teachers and education providers, as well as ongoing professional development upon commencing work. Such training should also be integrated into strategies for personal and professional development of all teachers and education staff, as well as department policies and frameworks.*

**10. Develop comprehensive ESL resources similar to those in Victoria which are directed to supporting mainstream teachers of ESL.<sup>73</sup> Recurrent funding for schools and teachers to purchase ESL resources should also be provided.**

**11. Introduce programs and/or expand existing programs which cater specifically to the unique learning needs of refugee students and address their social support needs (such as trauma, health and wellbeing), including:**

- **Counselling and support services within schools, such as Milpera State High School's HEAL Program.**
- **Out of school learning support through homework clubs and tutoring.**

*It is crucial that these programs be adequately funded and resourced with culturally competent staff, proper use of interpreters, teacher aides or bicultural support workers. These programs could also be delivered in conjunction with community organisations specialising in refugee support, such as QPASTT, which currently provides outreach services to Milpera.*

*Appendix B details current programs in Queensland and other states/territories for refugee students, which could be considered for implementation in Queensland and/or extended for provision throughout the State.*

**12. Undertake longitudinal research to track refugee student progress through schooling. Such research would be invaluable in determining how refugee students are faring, and where resources could be best directed to improve students' educational outcomes.**

**13. Mechanisms to improve identification of refugee and CALD students with a disability to enable them to receive appropriate educational support and to reduce the potential for disadvantage in schooling.**

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<sup>73</sup> See the Victorian Department of Education's website at <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/resources/pubsecesl.htm#8>> at 16 March 2011.



## ***Term of Reference Two: Role of parents, families and communities and educational partnerships in schools***

MDA considers parents, families, communities and schools have a vital collective role around education of children from refugee and CALD backgrounds. Parental support in education is essential to achieving positive educational outcomes for students.<sup>74</sup> Recent research undertaken in Australian high schools confirms that parent-child relationships, after teacher-student relationships, have the most significant impact on academic outcomes, including 'motivation, engagement, homework completion, enjoyment of school, attendance and educational aspirations'.<sup>75</sup>

MDA supports a holistic approach to refugee education whereby students, families, communities and schools work collaboratively to achieve the best outcomes for their students. School environments play a critical role in supporting young people's transition to a new country and sense of belonging and inclusion in the community. MDA considers that education is a two-way street where students, teachers, families, schools and communities share culture and experiences, foster enduring relationships and support each other to learn, participate and achieve.

While the majority of parents and families from refugee backgrounds highly value education and wish to make a positive contribution to the education and development of their children, they face challenges in doing so as many families from refugee backgrounds have little or no educational experience themselves. A compounding factor is the lack of English language proficiency of many parents and families who, as well as their children, may be learning English for the first time and may be illiterate in their own language. This means that many parents have difficulties in understanding Australian curriculum and may struggle to assist their children with homework or study.

Other challenges encountered by refugee parents and families in supporting their children in education include:

- Many lack understanding of the Australian education system and may not be provided with adequate information about this by schools or other agencies upon settlement in Australia. It is understood that at present limited information is provided by schools, the government and community sector.
- Different cultural perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of parents/families and teachers/schools in educating children. In many countries from which refugees originate, schooling and education of children is the sole responsibility of teachers and schools and parents are generally

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<sup>74</sup> Refugee Education Partnership Project, *The Education Needs of Young Refugees in Victoria* (April 2007) 31.

<sup>75</sup> Queensland Government, Education Views; Teachers really do make a difference (July 2009) <<http://education.qld.gov.au/projects/educationviews/academic-views/2009/july.html>> at 28 march 2011.

not involved in schooling unless a problem arises. This approach differs to Australia's 'shared responsibility' view of schooling.

- Sometimes parents/families have unrealistic expectations of educational outcomes and long term career pathways available to their children (such as wanting children to become lawyers, doctors, etc) and may place additional pressure on students to succeed. This may be compounded by intergenerational conflict and concerns around 'loss of culture'.
- Inability to communicate with teachers and staff where schools fail to use interpreters and translate materials, particularly for parent/teacher meetings. Due to these communication problems often students act as an intermediary between schools and parents, with parents reliant on their children's interpretation of letters and reports, leading to misinterpretations and inaccuracies. In Queensland there is limited multilingual information to assist communication between schools and parents.
- Some parents feel they lack information about their child's development and progress and that some schools are not proactive in communicating with parents/families around this. When reporting does occur, often it is not provided in a meaningful way which parents understand.
- Insufficient numbers of career guidance counsellors to assist refugee students, parents and families in selecting senior school subjects and to explore post-compulsory schooling options.

MDA is anecdotally aware that in some cases career guidance counsellors have not taken appropriate measures to involve parents/families in decision-making around senior schooling subjects and post-employment pathways, such as through failing to use interpreters, or not impressing upon families the importance of their involvement in such matters. Some students have reportedly been discouraged by schools from taking subjects which will enable them to be accepted into university. In those cases refugee parents/families have not been involved in exploring post-compulsory schooling options and do not understand the importance of senior subject selection. Upon those students completing year 12 parents/families have been dismayed to discover their child is not eligible for acceptance to university.

- Parents/families are often unable to attend schools for meetings or events as they do not have access to private transport, may not have their driver's licences and may not be able to afford public transport.
- Inability to afford for their children to participate in school events such as excursions and sports.

- Some parents report they lack confidence and language in dealing with schools and feel intimidated by the school environment.

As noted above, currently there are Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) and one Home School Liaison Officer within some Brisbane high schools who provide assistance to refugee students and parents/families. CLOs and Home School Liaison Officers provide a vital link between schools and families through home liaison support around education and welfare issues. Without such support many parents and families would be unable to participate at all in their children's schooling. However, due to limited numbers of CLOs and Home School Liaison Officers (currently there are only three CLOs in Brisbane secondary schools and one Home School Liaison Officer at Milpera) and high demand, many parents and families remain unsupported, are unable to communicate and engage effectively with schools, and are socially excluded.

### **Recommendations**

Feedback to MDA indicates that targeted programs, support and assistance are needed for schools to improve engagement with refugee parents, families and communities (particularly during their first few years of settlement) and to provide improved educational opportunities for students. It is crucial that any programs be adequately funded and resourced with culturally competent staff and interpreters.

To enable refugee parents, families and communities and schools to better support refugee students and each other MDA recommends that enhanced funding and resourcing be directed in Queensland to:

- 14. Support for schools and/or community organisations (such as settlement services) to conduct community information sessions for all newly arrived parents and families about the Australian education system, including information about parental and school roles and responsibilities, how to support students in schooling and post-compulsory schooling pathways. Additionally, schools could provide opportunities for refugee communities to provide information sessions to teachers, school staff and students about their cultural background and experiences. Such initiatives would build trust, confidence, relationships and social inclusion between families and schools.***

***Examples of current programs successfully addressing these issues include the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and Trauma's Whole of School Approach (currently operating in Queensland through QPASTT), the UCan2 Program and Mercy Family Services Toowoomba's Pilot Project Transition into Australian Education (see Appendix B for further information about these programs).***

**15. Programs to strengthen communication, engagement and relationships between refugee parents and families, and schools, and to encourage families to participate more fully in schooling.**

*For example, orientation programs specifically for refugee communities (supported by interpreters and bicultural workers), programs to enhance communication and facilitate regular contact and information between schools and families, and initiatives to engage refugee parents and families in school events and activities (including tuckshop duty, sports days, Parents and Citizens Associations and school councils, mentoring with parents from non-refugee backgrounds, volunteering and school excursions).*

**16. Establish programs to better support and assist refugee students, parents and families around senior schooling. Such programs could provide information and facilitate understanding for families around assessment, senior subject selection, post-compulsory schooling options and career pathways.**

**17. Provide and/or subsidise transport to enable those refugee parents and families who experience financial hardship to attend schools for meetings with teachers and other events, and to participate in the school community. For example, funding could be provided for a school bus or mini bus to transport parents and families to schools and school events.**

**18. Provide formal training programs to all primary and secondary schools around interpreter usage, including how to recognise the need for an interpreter, how to engage an interpreter, who is an appropriate interpreter and relevant guidelines and procedures.**

**19. Translate further education resources and materials for refugee students, parents, families and communities, particularly resources to assist individuals and communities to understand the Queensland education system, career pathways and options for students post-compulsory schooling.**

*For example, the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has a range of publications in community languages, including information on ESL and the Victorian Essential Learning Standards to assist parents to understand the Victorian education system.*

As recommended above:

- Professional development for teachers and staff around cross-cultural issues is also needed to equip them with the requisite knowledge and expertise to engage with refugee and CALD parents, families and communities (see recommendation 9 above).

- Additional Community Liaison Officers, Home School Liaison Officers and specialist staff from a variety of cultural backgrounds are needed to provide individual support to refugee students in classrooms and to link schools and families (see recommendation 1 above).

### ***Term of Reference Three: Role of Australian and State/Territory Governments in funding schooling***

MDA considers that the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments have an equally significant role and responsibility in funding education for refugee and CALD students. This is supported by the commitments of both Governments in the *2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* to equity, access, excellence and improved outcomes in schooling for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, including refugees, as well as the Queensland Government's *Toward Q2, Tomorrow's Queensland* strategy.

Notably, a key principle underpinning *The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy* is the commitment to a 'just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers and where government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds'.<sup>76</sup> Central to this is equitable access to government programs and services responsive to the needs of refugee and CALD communities, including education.<sup>77</sup>

To ensure equitable access and better educational outcomes for refugee and CALD students, the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments must work in partnership to share leadership and responsibility for funding, policy, and program and service delivery around education and ESL.

MDA considers there are benefits to integrating funding and support services within schools with community sector organisations who work with refugees and migrants. Improved partnerships and coordination between the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments, settlement agencies and community organisations would ensure improved service delivery and support for refugee students and families in key metropolitan and regional settlement areas, particularly around funding and resourcing of schools and education, to better respond to the educational and social needs of refugee and humanitarian entrant students.

Action by both levels of Government is urgently required to prevent refugee and CALD students falling further behind and experiencing socio-economic disadvantage through poor educational outcomes. To achieve this ESL and refugee and CALD education must become a priority for both levels of government.

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<sup>76</sup> Australian Government, *The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy* (2011) 5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

While the Victorian Government has a refugee education strategy<sup>78</sup> and a multicultural education strategy<sup>79</sup>, there is no national strategy addressing the educational needs of students from refugee and CALD backgrounds. As noted by the Australian Council of TESOL Associations a national strategic response across all sectors is needed to improve refugee education.<sup>80</sup>

In Queensland there is no state-based Settlement Planning Committee responsible for jointly coordinating settlement planning between Federal, State and Local government agencies, non-government organisations and settlement services for refugee and new arrivals. Queensland had a Settlement Planning Committee convened by DIAC but it no longer exists.

A joint mechanism for settlement planning is required to provide a strategic, coordinated approach to service provision by government and non-government agencies in relation to education, as well as health, employment, housing, and transport in key refugee settlement areas. Joint settlement planning is also necessary given the dynamic nature of the refugee program and the Federal Government's ongoing commitment to regional settlement.

### **Recommendations**

To ensure greater equity in education for refugee and CALD students and to improve coordination around ESL funding, policy and program and service delivery MDA recommends:

**20. The Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments work in partnership with community sector organisations to develop a targeted national strategy around education for refugee and migrant students, to improve educational support and outcomes.**

**21. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship reconvene the Queensland Settlement Planning Committee as a joint planning mechanism between Federal, State and Local government agencies, non-government organisations and settlement services to:**

- **provide a strategic, coordinated approach to settlement planning and service provision in relation to education, as well as health, employment, housing, transport and other services in key Queensland refugee settlement areas.**

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<sup>78</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Victoria, *Strengthening Outcomes: Refugee Students in Government Schools* (2008).

<sup>79</sup> Department of Education Victoria, *Education for Global and Multicultural Citizenship: A Strategy for Victorian Government Schools 2009 – 2013* (2009) <<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/commrel/policy/multicultural-ed-strategy.pdf>> at 18 March 2011.

<sup>80</sup> Australian Council of TESOL Associations, *An overview of the issues around the settlement and provision of services for new arrivals from Africa* (31 January 2006) <[www.tesol.org.au](http://www.tesol.org.au)> at 14 March 2011.

- *identify emerging settlement issues for planning consideration and determine and coordinate responses.*<sup>81</sup>

***Term of Reference Five: Funding Mechanisms and Term of Reference Six: Accountability and Regulation***

**(a) Funding mechanisms and accountability around ESL in Queensland**

In providing feedback to MDA around school funding needs for refugee and ESL students in Queensland, schools, ESL teachers, community organisations and communities consistently reported:

- Current ESL and Refugee Program funding arrangements do not adequately support refugee and migrant children to overcome multiple disadvantage and attain educational outcomes comparable to students from English speaking backgrounds; and
- There is limited transparency around funding mechanisms for ESL in Queensland state schools.

It was also reported that:

- Many teachers and schools lack knowledge and understanding around:
  - how much funding is currently provided to refugee and ESL students and schools in Queensland
  - how funding for students and schools with large refugee and ESL populations is determined
  - who is eligible for funding
  - decision-making processes around funding, including why some Queensland schools get ESL funding and other do not.
  - how much funding is contributed by the Commonwealth Government to Queensland Treasury for education expenditure in Queensland.
  - the amount of State funding contributed to the ESL Program, and whether this is:
    - (a) comparable to the funding commitments of other States and Territories towards ESL and refugee support in their jurisdictions, and

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<sup>81</sup> It is noted that the Terms of Reference of the National Settlement Planning Committee include similar functions: see the 2006 National Framework for Settlement Planning at [http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/\\_pdf/sett\\_plan\\_framework.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/_pdf/sett_plan_framework.pdf).

(b) whether this is sufficient to meet current student need in Queensland.

It was noted that these issues have been particularly prevalent since the 'untagging' of ESL funding following COAG's introduction of the *National Education Agreement* (NEA) and the removal of New Arrivals Program funding as a separate funding component for refugee students. Feedback indicated uncertainty around exactly what the ESL expenditure is given the 'mixing' of funds under the NEA.

- There is limited information provided by regional offices and the Department of Education and Training around funding mechanisms. As noted in the table of student numbers and funding above, this information is not publicly reported in the Department's annual reports.

Further issues raised around funding, accountability and regulation in relation to ESL in Queensland include:

- Lack of a centralised and coordinated approach for ESL, including absence of specialised ESL staff and an ESL unit within Central Office to contribute to policy and program development (discussed below).
- Absence of a formalised ESL Policy (as noted above).
- Inadequate and inconsistent data collection (discussed below).
- Limited communication and consultation between the Department, regions, schools and teachers around ESL funding and program issues.
- Some feedback indicated perceptions that ESL funding in Queensland had not increased in recent years, despite increases in student numbers and need, and that this has resulted in cutbacks in ESL hours.
- Uncertainty around ongoing funding for ESL programs in Queensland, creating insecurity and instability for schools and staff around positions, and planning issues.
- Lack of funding and Inconsistency in ESL programs across Queensland's regions, generating disparity in the quality of programs, staff numbers and service delivery. These issues are discussed in detail in the Community Action for a Multicultural Society's submission to this review.

#### **(b) Centralised support around ESL and multicultural education**

Feedback to MDA has indicated that many teachers, schools and refugee communities feel there is a lack of centralised support and leadership around ESL and multicultural education in Queensland.



It is understood that for some years there has not been an ESL Coordinator or similar ESL-specific role located within the Department of Education and Training's central office to coordinate ESL resource and program delivery across the State. Further, it is understood there is currently no specialist unit within the Department with a focus on ESL or multicultural education and policy and program development. As a result, MDA is anecdotally aware that some teachers feel they lack leadership, are disconnected, uninformed and under consulted, and that ESL is not prioritised or an ongoing commitment of government.

By comparison, in Victoria the Student Learning Division with the Office for Government School Education, Department of Education has a Targeted Programs Branch with separate Multicultural Education, ESL and LOTE Units. While the ESL Unit is responsible for policy, program and resource coordination statewide, the Multicultural Education Unit is responsible for implementation of the *Education for Global and Multicultural Citizenship - A Strategy for Victorian Government Schools 2009-2013*. In accordance with this strategy the Unit aims to support Victorian schools around education and professional development for students, teachers and schools in relation to Global and Multicultural Education, Civics and Citizenship Education, Human Rights and Values.<sup>82</sup>

MDA considers that the establishment of an ESL Unit as well as a Multicultural Education Unit within the Queensland Department of Education and Training would be invaluable in providing consistent, centralised coordination and leadership around ESL policy, program and resourcing; and delivering education, support and professional development around multiculturalism across government schools. Such Units would ensure improved ESL support and coordination for schools and refugee and CALD students, as well as further embedding and prioritising multicultural values within Queensland curriculum and school environments.

### **(c) Data collection**

It is understood that at present data collection around refugee and ESL students in Queensland government schools is inaccurate and inconsistent. Prior to 2009 the ESL Database was utilised by the Department to identify ESL students and collate information about their needs.<sup>83</sup> It is understood that data was used to determine funding allocations and resource distribution for schools with ESL learners.

MDA understands that the ESL database was decommissioned at the end of 2008. Feedback to MDA indicates that since then ESL data has been collected by schools through the whole-of-school database SIMS, but that some schools are not collecting accurate or adequate data at the time of enrolment or following enrolment about refugee and ESL learners, resulting in unidentified student need, as discussed above. Further, it is understood some schools are inadvertently recording students who are

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<sup>82</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Victoria, Multicultural Education <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/>> at 20 March 2011.

<sup>83</sup> Education Queensland, *ESL Handbook for Schools* (2006/2007), 9

bilingual as having an ESL need where they do not, resulting in inaccurate data and potentially inappropriate placement of funding. It is understood that a new database to collect ESL student data was to be introduced, however to date that has not eventuated.

As noted in the *2008 Melbourne Declaration*<sup>84</sup>, the Australian States and Territories have committed to action to strengthen accountability and transparency through improving the quality and reliability of information on schooling and data collection, in order to monitor and improve student progress and performance outcomes, determine students and schools with particular needs, to inform approaches to policy and program delivery, and to allocate resources.<sup>85</sup>

In the absence of reliable data collection and support for Queensland government schools to properly identify students with an ESL, refugee and students will continue to experience disadvantage, poorer educational outcomes. Further, schools may be disadvantaged through not receiving appropriate funding for ESL programs.

#### **(d) Recommendations**

In order to address current issues around funding, accountability and regulation of the ESL program in Queensland, MDA recommends:

**22. *Consideration be given by COAG to reintroducing 'tagged' funding through the ESL New Arrivals Program for state and territory government schools.***

***Increased Commonwealth funding should also be provided to schools for refugee students to enable additional support provision to meet their unique learning and settlement needs, particularly where students have experienced significantly disrupted and limited schooling prior to arrival in Australia. Funding should not be restricted to time frames for learning, but rather should be provided on an individual needs basis.***

**23. *The Commonwealth and Queensland Governments implement appropriate mechanisms to improve transparency and public reporting (on an annual basis) of ESL program funding in Queensland, including program funding for refugee students.***

**24. *That a centralised unit, similar to the ESL Unit and Multicultural Education Unit within Victoria's Department of Education be established within the Queensland Department of Education and Training to:***

***a) coordinate funding, program and service delivery of ESL and educational support for students from refugee and CALD backgrounds, and***

***b) deliver education, support and professional development around***

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<sup>84</sup> *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians 2008* (2008), 16 - 17

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

*multiculturalism across government schools.*

- 25. Mechanisms to improve certainty around ESL funding arrangements for Queensland Government schools to ensure greater stability for teaching staff and continuity and retention of staff, particularly those with specialist knowledge and expertise around ESL.**
- 26. The introduction of comprehensive ESL data collection mechanisms for schools to ensure improved identification of ESL learners, better monitoring of student progress and appropriate funding and resourcing of schools with refugee and ESL learners. Comprehensive training for all school staff, including administration staff (who are generally involved in student enrolments) around who is an ESL learner and has need for language support, the type of information to be collected, and processes/procedures for collecting data should accompany the implementation of data collection mechanisms to ensure accuracy of data and appropriate identification of student need.**

## **9. Conclusion**

This submission has provided a comprehensive overview of the unique and complex educational and support needs of refugee students, the multiple layers of disadvantage they experience and the inadequacies of current ESL and refugee funding and resource allocation in Queensland.

As noted in the *2008 Melbourne Declaration*, 'Australian Governments must support all young Australians to achieve not only equality of opportunity but more equitable outcomes'.<sup>86</sup> To achieve equitable, accessible and quality education for refugee students governments at the Commonwealth and State/Territory levels must demonstrate greater commitment to and leadership around funding and resource allocation as well as policy and program development and service delivery for ESL and refugee student support.

Both the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments have a vital role to play in funding and supporting refugee students and families in primary and secondary school education. Only through targeted, individualised ESL, settlement and social support responsive to the unique and often complex learning and social needs of refugee students, families and communities will refugee students achieve improved educational outcomes.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 14 - 15.