



Settlement Council of Australia – response to Employment Services Discussion Paper

Introduction

Employment is a key settlement milestone in a person's journey in establishing themselves in a new place. The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) has held numerous consultations on employment with our members and the settlement sector, and released a discussion paper on employment in June 2012. SCOA appreciates the opportunity to respond to the 'Employment Services – building on success' discussion paper. The recent Second National Settlement Conference included employment participation as a major stream. Settlement agencies across Australia in their work in supporting migrants and refugees are reporting employment support and challenges with finding employment are major concerns for their client groups. Many of our members have also prepared detailed submissions to the discussion paper, highlighting the issues migrants and refugees face in finding stable secure employment, and the creative innovative solutions being implemented in locations across the country.

There is a plethora of research and discussion papers on facilitating people to find work, and an equally large range of information on supporting people from a variety of backgrounds connect to services and employment in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way. That said, the body of research and feedback from the settlement sector indicates that while great work is being done in pockets, this needs to be more effectively spread and shared, with increased support to links, networks and the connections between employment support services.

Key themes

The key themes that have emerged in SCOA's consultation and research include:

- The need for specialist employment support services for migrants and refugees
- Facilitating employment pathways
- The need for research which connects the anecdotal and qualitative evidence with the quantitative and statistical evidence on job seekers, and which examines the longitudinal path of job seekers through support services and into employment over time
- Fostering the creation of links – between agencies and for job seekers themselves, including in specialist areas such as English language training
- The need for cultural competency across the employment services network (notwithstanding the recommendation and need for specialist services)

Specialist services:

The need for specialist employment support services for migrants and refugees came through member feedback, and is clear in the anecdotal evidence of job seekers from migrant and refugee background's experience of employment support services. Specialist support services are trained and equipped to provide culturally appropriate support which fosters the relationships and learning needed for job seekers to find and maintain employment. There are examples of successful specialist programs in specific locations (and at specific points in time, for example programs in NSW and QLD which targeted providing migrants with employment support) across Australia which have been successful in supporting migrants and refugees secure employment.

Employment Pathways:

Facilitating employment pathways for newly arrived migrants and refugees is a theme which emerged in consultation. Respondents highlighted issues such as the complexity of gaining recognition for prior skills and study, and supporting job seekers understand the pathway to employment in the Australian context. Navigating new systems and structures can be confusing, leading some job seekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds to unnecessarily waste their talent or effort in finding appropriate employment which matches their skills and qualifications.

Further, the need to allow for opportunities to harness entrepreneurial and business acumen of refugee and migrant jobseekers to support and resource any effort to establish their own small business and increase employment opportunities for those from their own communities

Case Study – SSI in NSW:

A recently arrived refugee client of SSI in NSW established his own small business (cleaning) and employs eight other people from the Afghan community.

Research:

The importance of research to provide a strong evidence base for policy and program development is clear, particularly given the current apparent disconnect between general statistics on job seekers and employment support services (which are largely positive) and anecdotal case studies (which highlight gaps and inconsistencies within policy and program settings).

Data collected by DEEWR and employment service providers needs to be disaggregated to facilitate refined analysis of policy settings and their impact. Including information on visas, length of time in Australia and cultural background would enable providers and the government to more accurately assess what services are needed and where.

Longitudinal studies have been of significant benefit in other areas of government policy, such as the studies conducted by DIAC (the Longitudinal Survey of Migrants is a good example) and the report by Professor Hugo on the "Economic, social and civic contribution of first and second generation

humanitarian entrants” (June 2011, DIAC). Following a cohort of migrants and refugees through their employment journey over time will provide great research dividends.

Links:

Links are needed across services and for individuals. Reports indicate that many job seekers find jobs through personal contacts, which indicates supporting migrants and refugees in establishing relationships will facilitate their entry into employment. Agencies too need to connect and work together, linking projects and leveraging results through working together. Thankfully there are some great examples of this occurring across Australia. Supporting the expansion of these projects, and ensuring that agencies are funded to build the social capital required to provide holistic services to job seekers is a priority within any re-shaping of employment support services.

Program links between English language provision, settlement providers and job support agencies need to be strengthened. Current partnerships are not consistent across the country, and many operate without acknowledged program resources, making them vulnerable to difficult to replicate.

Case study: South Australia, volunteering, work experience and student placement

The Migrant Resource Centre, South Australia (MRCSA) runs a wide range of volunteer programs, work experience and student placements within their community development projects which have assisted approximately 400 people gain experience in Australian workplaces. This has facilitated the strengthening of networks, cultural understanding and expanded training and employment pathways for participants.

Cultural competency

Ensuring all agencies are supported to provide services in a culturally sensitive manner, and have a culturally competent workforce is vital in today’s multicultural Australia. The productive benefits of diversity are well acknowledged, and need to be capitalised on within the employment support services framework. This will ensure that job seekers receive an appropriately targeted service, and that skill sets such as language are capitalised on.

[Response to the discussion paper](#)

Meeting the needs of job seekers:

The current model of employment support services, with its particular emphasis on the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) does not work well for job seekers from a refugee or migrant background. There have been ongoing reports of inconsistencies within the allocation of streams and matching of agencies with job seekers. Job seekers are being streamed into inadequate service streams i.e. stream 1 when the fuller range of support provided within stream 4 is needed. Where review or reassessment is required the process is difficult.

Diversitat (Job Futures) Case Study

This process can be difficult, particular if there is an Employment Services Area without a CALD specialist JSA. In Geelong, Diversitat runs a specialist CALD JSA service and has a very strong working relationship with the Centrelink Multicultural Services Officer (MSO). This has proven to make the assessment process a lot less cumbersome and in most cases clients from a refugee or migrant background are moved into a more appropriate stream commensurate with their circumstances and level of disadvantage. Albeit this is not a perfect system and many CALD clients are confused by the level of choice available to them when it comes to selecting a JSA provider. In a lot of cases the choice is made for them by Centrelink and is largely based on geography rather than which provider would best suit their needs. In an area such as ours where there is a CALD specialist JSA, we believe that clients unable to choose should be referred to a CALD JSA specialist as best practice.

There is also anecdotal evidence that employment support services are not utilising the financial resources at their disposal to their maximum benefit. Simple solutions, such as allocating funds to cover a medical exam when it is required for a job, have not been able to be funded. The way the Employment Pathway Fund (EPF) flows through the system needs review and refinement.

Case study: financial support for medical tests

A client granted his PV in July 2011, was released from detention and referred to HSS provider. The client has mental health issue and has been supported intensively by HSS provider. The client can't live with other people due to torture and trauma experience. He is registered with JSA provider and desperate to find a job. The client did not receive any help from the JSA provider to search for jobs. HSS case manager assisted him to apply for a job in a meat factory in Wagga Wagga. The employer requested medical tests to be done before they progress the application. The tests cost \$450 all up and the client was unable to pay for it. The HSS case manager approached the JSA provider but they advised they cannot assist financially. HSS provider had to assist the client to pay for his medical checks as they believe that outcome of this job is not only going to assist the client financially but will also assist his settlement and mental health wellbeing. All medical checks are now completed and the client is waiting for the application outcomes.

In terms of meeting the needs of job seekers it is also important to look closely at what aspirations job seekers have about their career. Migrants and refugees can be in danger of being under employed (where their qualifications may not be recognised or acknowledged), or of being steered into casual low skilled jobs which may limit future career progression.

Skills recognition is a vital component for job seekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds, as an element in itself, and as a practical marker of employment pathways. It is a waste of human capital when skills are not recognised and can lead to other problems for job seekers, such as mental health issues. Short term loans may be a useful way to fund this process for some job seekers.

Eligibility for services for migrants within the first two years is recommended, as eligibility would facilitate migrants, where needed, to find stable and secure employment. It would thus speed up the process of settlement and migrant's full productive contribution to Australian society.

To fully match services to job seeker needs outreach is required for specific groups such as refugee women and refugee youth. Outreach programs will allow innovation and experimentation to be fostered, and with the right program settings, sharing best practice and communication (as discussed in more detail below) would allow successful programs to be replicated. SCOA members have regularly commented on the need for specialist support for youth, a good example is MDA's case study on youth in their response to the discussion paper, which gives an example of successful partnerships and the results they can achieve (MDA Submission March 2013).

Economic pressures on agencies have resulted in reduced cultural competency, with agencies becoming mono-cultural in response to the continual pressure to do more with less. Reviewing agencies for their sensitivity to diversity would mitigate these impacts and result in a client centred service model which addresses the needs for cultural competency and cultural sensitivity. This would also strengthen community and job seeker trust in employment support services. It would also reduce confusion from an agency's perspective in relation to understanding all cohorts of job seekers, whatever their origin and the visa category they hold.

The Centrelink model of Multicultural Service Officers (MSOs) may be worth considering. Centrelink has Multicultural Service Officers across the country who support connecting multicultural communities and clients with Centrelink services and support. The investment they are able to make in strengthening local networks, fostering connections between diverse agencies and linking the multicultural communities with providers has proven successful.

Working with employers

Consultation with the settlement sector highlighted the need for employer support in relation to hiring job seekers from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Increased awareness of the benefits cultural diversity can bring to a workplace needs to be a focus of discussions with potential employers.

Connecting employers with best practice, and demonstrating the positive economic impact of best practice will be a good way to get employers 'on side' in hiring job seekers from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Creating work experience placements is also a vital element for migrants and refugees as they often have significant experience overseas, but can find it very difficult to break into the Australian job market.

Case study: work experience needed

In February 2012, SSI volunteer program advertised on job websites for several volunteer positions, in administration roles, in Western Sydney. The advert attracted over 300 applications, from newly arrived refugees and migrants in less than a month.

SSI was overwhelmed by the response for this unpaid role and we asked Why?

As one young man said “because I want a job”.

He, like so many others, has tertiary qualifications, either from Australia or from overseas, and he is desperate to get work. But, as he mentioned, he can't even get to that first step to get an interview.

SSI has over 300 registered volunteer's majority of whom are looking for local work experience. Most volunteers have tertiary education and are actively seeking employment.

SSI provides an opportunity for volunteers to utilise their bi-lingual skills so that when refugees and asylum seekers come here, they are welcome and can settle in smoothly, and they know how to find the services they need.

In the last nine months SSI has offered paid employment to 18 former volunteers from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Volunteer program estimates that over 30 volunteers have been employed by other agencies.

Stronger partnerships with other services

Links between agencies in some areas are working really well, in other areas they are under-funded or not funded at all, and are consequently not able to support job seekers to their full capacity. Supporting agencies, employment support services and other community organisations, in their work with job seekers is vital and more emphasis on facilitating partnerships is essential. Agencies, be they job support agencies or other community support agencies, need sufficient funding to resource partnerships, which are an essential component of supporting job seekers in securing long term employment. Training and employment pathways networking, advocacy and mentoring are all key components of finding employment, which job support agencies can productively work with a whole host of partners on facilitating. Real and equal partnerships in this area require resourcing for ongoing sustainability.

Local level links between apprenticeship providers, training and newly emerging small business are a fundamental requirement, with reduction in red tape a particular need (emphasised for new business ventures and social enterprises). Where the level of application process and information requirements are too onerous it functions as a disincentive, and reduces the motivation to establish what may be productive partnerships.

The link between state and federal funding is also important. The shifts (and cuts) in state funding have had significant impacts in some areas (for example in Queensland – the closing of the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program in 2012) This has repercussions on the partnerships and links which are developed at a local level.

Utilisation of existing services such as the Telephone Interpreting Service (TIS) also needs to be strengthened and encouraged.

New ideas for a better system

In consultation with the settlement sector the feedback on the current model of the Job Services Australia (JSA) has indicated areas which need be strengthened in any proposed change of model, services, systems or policy settings for employment support services. In particular the current JSAs do not have strong links to other agencies. The JSA agencies are operating in a tight competitive environment which has, in many cases, limited their connections to other agencies, and acted as an inhibitor to connections and links being established or maintained. For instance the star ratings system, while fostering excellence and providing a means of rating providers, has been mentioned in consultations as focussing more on providers than on client outcomes.

Historical examples of good practice and innovative programs were discussed, within the context of not wanting to lose valuable lessons and experience, and the need for specialist services. While generalist providers can (and should) be 'up-skilled' in their services to increase their cultural competency, the recommendation is that specialised employment service providers for people from migrant or refugee backgrounds will be able to foster the trust and community connections to provide improved links to employment for job seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Feedback also included exploring the possibility of other structures due to the level of competition within the employment services sector. It could include looking at models which have an accreditation focus rather than compliance focus, or a mixed competition or open competition model.

Additionally, feedback indicated the need to acknowledge the English language needs of job seekers and allocate funding accordingly, echoed in the recommendation for specialist providers, and strengthening the link between the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and employment support services (as was recommended at the Second National Settlement Conference).

Any employment support services should be geared to an 'early intervention' approach, which prioritises providing comprehensive support early in a job seekers search for employment. This can also link to English language classes, as one of the main barriers identified to long term successful employment is proficiency in English.

Within the exploration of employment support systems collaboration could be fostered by strengthening the support and funding provided to social enterprises, which are ideal for migrants and refugees with a business background, and which provide added impact and support to the wider community through their focus and mandate.

Innovation and sharing information on best practice needs to be embedded into the structure of employment support services. Collaboration is a crucial element and requires support to foster. There are strong links between successful settlement and employment and examples of collaboration between JSAs, settlement agencies, and Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) with positive outcomes.

Case study – Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre/JobQuest collaboration

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre (FMRC) undertook a partnership with JobQuest, a community organisation focussed on providing training and support to disadvantaged people in Western Sydney. Through providing vocationally oriented training in asset maintenance supported by significant work experience the program provided support which resulted in a significant proportion of participants gaining work (part time or full time), or preparing participants for further study.

The settlement sector strongly recommends additional research and qualitative evidence are used to inform the development of service models and policy settings. The current JSA model and the JSCI in particular as a tool is very statistically oriented, as mentioned in the section on key themes above, there is a disconnect between the anecdotal evidence settlement agencies are seeing with their client groups and the statistics. Research is needed to work through the information gaps to ensure that any issues are addressed in the development of a new model of employment support services.

The research needs to examine the frameworks and outcomes of employment support services from a client point of view, looking at long term (52 week) outcomes and taking into account the diversity within the Australian community. Research should also focus on identifying best practices, looking at regional and metropolitan solutions, and sharing these. Research which has the job seeker voice uppermost in mind, and which looks at job seekers from a perspective of resilience will generate useful information and data to inform future program development and policy settings.

In terms of examining place based solutions, there are examples where this is working well in the area of support for migrants and refugees. The alignment of services regionally can create strong support for collaboration and minimise disruption for job seekers as they move between services. Outreach services may be needed in some areas, particularly where there is a small population from a particular cultural background to support local mainstream services. Settlement agencies across the country are demonstrating the success that arises from developing local relationships and the positive impact this has on job seekers and the community.

Case study – Luv-a-duck

The award winner in the business inclusion category at the recent Migration and Settlement Awards, Luv-a-duck, highlights the impact building relationships at the local level can have. Luv-a-Duck has supported the Karen community in the Wimmera region in Victoria, working with AMES and local service providers to not only find sustainable employment but become firmly established in the local community.

Other areas for discussion

Other program ideas that have been shown to work well in services and support to migrant and refugee groups are mentoring, as the mentoring relationship builds the links and connections which are so important in establishing a life in a new place.

To support career development a HECS type system to upgrade qualifications may also work well for some migrants and refugees.

Conclusion

Employment support services are an important component of the range of community services migrants and refugees access when establishing their lives in Australia. Ensuring that services are connected, culturally competent and oriented to sustainable solutions will foster greater social and economic inclusion for all who live in Australia. The settlement sector has demonstrated ingenuity and creativity in fostering links, trialling programs and working with a wide range of agencies and employers to support migrants and refugees gain long term employment, however greater support for program links, skills recognition and pathways to employment are needed. Specialist services, supported and framed by research which covers the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the job search process, will create stronger outcomes for job seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.