



Settlement
Council
of Australia

Submission: Jobs and Skills Australia Foundation Skills Study Discussion Paper

Settlement Council of Australia

April 2023

The Settlement Council of Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate, the Ngunnawal people. We also acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which migrants and refugees settle across Australia, and on which our sector operates.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to our lands and waters.

About the Settlement Council of Australia

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) is the peak body representing the vast majority of settlement agencies across Australia providing direct services and support to people of migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Our members include organisations large and small, who are committed to the successful settlement of migrants and refugees across the country. Their services range from greeting new arrivals at the airport, through to assisting them to secure housing, learn English, make social connections, access services and find their first job. Australia's settlement services are recognised as being among the best in the world.

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Introduction

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) is grateful for the opportunity to make a submission response to the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) Foundation Skills Study Discussion Paper. SCOA represents settlement agencies across Australia providing direct services to people of refugee and migrant background. We are the national peak body for settlement. Our goal is to help ensure the best possible settlement outcomes for migrants and refugees settling in Australia.

Our submission is based on previous consultations conducted over the past 24 months, in which issues relating to foundation skills, digital literacy, and employment were raised across the SCOA network. SCOA conducted a targeted consultation for this submission with over 23 attendees from various member organisations in April 2023. Our submission feedback is mostly in response to this question:

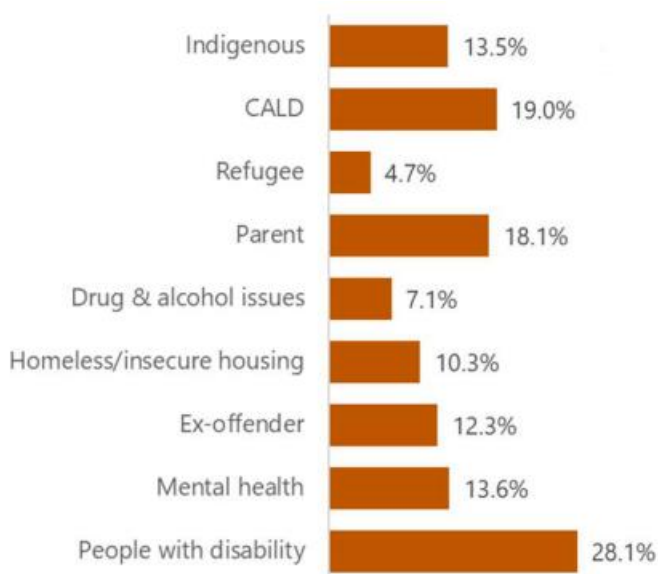
Which groups would you like to see more extensive research into and why? For example, First Nations, recent migrants, mature age workers, Australians in rural or remote locations?

SCOA recommends that there should be a feasibility study into how to best assess foundational skills of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. CALD individuals may face language barriers, cultural differences, and educational disparities that can affect their ability to access and succeed in the job market. Conducting a feasibility study to assess their foundational skills can help identify potential gaps and develop strategies to address these disparities, ensuring equitable and inclusive services for all jobseekers, regardless of their background. This can involve developing culturally-sensitive assessment tools, providing language support, and offering training programs that are relevant and effective for CALD individuals, leading to better outcomes in their job search efforts. 22.3% of Australia's population use a language other than English at home, and almost one quarter of Workforce Australia's caseload are people from CALD and refugee backgrounds (23.7%).¹ As Australia's population demographics change, there are increasing numbers of people from CALD backgrounds and refugees in the Workforce Australia jobseeker caseload.² Conducting a feasibility study of foundational skills of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds will give a fuller picture into why these groups face exclusion from education, training, and secure work, as well as difficulty engaging in society more broadly.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *2021 Census: Nearly half of Australians have a parent born overseas*. Available online at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2021-census-nearly-half-australians-have-parent-born-overseas> ; Department of Employment and Workplace Relations [DEWR]. *Public hearing 3 November 2022 – Department of Employment and Workplace Relations – presentation slides Caseload*. Available online at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Workforce_Australia_Employment_Services/WorkforceAustralia/Additional_Documents

² Workforce Australia defines CALD as: Indicates that the participant has disclosed that they were not born in any of the following countries: Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, The United States of America, South Africa. If the participant was born in any other country outside of the list above, they are recorded as CALD. This information is derived based on Services Australia Registration data.

Table 1: Workforce Australia caseload composition as at 30 September 2022³



Recommendation 1

JSA should conduct a feasibility study into how to best assess foundational skills of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds including migrants and refugees.

English language proficiency impact on labour force participation

Amongst culturally and linguistically diverse populations in Australia, there are cohorts such as refugees who have lower English language proficiency and thus poorer educational and employment outcomes. Australia's permanent migration program consists of the Skill and Family stream. In addition to the permanent migration program the Humanitarian Program allows individuals and families fleeing persecution to permanently settle in Australia.

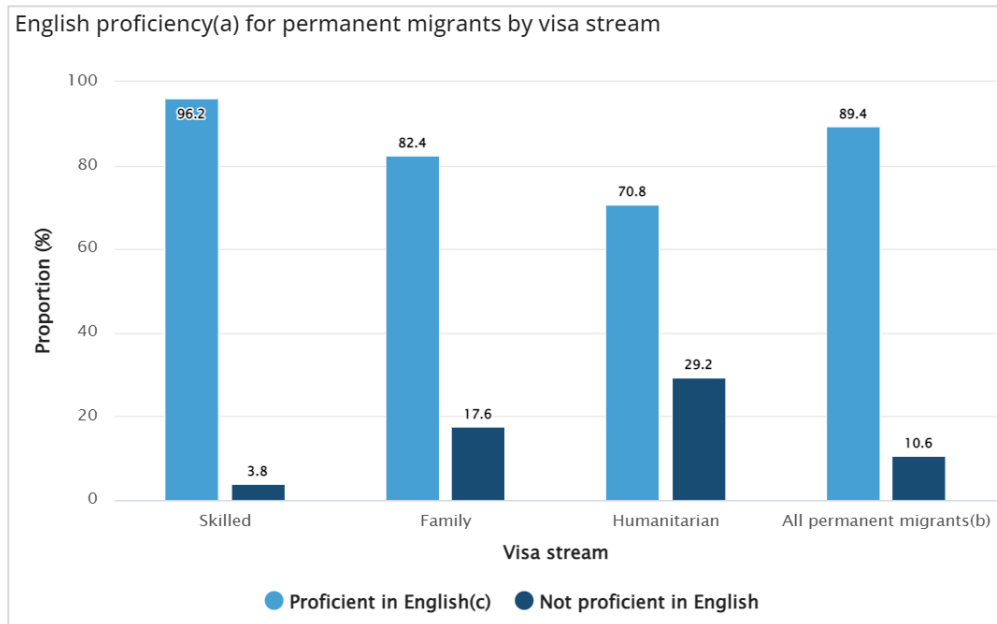
Amongst all permanent migrants to Australia in the last 20 years, 73% use a language other than English at home and 10.6% are not proficient in English. Amongst humanitarian entrants (refugees), 94% use a language other than English at home and 29.2% are not proficient in English. English language proficiency is one of the factors impacting on refugees' labour force participation. Amongst humanitarian entrants who arrived in Australia between 1 January 2000 and 10 August 2021, 50% were not in the labour force and their median weekly income was only \$478 (compared to the median for the total Australian population aged 15 years and over being \$805). Due to these lower language proficiency levels and income levels, we believe JSA should also survey humanitarian entrants as they face increased barriers. The feasibility study recommended above should delineate between different arrival pathways and ask specific questions relating to humanitarian entrants given the particular barriers they face.

³ Department of Employment and Workplace Relations [DEWR]. *Public hearing 3 November 2022 – Department of Employment and Workplace Relations – presentation slides Caseload*. Available online at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Workforce_Australia_Employment_Services/WorkforceAustralia/Additional_Documents

Recommendation 2

JSA should survey humanitarian entrants as they face increased barriers and lower levels of English language proficiency.

Table 2: English proficiency(a) for permanent migrants by visa stream⁴



The JSA acknowledges the nation is currently going through a major skills shortage and a housing crisis. Hence, there is a need to upskill those already in Australia to get them into jobs where workers are needed. Some of our SCOA members in Queensland have received funding for training and building foundational skills which addresses English literacy, numeracy and digital skills and deliver programs that are targeted and specific to refugee cohorts. [Community Foundation Skills](#) offers assistance to disadvantaged Queenslanders with low level language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) skills to equip them with the knowledge and confidence to participate successfully in a modern knowledge economy. The programs' success is proven with many people gaining employment due to their improved literacy skills, and thus staying in regional areas too as an added benefit. In addition, the [Foundation Skills for Your Future Program](#) helps with reading, writing, maths and digital skills to obtain employment or upskill for new roles, and is run successfully by many SCOA members.

Recommendation 3

JSA should measure current literacy levels and compare down the line to show the impact if there are improved literacy skills.

Digital literacy

SCOA has published a report titled *Supporting the digital inclusion of new migrants and refugees*, about the digital divide between newly arrived migrants and refugees and the rest of Australia, in

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Permanent migrants in Australia*. Available online at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/permanent-migrants-australia/latest-release#proficiency-in-english>

both access to and use of digital technology.⁵ Digital literacy is important in all aspects of our lives, and the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a rapid and substantial transition towards digital-only services, information, and activities. This sudden shift towards online engagement has underscored the issue of digital exclusion among some migrant and refugee communities. This lack of access to digital resources has significant implications for the successful settlement of newly arrived migrants and refugees in their new home. The impacts of digital exclusion on settlement are wide ranging and include disruptions to education, limited ability to engage in employment, and social isolation.

We have heard from our members that availability and affordability are major issues with many clients having no access to laptops or tablets. Many newly arrived migrants and refugees may only have one device for the family, requiring them to share, and have limited time on the device. This can impact each family member's education, employment and social goals. In addition, if support is needed to engage with digital services (i.e., a family member has to accompany another to Centrelink), this impedes on ones' ability to be independent.

SCOA supports JSA's second definition of digital literacy as it is broader than the first definition and is more about participation in learning, work, and life: "To participate fully in learning, work and life, digital literacies required need to reflect application of skills and knowledge of using digital technology tools."

SCOA believes the proposed 65-year-old age range is limiting, as older people generally and older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in particular, are more likely to have a significant gap in digital literacy skills, impacting on their everyday lives. So while the 65 year age limit makes sense in terms of labour force participation, elderly people are still interacting with digital tools in their everyday lives such as MyGov, banking and other online portals, and thus should be included in the survey.

Recommendation 4

JSA should survey migrants and refugees' digital skill levels specifically as there is a digital divide between these groups and the rest of Australia.

Recommendation 5

JSA should adopt the second definition of digital literacy.

Recommendation 6

JSA should expand the age limit beyond 65 years old as elderly people are still interacting with digital tools in their everyday lives.

Mode of survey

SCOA is concerned about the survey being done in online written form and English language only. Due to varying levels of English language proficiency amongst people in Australia, care

⁵ SCOA & Good Things Foundation Australia. (2020). *Supporting the digital inclusion of new migrants and refugees*. Available online at: <https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Supporting-the-digital-inclusion-of-new-migrants-and-refugees.pdf>

should be taken to ensure all people answering the survey are given sufficient opportunity to understand the survey and engage with it. In-language surveys must be made available, including in online, physical written and spoken formats. Bilingual support should also be offered, or peer/family support to sufficiently answer the survey. If this is not reflected in the survey strategy, the results will be biased and will not adequately reflect the needs of those that experience the most exclusion and therefore stand the most to gain.

Recommendation 7

In-language surveys must be made available, including in online, physical written and spoken formats. Bilingual support should also be offered.

Conclusion

As the national peak body for settlement agencies across Australia, SCOA is dedicated to supporting migrants and refugees from CALD backgrounds to achieve successful settlement outcomes. SCOA has put forth several recommendations regarding foundation skills, digital literacy, and employment.

SCOA's recommendations highlight the need for a feasibility study to assess the foundational skills of people from CALD backgrounds, including migrants and refugees. This is crucial given that a significant proportion of Australia's population uses a language other than English at home, and a considerable number of jobseekers in the Workforce Australia caseload are from CALD and refugee backgrounds. In addition, SCOA recommends evaluating the digital skill levels of migrants and refugees, as there is a digital divide between these groups and the rest of Australia. Adopting a comprehensive definition of digital literacy and making in-language surveys available in online, physical written, and spoken formats, with bilingual support, is also recommended.

Overall, SCOA's submission emphasises the need for research and data collection to better understand the foundational skills, digital literacy, and employment challenges faced by migrants and refugees from CALD backgrounds. By conducting feasibility studies, surveys, and assessments, JSA can gather valuable insights to inform policies and programs that support the successful settlement and integration of these individuals into Australian society. SCOA is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion and looks forward to further collaboration with JSA and other stakeholders in addressing the needs of migrants and refugees in Australia. We would welcome further opportunities to support JSA in designing research and data collection strategies to ensure they are accessible and inclusive. By measuring foundation skills, we can better improve the lives and independence of Australia's most recent arrivals.

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1: JSA should conduct a feasibility study into how to best assess foundational skills of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds including migrants and refugees.

Recommendation 2: JSA should survey humanitarian entrants as they face increased barriers and lower levels of English language proficiency.

Recommendation 3: JSA should measure current literacy levels and compare down the line to show the impact if there are improved literacy skills.

Recommendation 4: JSA should survey migrants and refugees' digital skill levels specifically as there is a digital divide between these groups and the rest of Australia.

Recommendation 5: JSA should adopt the second definition of digital literacy.

Recommendation 6: JSA should expand the age limit beyond 65 years old as elderly people are still interacting with digital tools in their everyday lives.

Recommendation 7: In-language surveys must be made available, including in online, physical written and spoken formats. Bilingual support should also be offered.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *2021 Census: Nearly half of Australians have a parent born overseas*. Available online at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2021-census-nearly-half-australians-have-parent-born-overseas>

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