



Experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse people in Vocational Education and Training

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Background

Migration Council Australia (MCA) is an independent, national not-for-profit body established to enhance the benefits of Australia's migration program and support better settlement outcomes for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. MCA works across sectors to provide a national voice to advocate for effective settlement and migration programs and to develop policy solutions to issues faced by migrants and refugees in Australia. MCA is auspiced by The Social Policy Group.

MCA was engaged by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) – now the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) to undertake a short research engagement on the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people in Vocational Education and Training.

This focus of this research is to understand the experiences of CALD people in accessing and participating in vocational education and training. The research will support the Department to understand how learners in this group are supported to access, participate and complete vocational education and training.

For further information on any of the points raised in our report, please contact MCA on info@migrationcouncil.org.au or 02 6162 0361.

Acknowledgements

MCA wishes to acknowledge the involvement and support of the individuals and organisations who have supported this research. MCA also wishes to acknowledge the support of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations for their support in this project.

Methodology

Approach

Migration Council Australia (MCA) used a mixed methods methodology which combined both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Using both statistics and gathered input and perspectives from across the VET service sector helped to investigate the topic on multiple levels. These approaches used were centred around the experience of CALD learners and clients, but also enabled input from supports and support systems.

Limitations in each of the data collection methods is noted below.

Data and Literature Review

MCA conducted a high-level literature and data review to understand the baseline of levels of support and barriers faced by people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Migration Council Australia has also analysed learners' outcomes using data from a variety of National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) collections.

National Survey

An online survey was developed and released for feedback on 23 June 2022. The survey comprised of up to 34 questions (subject to the response path taken by respondents). The survey was circulated across MCA's networks including via the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) Community of Practice (SETSCoP), via Harmony Alliance and via other stakeholders. The survey was also made available via MCA's social media accounts and promoted through MCA networks.

Dissemination methods and survey questions design sought to ensure that survey completion was undertaken only by people from CALD backgrounds, however no verification of this was undertaken in this process. This should be noted in any consideration of analysis in these responses.

Focus Groups – CALD Learners

MCA conducted three focus groups with 40 CALD people across Australia. Focus groups were run by MCA staff with specific experience engaging with people from migrant, refugee and CALD backgrounds. One focus group was held in person, with two remaining focus groups held online to expand the reach of the research.

Participants in these focus groups self-identified. Feedback provided during discussions has been taken as an accurate reflection of learner experience, with no verification undertaken of claims made during sessions.

Interviews – Community Sector Organisations

Interviews were held with 10 Community Sector organisations involved in supporting CALD people. MCA sought a mix of service types including migrant and settlement services and employment service providers as part of this mix.

Interviews – Training Providers

Interviews were held with 26 training organisations providing training to CALD clients. Training providers were engaged from the private and public systems.

Other Considerations

In considering the observations of this report, it should be noted that CALD learners experiences are impacted not only by their experiences as refugees or migrants, but also by their gender, any disabilities they may have, socio-economic status, geographical location, or sexual orientation. The limited size of the focus groups, and elements of the research methodology (e.g. self selection etc) have meant that these full range of issues have not been considered across this report. Individual experiences will not therefore will not be reflective of the experiences of the full cohort. This should be noted in considering findings.

Data and Literature Review

A brief review of available literature and existing research was undertaken to understand the baseline of levels of support and barriers faced by people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Migration Council Australia (MCA) has also analysed learners' outcomes using data from a variety of National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) collections. Where trends or patterns presented, MCA have captured this information below.

MCA acknowledges that the data was originally collected by registered training organisations and state training authorities around Australia.

MCA acknowledges that the NCVER is not responsible for the correct extraction, analysis or interpretation of the data presented herein.

The vocational education and training (VET) sector in Australia provide services to a wide range of people. Learners undertaking courses and programs in the VET sector are not a homogenous group, they have different needs, and their learning outcomes can be improved in a variety of ways. MCA has undertaken quantitative and qualitative research on the experiences of CALD people in accessing and participating in VET.

The research MCA has conducted used available papers and NCVER databases to map the learners' participation through cultural, linguistic and gender lenses. The objective was to assess whether such criteria as English familiarity, gender, age, or CALD background had an impact on learners' choice, enrolment or outcomes. Another objective was to define what supports are available for people from CALD backgrounds, which have proven to work well, and which barriers CALD people are facing while accessing the skills and training systems.

Course-based and learner-based strategies are most commonly used to support learners' outcomes and enhance their participation. Course-based strategies are related to flexible course delivery options, partnership in course delivery, building relationships with employers to help learners to gain work experience and having specific staff positions dedicated to understanding and meeting the needs of the learners.¹ Learner-based support is conceived in terms of individual wellbeing. Many providers use mentoring to help learners in participation and completion of programs, provided additional support in terms of housing and transport, and had support units for groups of learners with specific needs.²

Training providers in high-performing regions have been using community-based approaches to enhance the learners' outcomes. These approaches include utilising community member programs, co-locating education, and training with other community services, delivering programs in community settings and building relationships with employers to help learners gain relevant experience. Some of the other successful approaches are providing intensive

¹ S Lamb, Maire, Q, Walstab, A, Newman, G, Doecke, E & Davies, M, *Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners*, NCVER (Adelaide, 2018).

² Lamb, *Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners*.

courses and career guidance, as well as tailoring specific programs for learners with low skills.³

Age-tailored approach

Disadvantaged learners are not a homogenous group, and effective VET providers use a learner-centred approach to deliver tailored services. While a diverse group of disadvantaged learners are being offered support, it is essential to use a person-centred approach and customise support per individual, particularly in the case of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people⁴, while considering the questions of CALD background and its intersection with gender and age.

The age-tailored approach is essential in regard to the CALD population of Australia. CALD students exhibit a very different pattern around the age when they complete the program. A large cohort of students who are not from CALD backgrounds complete programs at a younger age.⁵ This is expected as many CALD students may not be in Australia early in life.

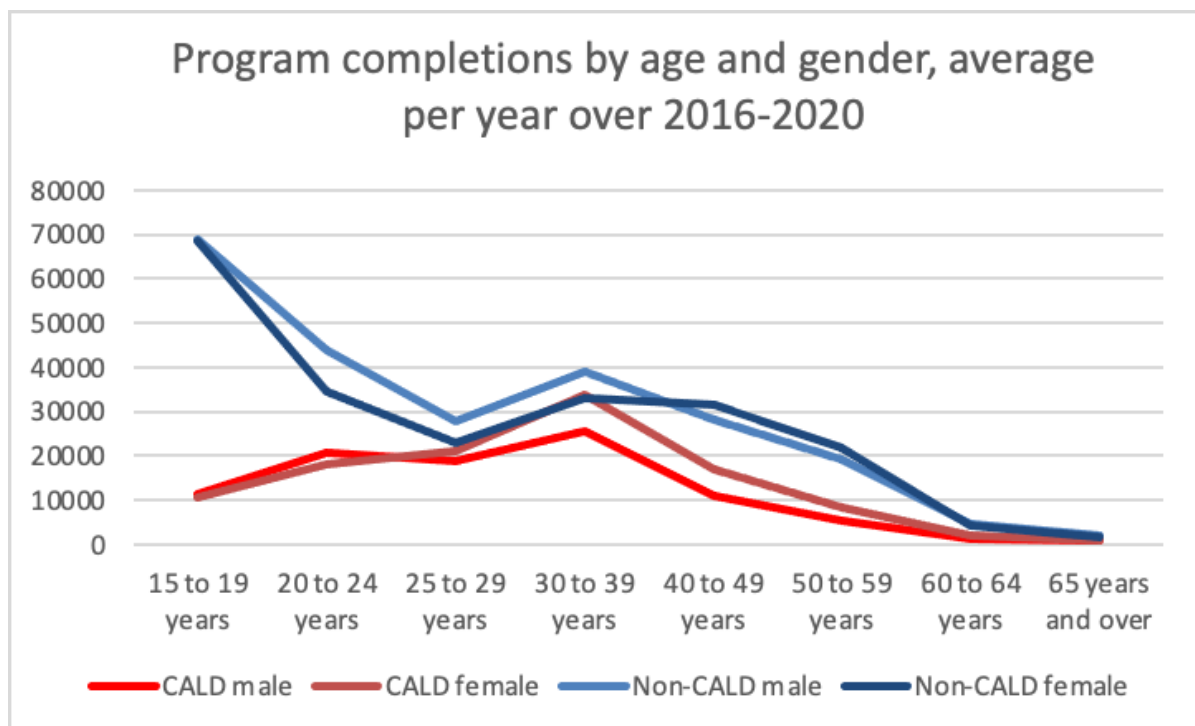


Figure 1 Program completions by age and gender, average per year 2016-2020

Source: VOCSTATS, <http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html>, 'VET in schools' extracted on 13/07/2022

³ Lamb, *Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners*.

⁴ Lamb, *Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners*.

⁵ VOCSTATS <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 07/06/22"

Older people from CALD backgrounds have lower English literacy levels and face more challenges while moving to a new country than younger people. Based on performed analysis, it was found that younger CALD students tend to complete programs in higher proportion to non-CALD students, but this is reversing for older cohorts.⁶

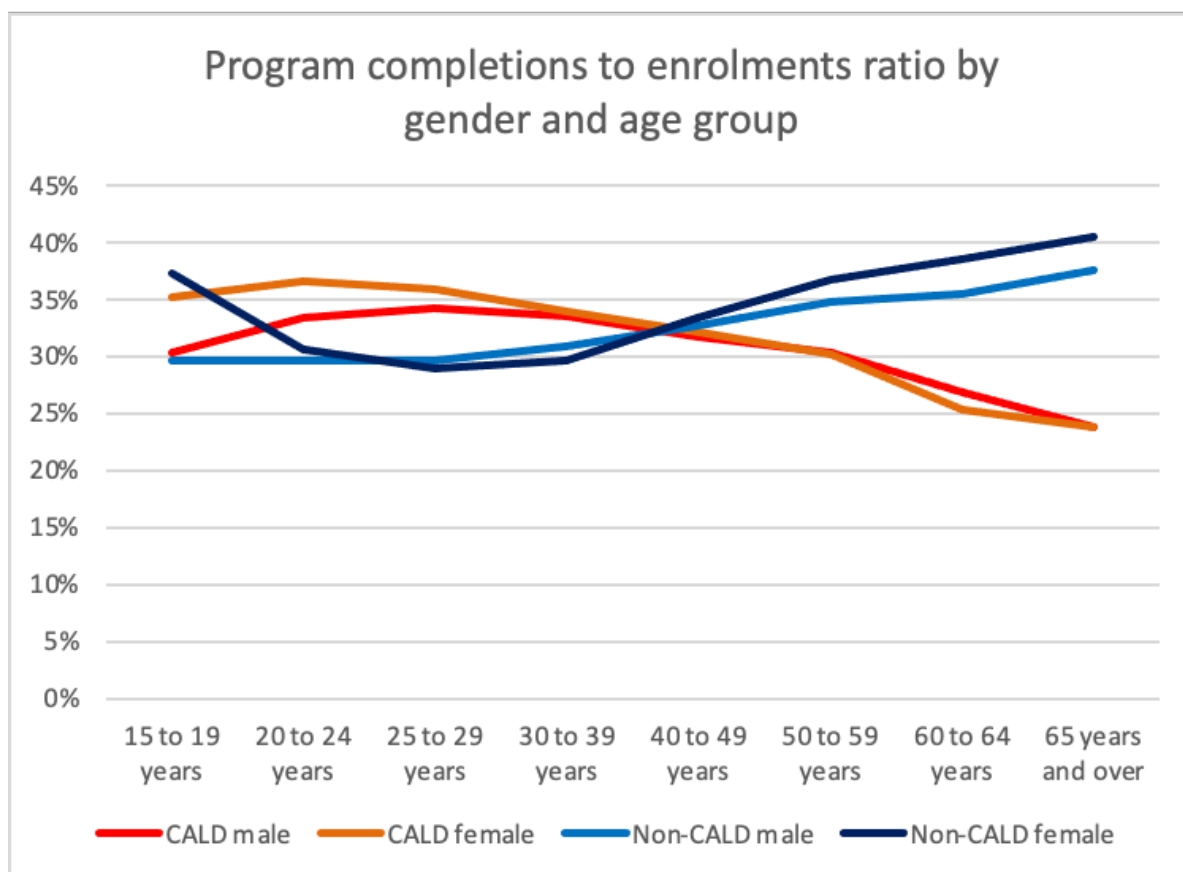


Figure 2 Program completions to enrolments ratio by gender and age group

Source: VOCSTATS, <http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html>, 'VET in schools' extracted on 13/07/2022

Women from CALD backgrounds tend to complete more programs than similarly aged CALD men. While men and women from CALD backgrounds complete their studies in similar volumes up to the age of 30, a higher number of older CALD women complete programs than similarly aged men.⁷ Based on the research done before, it could be explained by migrants and refugees using VET to re-qualify but, in effect, becoming de-skilled. This phenomenon has been particularly noted with migrant and refugee women, who are enrolling into programs until they get a job, despite the existence of previous qualifications.⁸

Figure 2 clearly shows the drop in participation and enrolments to completion ratio for the CALD people aged 40 to 49 years. While considering improving CALD people outcomes

⁶ VOCSTATS <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 07/06/22”

⁷ VOCSTATS <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 07/06/22”

⁸ S Webb, Beale, D & Faine, M *Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training*, NCVER (Adelaide, 2013).

through course-based or learner-based approaches, program providers should consider the age differences and needs of the CALD population in Australia.

Program enrolment gender bias

Upon the investigation into programs' fields of study, the difference in program choice along the lines of gender and CALD status is clear. 40% of CALD men and 47% of CALD women are in either management and commerce or society and culture programs of study, as compared to 24% of non-CALD men and 49% of non-CALD women⁹.

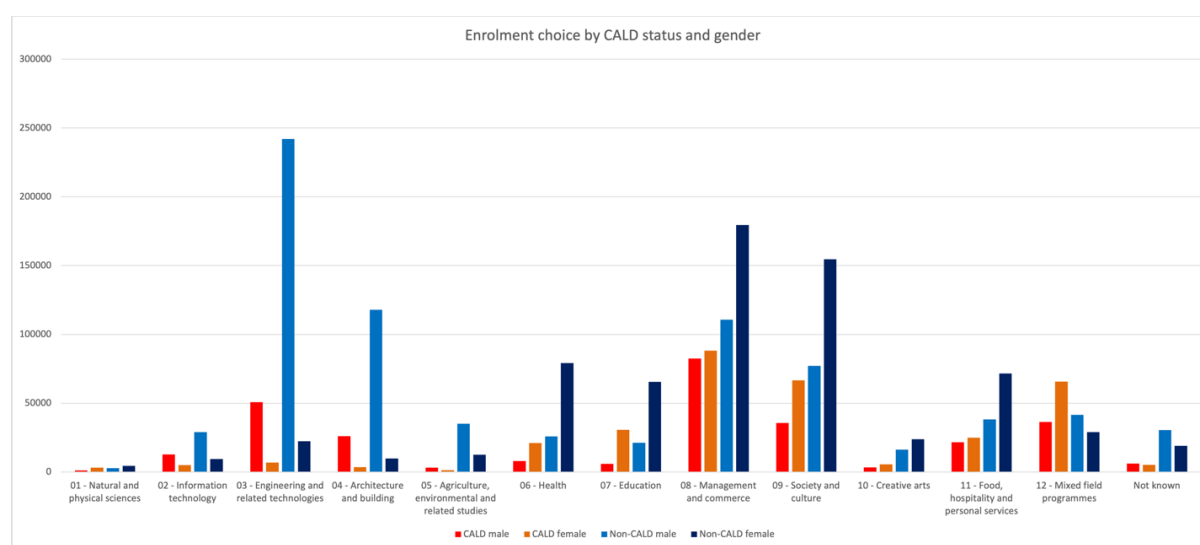


Figure 3 Program enrolment choice by CALD status and gender

Source: VOCSTATS, <http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html>, 'VET in schools' extracted on 13/07/2022

While CALD and non-CALD men are more likely to study engineering than women, CALD men are still far less likely to study engineering than non-CALD men. Meanwhile, CALD women are much more likely to be in a mixed field program than non-CALD women.¹⁰ For the purposes of this review, mixed field was study comprised that which includes both vocational focussed training, alongside English lessons, or foundational skills training.

CALD students are more likely than non-CALD students to study mixed field programs and this tendency increases with age. These programmes include general education programmes, social skills programmes, employment skills courses and others.

⁹ VOCSTATS <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 07/06/22”

¹⁰ VOCSTATS <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 07/06/22”

CALD men are less likely to study engineering and more likely to study management and commerce than their non-CALD counterparts. The only other field that CALD women are more likely to choose compared to non-CALD women is management and commerce, but only till the age of 30, at which point they are less common.¹¹

Table 1 Program fields of study by CALD status and gender

Program fields of study	CALD		Non-CALD	
	male	female	male	female
01 - Natural and physical sciences	0%	1%	0%	1%
02 - Information technology	4%	2%	4%	1%
03 - Engineering	17%	2%	31%	3%
04 - Architecture and building	9%	1%	15%	1%
05 - Agriculture & environmental	1%	0%	4%	2%
06 - Health	3%	6%	3%	12%
07 - Education	2%	9%	3%	10%
08 - Management and commerce	28%	27%	14%	26%
09 - Society and culture	12%	20%	10%	23%
10 - Creative arts	1%	2%	2%	3%
11 - Food, hospitality, personal services	7%	8%	5%	11%
12 - Mixed field programmes	12%	20%	5%	4%
Not known	2%	2%	4%	3%

Source: VOCSTATS, <http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html>, 'VET in schools' extracted on 13/07/2022

Table 1 shows that CALD women are almost eight times less likely to participate in engineering programmes, nine times less likely to participate in architecture/building programs, twice less likely to participate in IT programmes and almost twice as likely to participate in society and culture or mixed field studies.

Skilled migrants as target audience and family-based approach.

Previous research suggests there is a gap in the provision of education and training for skilled migrant women, especially those who came to Australia as secondary applicants.¹² Skilled migrant women, particularly secondary applicants, are facing the most challenges, as their labour market opportunities after arrival are mostly gendered, culturally and linguistically distinct with lower rewards.¹³

There is a necessity to consider migration as a family endeavour, rather than a project undertaken by an individual. Family and friends are the primary source of encouragement to enrol, participate and complete the education and training. The necessity of providing support to the whole households was recognised by the individual managers and employers.

¹¹ VOCSTATS <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 07/06/22"

¹² Webb, *Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training.*

¹³ Webb, *Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training.*

However, implementing such family-based approach on a systematic level could enhance the participation rates of the learners and demonstrate the responsiveness of the sector as a whole.¹⁴

While supports are often available for individual humanitarian entrants it has been noted that not much support exists for skilled migrants and their families, besides the fact that skilled migrants made up to 6% of international completers of VET programs in 2021, and their partners, who can be in bridging or partner visa cohorts, occupying in a total of 18% of program completers in 2021.¹⁵

Displacing the skills of CALD people and the recognition of the previous experience

The figures below show that young CALD students are studying for qualifications that tend to be at the same level or above the levels of programs studied by their non-CALD counterparts. However, while the composition of levels studied by non-CALD students tends to remain consistent across age categories, older CALD students tend to study lower levels of programs. Gender

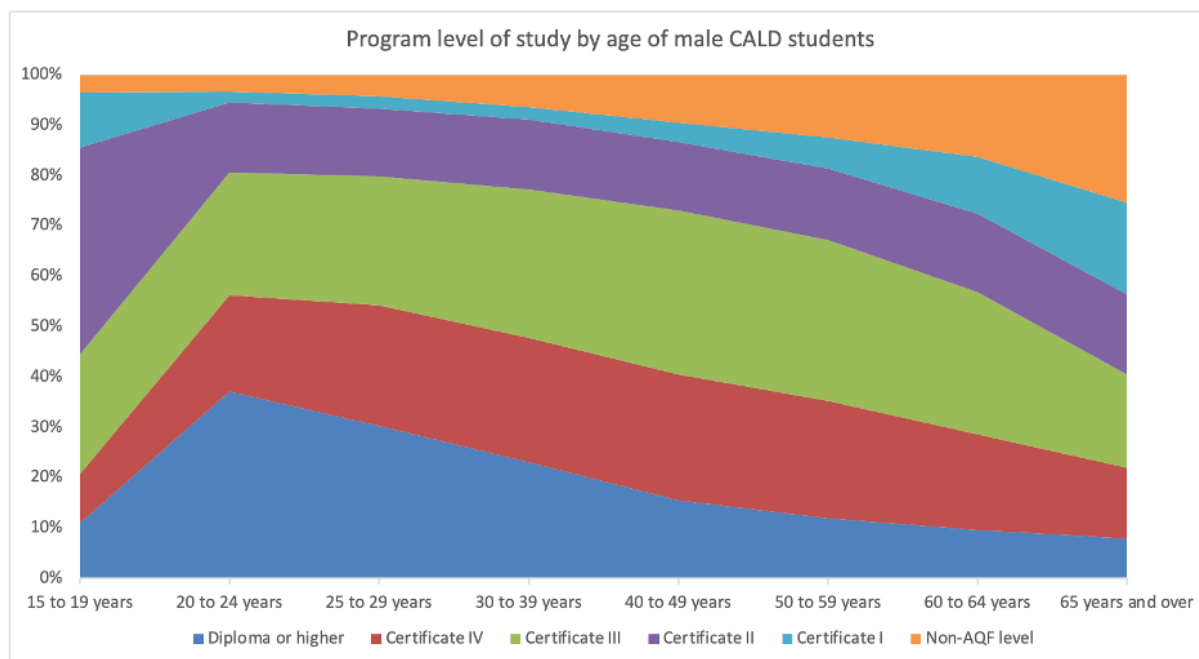


Figure 4 Program level of study by age of male CALD students¹⁶

Source: VOCSTATS, <http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html>, 'VET in schools' extracted on 13/07/2022

¹⁴ Webb, *Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training*.

¹⁵ VOCSTATS <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 07/06/22”

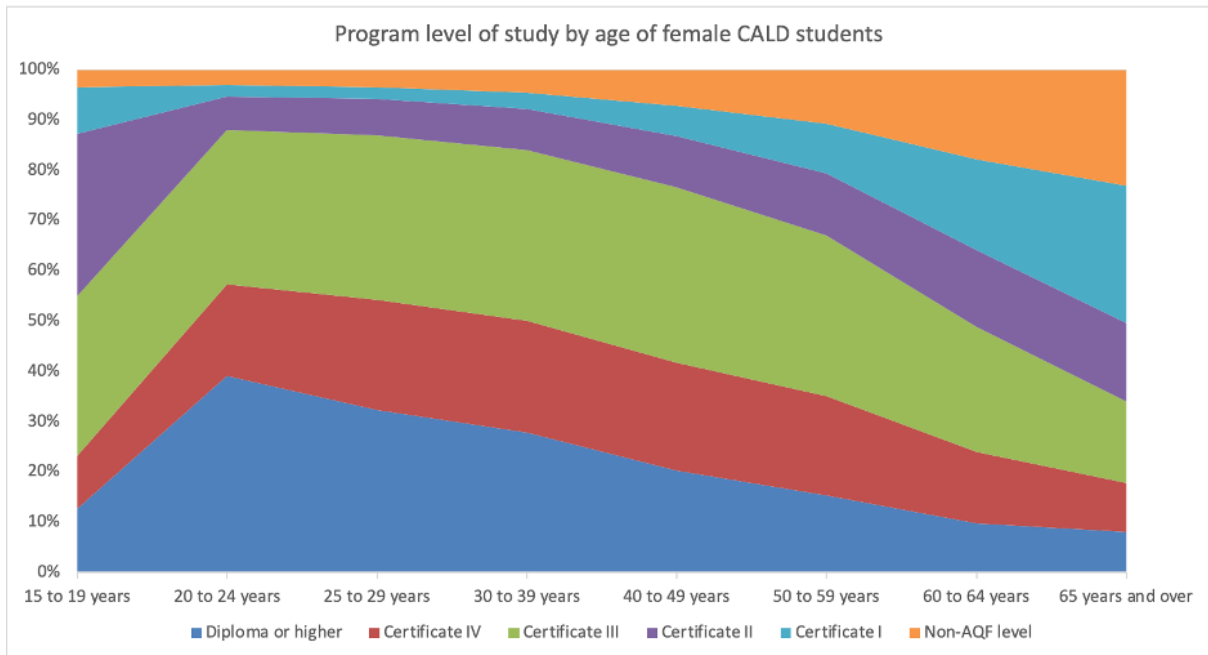


Figure 5 Program level of study by age of female CALD students¹⁷
 Source: VOCSTATS, <http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html>, 'VET in schools' extracted on 13/07/2022

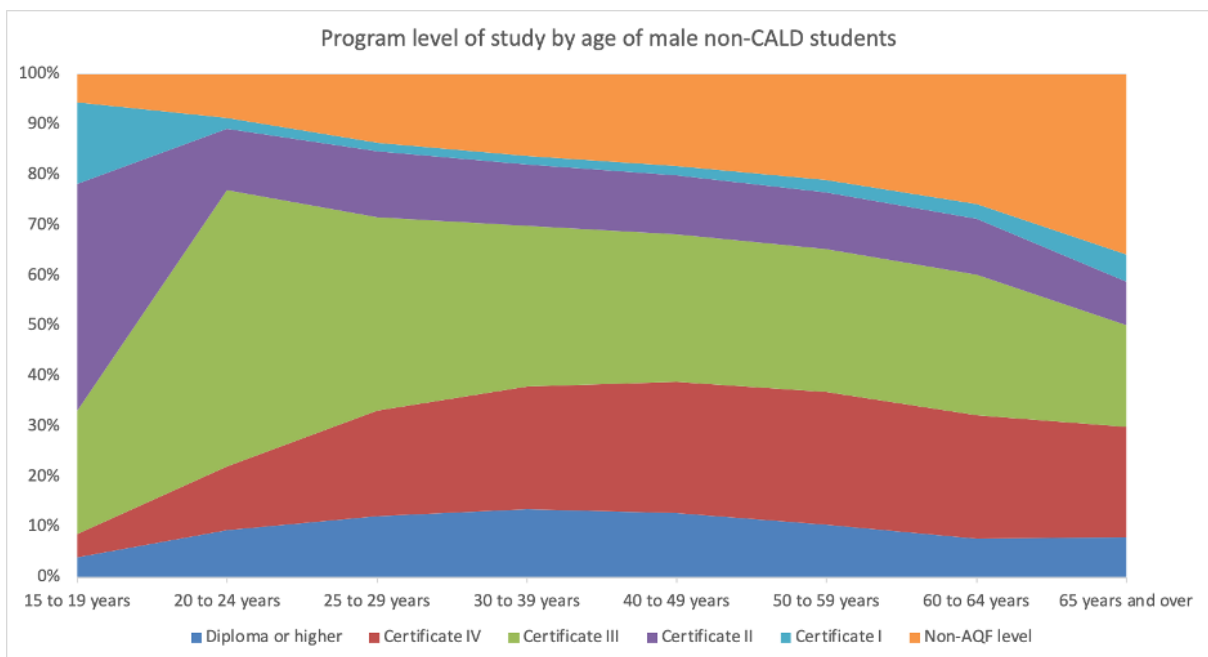


Figure 6 Program level of study by age of male non-CALD students¹⁸
 Source: VOCSTATS, <http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html>, 'VET in schools' extracted on 13/07/2022

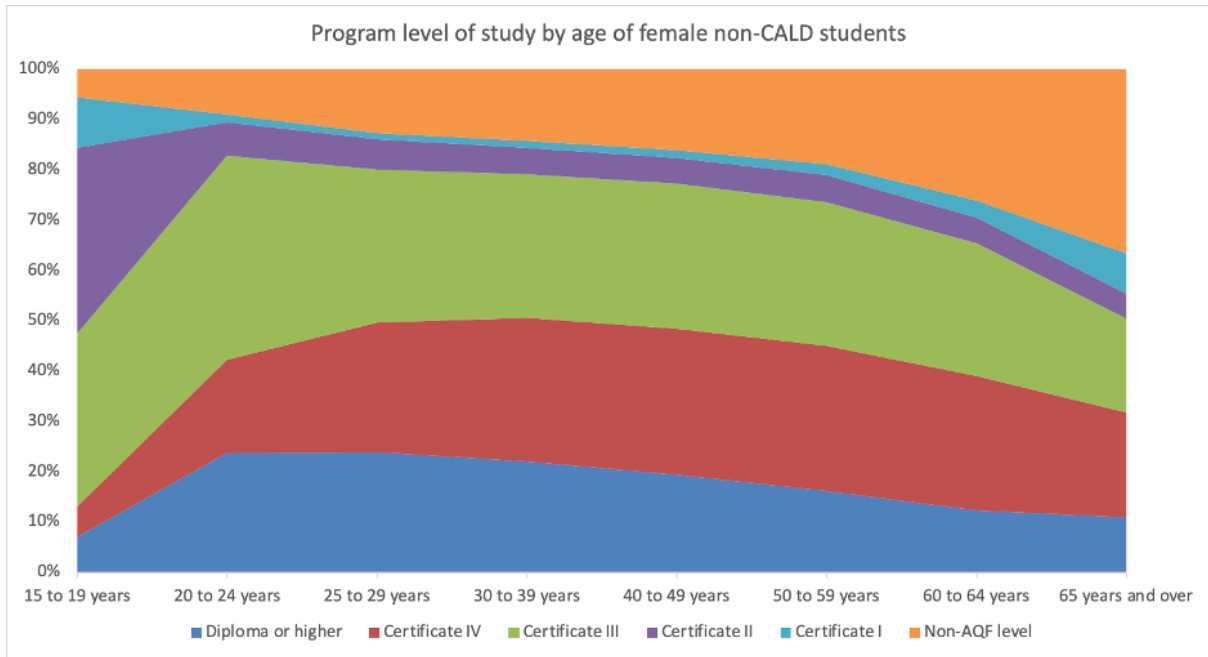


Figure 7 Program level of study by age of male non-CALD students¹⁹
 Source: VOCSTATS, <http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html>, 'VET in schools' extracted on 13/07/2022

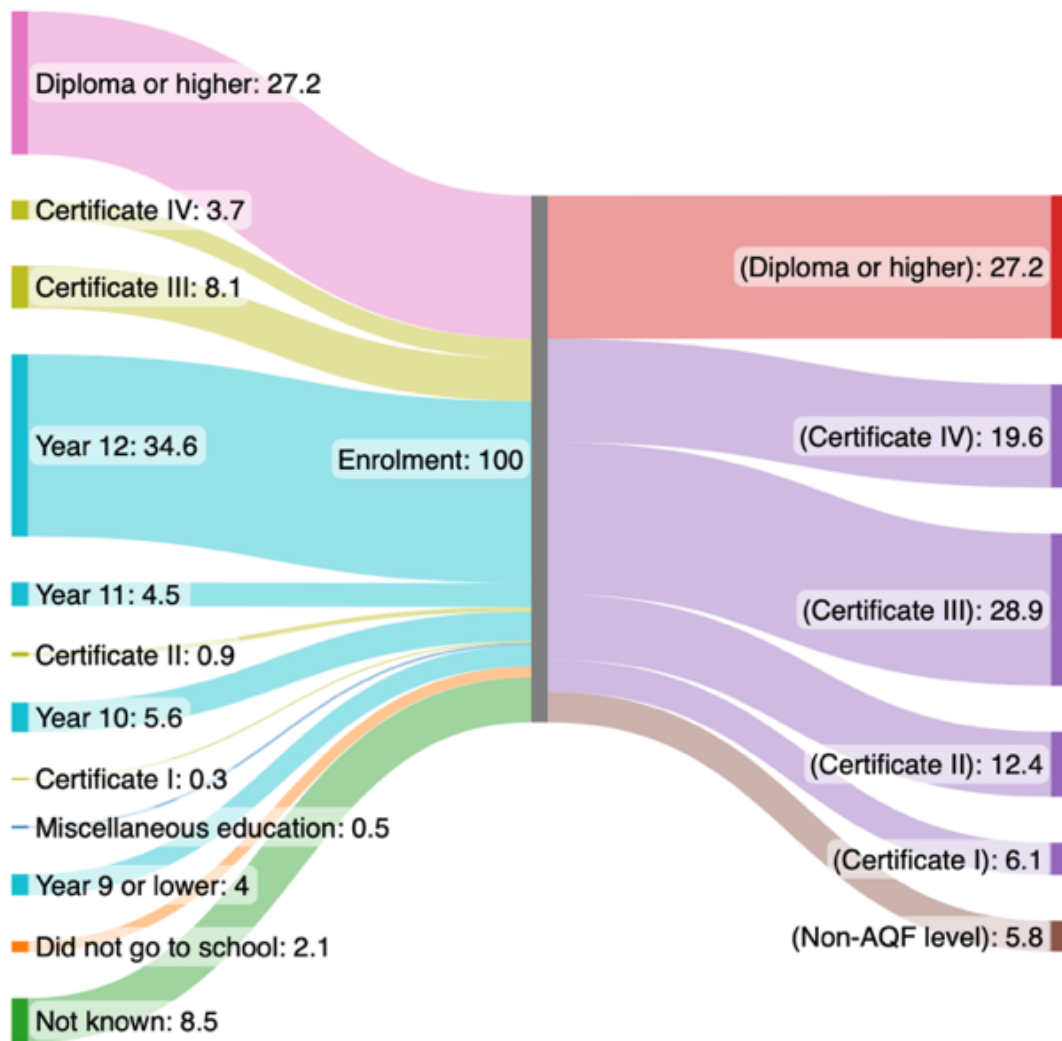


Figure 8 Highest level of education vs program enrolled, CALD

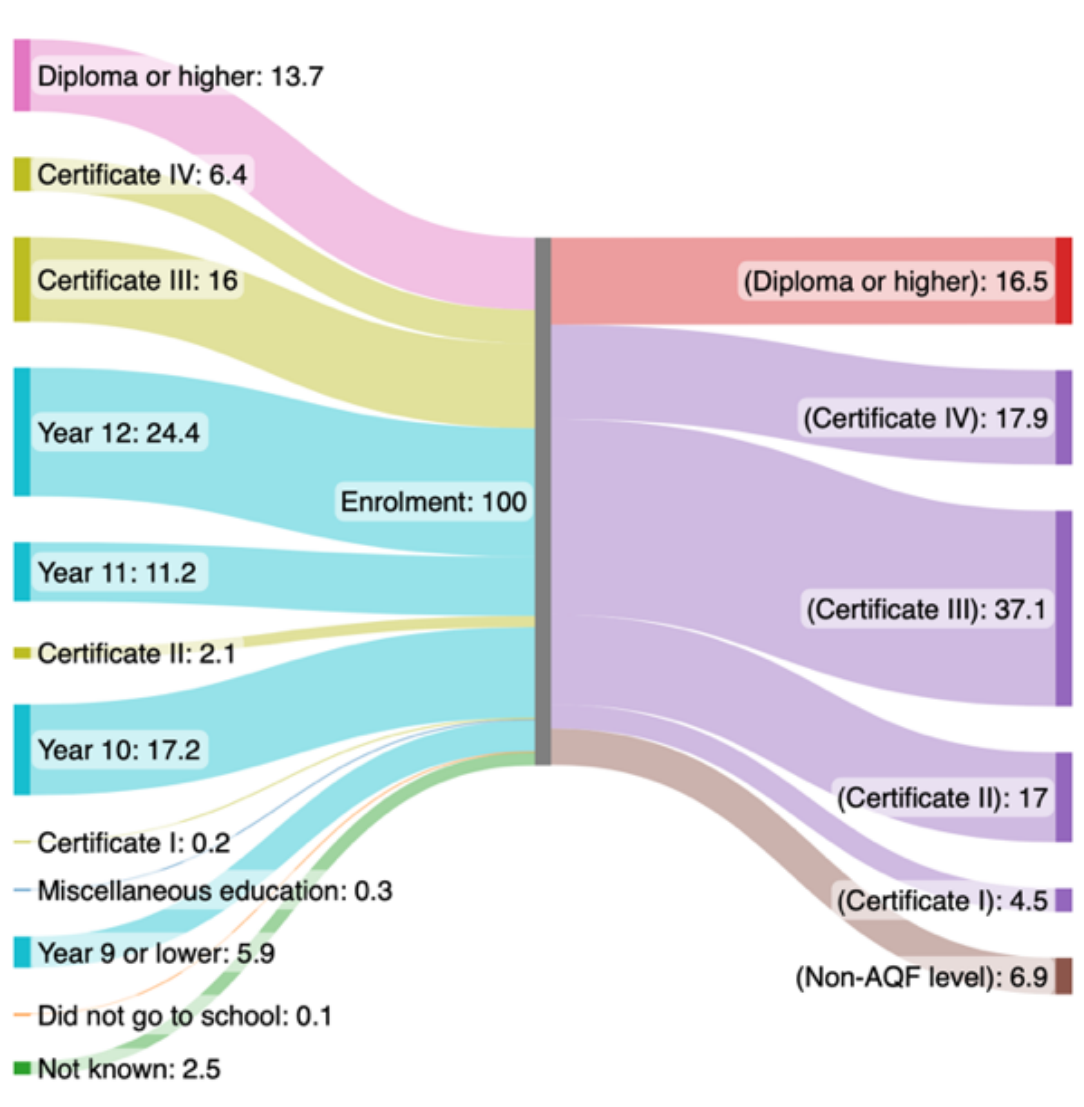


Figure 9 Highest level of education vs program enrolled, non-CALD

Source: VOCSTATS, <http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html>, 'VET in schools' extracted on 13/07/2022

People's accents and English proficiency have been acknowledged to mask the skills and capabilities of migrants.¹⁶ This can potentially explain why our research discovered there are proportionately two times more CALD students that hold bachelor's degrees or Higher Degree levels than non-CALD students enrolled in those programs. The chosen program level of education for CALD people compared to non-CALD people does not differ drastically. However, people from CALD backgrounds tend to choose a Diploma or higher level of education more often than people from non-CALD backgrounds.¹⁷

¹⁶ Miriam Faine Sue Webb, John Pardy & Reshmi Roy "The role of VET in the (dis)placing of migrants' skills in Australia," *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 69:3, no. 351-370, (2017).

¹⁷ VOCSTATS <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 07/06/22"

The following diagrams represent the highest level of education achieved prior to enrolment and the level of education of the program enrolled in the VET sector for people from CALD and non-CALD backgrounds, on average during the last 5 years in percentages.

As shown, the proportion of CALD people with education at Diploma level or higher is almost twice as much as their non-CALD counterparts. Only 31% of CALD learners with a previous education level of diploma or higher undertook further education at Diploma level or higher, 27% chose Certificate III and 26% Certificate II.¹⁸

26% of international course completers have reported that the training they have received was very little or not relevant to their profession. Some of the previous research has indicated that skilled migrants did not necessarily regard the training as relevant.¹⁹

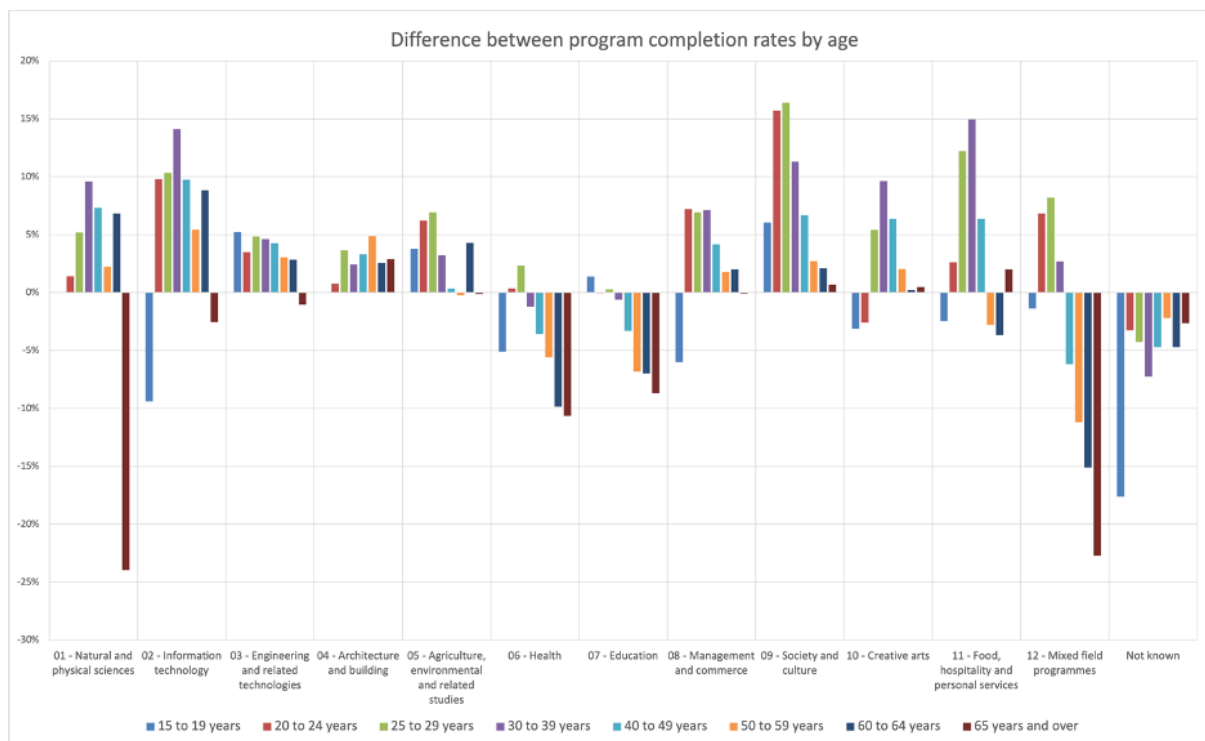


Figure 10 Difference between program average completion rates by age

Source: VOCSTATS, <http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html>, 'VET in schools' extracted on 13/07/2022

It was noted that younger CALD students tend to do well relative to their non-CALD counterparts in most fields of study, but completions tend to decline with age. In literature, it has been noted that migrant and refugee resilience and aspirations had more influence on

¹⁸ VOCSTATS <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 07/06/22”

¹⁹ Webb, *Skilled migrant women in regional Australia: promoting social inclusion through vocational education and training*.

completion rates and outcomes rather than the existence or non-existence of a specialised approach.²⁰

Community-based approach and mentoring support

While most students are in TAFE or private training organisations, there tends to be a higher proportion of CALD women on Community Education providers. This can be the result of reportedly successful community engagement, co-location training and education with other community services and involving community members, particularly for the most disadvantaged cohort – elderly women from CALD background. For one CALD woman aged 20 to 24 years, there are three CALD women aged 60-64 undergoing training with Community Education providers.

The importance of assistance, support, one-to-one interaction with service providers has been highly regarded by program and course completers. The community support, provided by other participants had great impact in learners' decision regarding further participation in the program.²¹

Building rapport with other learners and service providers, particularly in smaller groups had a positive impact on the learners' outcomes, not only in equational area but also in social participation.²²

The ongoing connection and support from service providers were noted to be very important for further education participation, even after years of finishing the course. This type of mentoring and support is usually done out of the goodwill of service providers, as they usually too keenly felt that they need to provide follow-up support.²³

The ratio of completions by SEIFA

The breakdown of the ratio of completions to enrolments by SEIFA area shows that lower disadvantage correlates to higher completions for non-CALD people. This aligns with our understanding that more resources can produce better outcomes. The story is less clear for CALD students. There is some indication that less disadvantage correlates to higher completions. While we have previously noted the lower completion rates for older CALD students, there is an apparent and counterintuitive result that less disadvantage also, means worse completion rates.²⁴

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on learners' outcomes

With the COVID-19 pandemic and transfer to online learning systems, international students have reported such issues with online learning:

²⁰ Sue Webb, "The role of VET in the (dis)placing of migrants' skills in Australia."

²¹ Silvia Pignata Harry Savelsberg, Pauline Weckert, "Second chance education: barriers, supports and engagement strategies," *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 57, 1 (2017).

²² Harry Savelsberg, "Second chance education: barriers, supports and engagement strategies."

²³ Harry Savelsberg, "Second chance education: barriers, supports and engagement strategies."

²⁴ VOCSTATS <<https://www.never.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 07/06/22"

- 25% reported that their subject matter was not suitable,
- 32% missed the opportunity to get experience in the workplace,
- 19% reported a lack of support from trainers/ teachers or instructors.

The two most reported issues were lack of face-to-face interaction with trainers/teachers/instructors and lack of face-to-face interaction with peers with 53% and 44%, respectively.²⁵

As mentioned prior the opportunity to get experience in the workplace and support from trainers and service providers had an exceptional impact on improving learners' outcomes, both educational and social. Lack of face-to-face interaction with tutors and peers have proven to increase participation rates and is linked to individuals' integration into community and workplace.

It is yet impossible to see the impact COVID-19 pandemic had on the program completions and further employment of the learners, but considering the importance of mentioned above factors, it is important to recognise it as a factor that can decrease the learners' outcomes.

Conclusions

Effective strategies at the learner level are case management and counselling. Some strategies were identified as being particularly useful in supporting positive outcomes for certain categories of learners. For example, some providers had support units for groups of learners with specific needs, some employed dedicated staff to manage the needs of specific groups, and some used mentoring.²⁶

Social support and networks are playing an important role in the learners' outcomes. Using holistic approach in mentoring and personal support has helped service providers to engage in the complexities of the learners' lives. Peer support is recognised as equally important and is an essential part of building social and relationship capital in the community.²⁷

Adopting a learner-centred approach has been identified as a key element to fostering enhanced outcomes for disadvantaged learners, including CALD people. Another important element of improving learners' outcomes is establishing a close connection with the community, delivering training in community settings, co-locating education and training with other community services and using community member programs.²⁸

²⁵ VOCSTATS <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 07/06/22"

²⁶ Lamb, *Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners*.

²⁷ Harry Savelsberg, "Second chance education: barriers, supports and engagement strategies."

²⁸ Lamb, *Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners*.

National Survey Findings

Respondents' characteristics

Migration Council Australia designed a survey of 34 questions to better understand the experience of people from CALD backgrounds in accessing and participating in vocational education and training. The survey was distributed nationwide through MCA's network including the SETSCoP and Harmony Alliance networks to maximise the possibility of reaching CALD communities directly. The survey was also provided to TAFE Directors Australia to be circulated via their members.

The survey was completed by 26 participants who reside across every state and territory of Australia.

65% of survey respondents were 30 to 49 years old, and almost 70% were women. The graph below represents the respondents' age and gender.

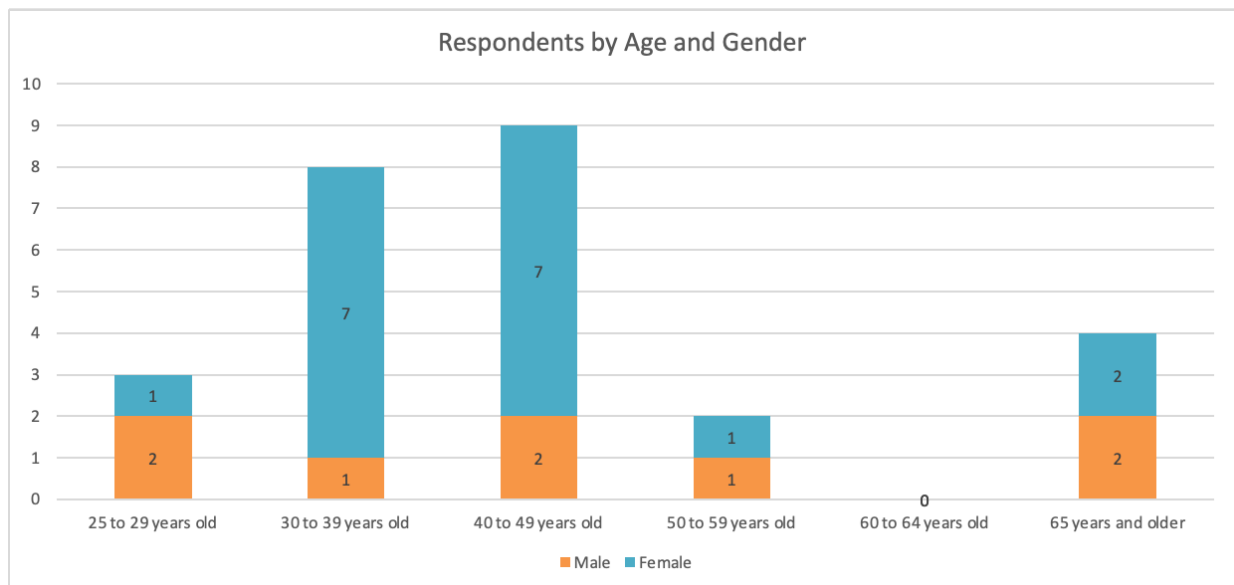


Figure 11 Respondents by Age and Gender, National Survey – Participating in VET

70% of respondents live in the Metropolitan/ Major City area, almost 20% in Inner Regional, 3,8% in Outer Regional and 8% in Remote areas.

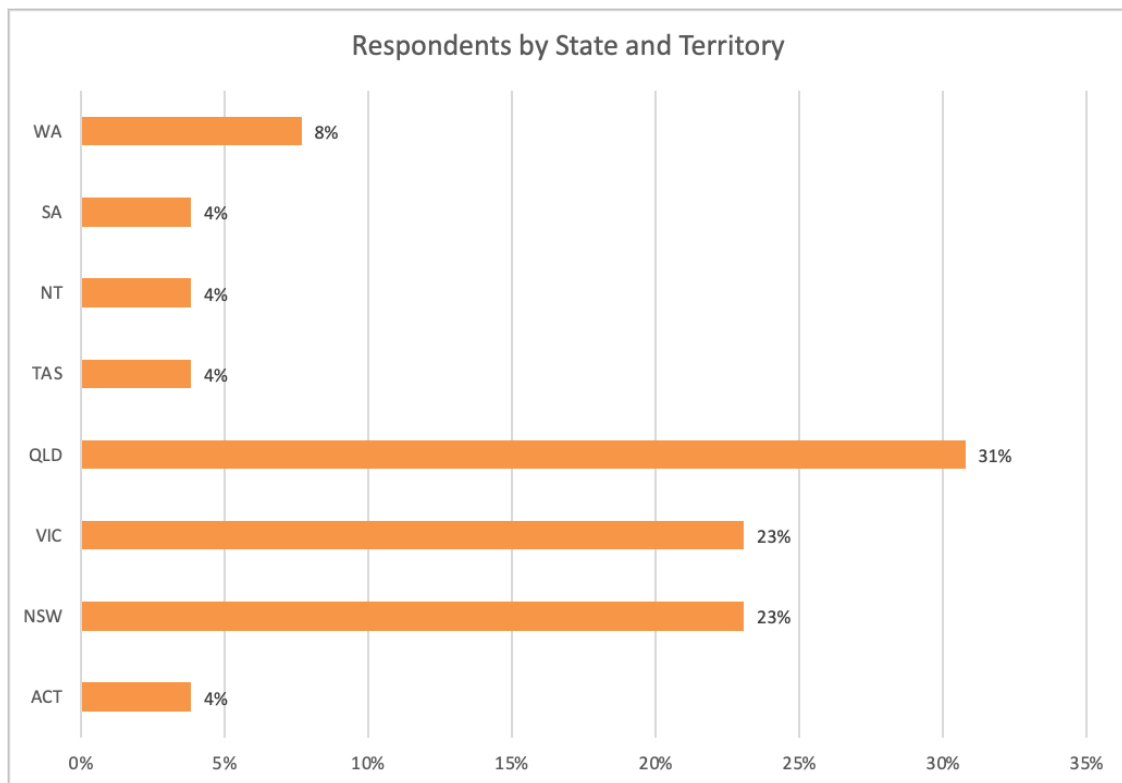


Figure 12 Respondents by State and Territory, National Survey – Participating in VET

Survey participants were born in the following countries: Bangladesh, Taiwan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Nepal, Cambodia, Honduras, South Sudan, Samoa, Iraq, Colombia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran, Japan, Italy, Afghanistan, and Kenya. 70% of respondents have lived in Australia for more than 5 years, 15% from 3 to 5 years, 7% from 1 to 3 years and 7% lived in Australia for less than a year.

Almost half of the respondents classified their level of English as Advanced, 35% as intermediate and 20% as Native or bi-lingual.

Courses undertaken by respondents – Overview

On average respondents have commenced 2.45 courses per person, with an average completion rate of 87%.

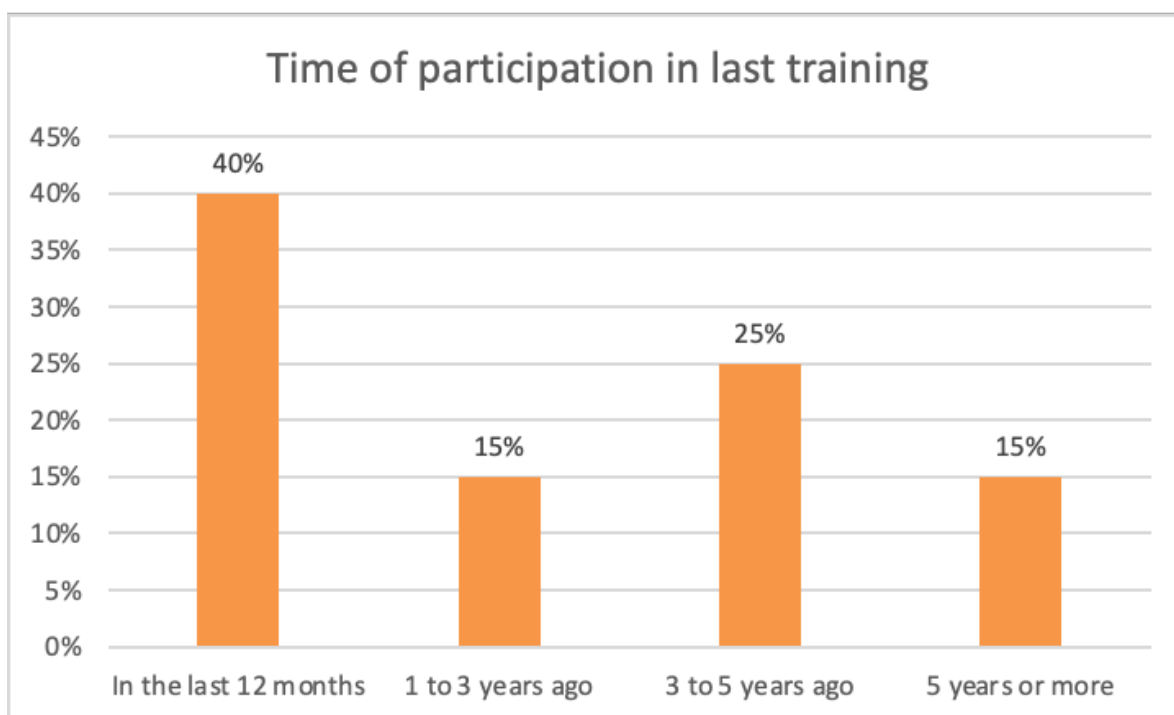


Figure 13: Time of participation in last training, National Survey – Participating in VET

Participants commenced the training in various periods, which are displayed in Figure 3. With 55% of participants undertaking the training in the last three years, it is possible to depict a current picture of experiences of people from CALD backgrounds in vocational education and training centres.

Level of qualification of the courses undertaken by participants is shown in Table 2, with '45 per cent of respondents undertaking courses at Diploma level'.

Diploma	9	45%
Certificate IV	2	10%
Certificate III	5	25%
Certificate II	1	5%
Certificate I	1	5%
Units of Competency	1	5%
Other (please specify)	1	5%

Table 2: Level of qualification of undertaken course, National Survey – Participating in VET

Half of the respondents have received training in person. Of the remaining half, 60% received a combination of in-person and online training, and 40% participated in online training.

80% of respondents received a combination of theoretical and practical training, while 20% received purely practical. None of the respondents took entirely written or theoretical training.

70% of respondents had their training in group settings, and 20% had their training in combined settings. Only 10% had their training delivered individually.

Table 3 shows the ways participants discovered the training. 75% enrolled themselves into training.,

Participants who were recommended training by a service provider or required by an employer are often enrolled by the service provider and employer themselves.

More than half of the participants paid for the training themselves. The other half had their training paid for by service providers, employers or by other means.

Respondents experience in accessing and participating in VET



I identified it myself	25%
It was recommended to me by a service provider	20%
It was recommended to me by a friend or family	15%
It was required by my employer	15%
Advertising - online	10%
Advertising - within the community	10%
Other	5%

Figure 14 Experience in participating in recent training, National Survey – Participating in VET

Table 3 shows the support that RTOs provided to respondents.

	Tutoring	Flexible hours	Assistance with childcare/family responsibilities	Materials support	Travel support	Other
Tutoring	5					
Flexible hours	1	6				
Assistance with childcare/family responsibilities	0	0	1			
Materials support	3	0	0	6		
Travel support	0	0	1	1	4	
Other	2	1	0	2	0	4

Table 3: Supports provided by trainer providers, National Survey – Participating in VET

Additional supports varied across RTOs and individuals, showing supports are tailored and not a one size fits all. Other mentioned supports were online resources, support with research, and provision of a laptop, tea/coffee and air purifier.

90% of respondents found the training pace suitable, so the respondents were able to keep up with material and absorb it confidently.

40% of respondents found some difficulties completing their training. Training providers were not able to assist in responding to these difficulties in half of the situations.

The main reasons for not finishing the training were identified as:

- Work reasons
- Family reasons
- Training was not adapted to respondents needs
- Training was not relevant

Only 10% of respondents felt that they did not understand the material after the training, even though all respondents were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the training experience.

Possible improvements to support CALD Learners

Improving the experience in **finding out** about the training could be achieved by:

- Increasing engagement with student services. The process of enrolment was identified as confusing.
- Available online resources.
- Language support.

Improving experience in **undertaking** the training can be achieved through:

- Increasing amount of training.
- Improving engagement and communication.

- Increasing variety of studying materials.
- Providing adequate fee payment options.

Improving experience in **completing** the training can be achieved by:

- Acquiring more skills through practical experience.
- Providing culturally responsive training to the staff.
- Better communication with providers.
- Study groups.

Several challenges in finding out, accessing, and participating in accredited training were mentioned by the respondents, and are identified as following:

- Not knowing how to find out about the possible training
- Training doesn't meet respondents needs.
- Inability to cover the cost of training.
- Having other responsibilities which could prevent from undertaking a training.

Focus Group Feedback

This section of the report presents findings from the focus group sessions.

Access to Training

The majority all attendees at focus groups noted that their training selection was supported by a third party, most commonly the training provider, a family member or community service organisation. These supports assisted across the access experience including in training and course selection and enrolment.

Outside this, selection of courses was informed through self-identification, including a high use of internet research informing study decisions.

With regards to funding, most focus group attendee's course costs were met by service providers and/or via accessing government subsidised places.

Impact of English Literacy

All participants who engaged in the focus groups displayed a moderate to strong conversational English. The most frequently raised issue with regards to English capability was the difference between the application and use of English in a training context. Several participants volunteered those issues with language presented in the use of technical terms used either by trainers, or in the subject matter being covered.

Employment as a driver of decision making

Employment was one of the key drivers around course selection. Focus group attendees indicated that those training programs which were able to strongly connect with employment were favoured. Those training providers who advertised or made commitments to work directly at the conclusion of training were preferable to those who did not.

The role of teaching staff

The relationship between teaching staff and students was highlighted as one of the key areas of influence within successful training provision. CALD students noted that those teaching staff who worked alongside them, offered support, referrals to additional assistance and took time in explaining and supporting training contributed greatly to their successful completion of training.

Access to Tools and Materials

Access to tools and materials was identified by some participants as a barrier to course participation and completion. Using community services and supports provided by the RTO were often necessary. Where access to computers and study space were made available, it contributed to the likelihood training could be completed.

Confidence in Accessing Assistance during Training

The level of comfort of individuals to access assistance and support, combined with the willingness of teaching staff to accommodate questions, and the infrastructure of the RTO to provide supports was raised as a key issue in the completion of training.

Several focus group participants noted issues in understanding course materials and concepts. A significant number of people gave feedback regarding issues of shame and embarrassment in seeking assistance and help. Several attendees detailed concerns regarding discrimination and racism.

Those who had a positive experience with teaching staff or tutors felt able to ask questions and access assistance at a pace which allowed them to unpack issues and improve their understanding of course materials. This included accessing support in person, but also the ability to engage in written forms via email.

Flexible Delivery and Assessment Approaches

Flexible delivery was viewed as a positive by a third of focus group attendees. This included start and end times, and in person and online training options.

A number of focus group attendees also indicated that they had benefited from flexible approaches to assessments which in their view allowed them to successfully participate in and complete their training. Flexibility and support extended to strategies such as:

- Provision of practice tests to build familiarity in assessment models;
- Staggered assessments which split the total value of each assessment more evenly across a qualification; and
- Varied assessment methods included practice/competency-based assessment and written assessments.

Competing Priorities

A key barrier to completing training was competing priorities experienced by students. Priorities extended across a wide range of areas, including:

- Family and childcare responsibilities
- Employment and work requirements
- Time constraints/requirements (including the need to travel to attend training, which in turn impacted on family and work commitments).

Community Sector Interview Feedback

This section of the report presents findings from the community service sector interviews.

Importance of Vocational Education and Training

All community service organisations engaged as part of this research indicated that accessing training was a high priority both for their staff and clients. Training is seen by clients as a necessary step to obtaining employment.

Providing Pathways to Training

Several community service organisations provided examples of attempting to provide more structured pathways to training, to assist with both access and then participation and completion. These pathways focussed in the first instance on building or confirming English capability, prior to engaging in a program of study. A tension highlighted in this was the pace at which individuals wish to connect or commence in training, alongside the assessment of the community organisation.

Connection and brokerage role of third parties

A theme through the community sector interviews was the key role community services played in connecting and supporting individuals to access training. Employment services noted they would often be a point of contact for advice and support on training options, referrals and funding. Similar advice was provided by settlement services. The nature of training recommended therefore was typically influenced by available jobs as well as relationships between training organisations and service providers. While not necessarily detrimental, this could limit the training options accessed by CALD learners.

Managing competing priorities

Community services noted that the capacity of individuals engaged in VET to participate fully in training, and in other services presented as a common challenge. For example, employment services highlighted that strong communication was required between learners and services to ensure that training could appropriately be accessed without impacting on other supports.

Barriers to Access

Functional barriers to accessing and participating in vocational education and training were noted across the community services sector. There were varying views on where responsibility sat for addressing access issues. Common barriers to access included:

- English capacity/capability for training;
- Funding to obtain books and materials;
- Access to infrastructure such as computers, internet access and training/study rooms;
- Transportation issues; and

- Childcare and family obligations.

Pastoral Care Requirements

Support for CALD learners extended beyond that required to access and participate in training and development activities. Community services were in many cases involved in providing additional wrap around supports, often in the areas of housing, counselling and mental health support, navigating other service systems, including working to respond to family issues.

Several of the community organisations engaged in this research also delivered other CALD and migrant supports. Where this occurred, they were often able to integrate supports from either the settlement or employment perspective into the delivery of training supports which was felt to enhance the quality of participation and completion in training.

English literacy

Ensuring suitable levels of English language capability was seen as crucial for supporting pathways into training. Some community services specifically prioritise access to English lessons prior to referring to training as a deliberate training strategy.

Training Provider Interview Feedback

This section of the report presents findings from the training sector interviews.

Attracting CALD clients to training

RTO's outlined a range of ways in which they seek to engage directly with CALD clients to attract them to training. These included:

- Direct advertising;
- Use of social media;
- Hosting and participating in career and training events;
- Contact via shopfronts/training locations;
- Engagement with migrant community groups and leaders;
- Working with community service providers including AMEP services, SETS providers and employment services;
- Word of mouth engagement through both formal and informal alumni networks; and
- Referral directly from employers.

While these methods were used, when asked, less than half of the training providers interviewed noted specific attraction and engagement strategies focussed on connecting with CALD clients. Specific strategies to support this appeared more frequently in the TAFE sector.

The opportunity to be placed into work was used by most training providers in their marketing and engagement.

Tension between training completion and employment

RTO's noted a key tension in the completion of training by individuals was the capacity or need to engage in work while training was undertaken. RTOs noted that outside of family commitments, and English language barriers, taking up paid employment was a key reason for students ceasing or deferring training.

Competition between Registered Training Organisations

RTO's highlighted the competitive nature of the sector as a potential detractor from the quality of training accessed, and completion rates for CALD students. The capacity to complete training programs in a shorter period was shared as an important incentive for CALD clients based on RTO feedback. Several indicated losing students to other RTOs based on qualifications being awarded in shorter timeframes.

Training providers interviewed in this research however noted concerns with the quality of training which could then be provide in shorter time frames.

Provision of training related supports

Additional supports were noted as contributing to assisting in the likelihood of students completing their training. Key supports identified included:

- Support from multicultural units/teams within the institution. This was noted in the TAFE sector but was less structured in the private RTO sector
- Access and information on foundational English training (including referral pathways) when English language barriers present during training
- Access to trusted teaching staff
- Tutoring supports alongside training
- Provision of study spaces and access to computers to support learning.

Pastoral Care Requirements

Access to pastoral care was consistently highlighted as a key influence in supporting training completion. While this included a range of areas, frequent reference to the following areas was made by RTOs across the interviews:

- Counselling and support with mental health and wellbeing;
- Medical assistance;
- Access to transport;
- Housing assistance; and
- Mentoring support outside the classroom.

Training providers outlined varying levels of support in terms of providing access to this support which appeared influenced by the size of the institution, and the personal investment of the teacher/interviewee.

Connecting training with practical based experience

The majority of RTOs engaged in this process noted a strong preference to include hands on and workplace exposure/experience as part of training either formally or informally where resources allowed to assist in the application of training concepts, as well as providing the opportunity to build local experience.

Cultural Awareness and Engagement

Working within a structured training environment in an Australian context presented cultural challenges for some students. This extended from minor adjustments to significant ones (e.g., approach to working with women in class) as examples. Several training providers noted that this could have a significant impact on engagement and completion and depending on the nature of issues often relied on the skills of the trainer to resolve.

Access to a Skilled Workforce

Several RTO's noted that the capacity to access a skilled, culturally capable workforce presented challenges in their approach to working with CALD students. Several RTO's detailed

internal efforts to build capacity (such as hiring from CALD communities, delivering cultural capability training for staff), however most noted that experience was built on the job. Competition between RTO's for high quality teaching staff in general was also noted as a challenge for training providers.

Monitoring Participation

Monitoring engagement and participation was seen as valuable, with different organisations taking different approaches.

Devoting resources though to follow up for non-attendance was identified as a key strategy for supporting completions. Several RTO's noted that a lack of familiarity with options within the training system (e.g. deferral, changing programs, moving to part time study) were not necessarily readily understood by CALD students, who may instead choose to disengage rather than seek alternative options with their institution. Targeted follow ups allowed for these options to be explored in more detail.

TAFE NSW noted that it has established a multicultural dashboard to capture student information including completions. This guide embedded multicultural specialists working closely with students to increase completions.

Establishing welcoming environments

Creating of safe and welcoming spaces for CALD students was highlighted as a strategy to both attract and retain learners in training. Common ways in which this was done included:

- Celebrating diversity/cultural events within the institution;
- Provision of materials in language; and
- Engaging educators from diverse backgrounds

Summary of Observations

The following section seeks to summarise some overall observations from the broader research. In reviewing observations, consideration should be given to the limitations presented in the methodology in terms of their application.

Observations have been presented as they relate to the impact on accessing training, participating in training, and completing training. In several areas, observations span across these key stages in the learner journey.

It is important to note, that the experiences of a CALD learner are not experienced discretely in each of these phases of decision making and participating in training. For example, a high-quality experience in accessing training, may then translate into strong structures that support participation in training. Where strong strategies for participating in training were in place, the likelihood of completing also was stronger. As such there are some areas of overlap in the following observations.

Where observations were noted across various parts of the research, they have been consolidated. Observations should be read in concert with the full report.

Accessing Training

The following area were noted as having a positive impact on accessing training:

- Employment as a driver of decision making and completion: Across all areas, employment was a key driver in the decision to access VET, with a particularly focus on training which included an element of work placement, or the promise of work at the completion of training.
- Role of third-party referrals in training selection and enrolment: Third party support was common across learners in terms of a decision to access training. Supports were typically in the form of family and personal networks, community services or RTOs. Internet supports played a role in verifying selections of training and providers (including the use of google searches, and reviews).
- Payment/Funding for training costs not an obvious issue: Barriers to funding were not highlighted as a major area impacting on access with learners engaged in this review. RTO's also did not identify it as a significant barrier. While consistent with findings in this review, MCA believes this would benefit from further exploration.
- Higher levels of qualifications prior to VET: CALD students who hold bachelor's degrees or Higher Degree levels than non-CALD students enrolled in the programs. The chosen program level of education for CALD people compared to non-CALD people does not differ drastically. However, people from CALD backgrounds tend to choose a Diploma or higher level of education more often than people from non-CALD backgrounds.

- Gender - Community Focussed Providers: Women were found to participate at slightly higher rates with community education providers based on the data analysis of the NCVET data.
- Pathways to Training: Supporting pathways to training through community service providers assisted in accessing training (e.g. provision of English language support, foundational skills programs through to specific VET courses).
- Access to mixed field programs: CALD students are more likely than non-CALD students to study mixed field programs and this tendency increases with age. These programmes include general education programmes, social skills programmes, employment skills courses and others.

The following areas were noted as barriers for CALD learners in accessing training:

- Location/Ease of Access: The issue of distance to training, and the impacts in terms of investment in time to travel has an impact on training selection, and access.
- English Proficiency: English proficiency was a factor in accessing training and carried across participation and completion. This was identified more by training providers and community organisations which may reflect a stronger understanding by them of the requirements in accessing and participating in training and their often hands on role in supporting referrals and enrolments.

Participation in Training

The following area were noted as having a positive impact on participating in training:

- Suitable teaching staff: Staff and teachers at RTOs were identified as playing a key role in the participation of CALD learners in their training. Teachers who were able to create environments which encouraged questions, provided additional support, and tailored training were identified by learners as enhancing their experience of participation. Access to a skilled workforce was noted as an issue by RTOs in this regard.
- Access to Tools, Supports and Infrastructure: Access to supports to complete training (such as training spaces, internet access and computing support) impacted on participation in training. RTOs with access to supports were considered favourably in terms of enhancing abilities to engage in training provided.
- Mixed modes of training: Options for flexible delivery was noted as an area which increased levels of participation in training. This included full time and part time engagement, as well as online and in person delivery. Varied assessment approaches also noted as relevant
- Gender – Courses; 40% of CALD men and 47% of CALD women are in either management and commerce or society and culture programs of study, as compared to 24% of non-CALD men and 49% of non-CALD women. While CALD and non-CALD

men are more likely to study engineering than women, CALD men are still far less likely to study engineering than non-CALD men. Meanwhile, CALD women are much more likely to be in a mixed field program than non-CALD women.

- **English Proficiency:** English proficiency was a factor in accessing training and carried across participation and completion. This was identified more by training providers and community organisations which may reflect a stronger understanding by them of the requirements in accessing and participating in training and their often hands on role in supporting referrals and enrolments.
- **Cultural Awareness and Engagement:** Provision of a welcoming training environment was considered a key factor by RTOs in engaging and supporting CALD learners, both in training and in the broader community.
- **Pastoral Care Support:** Access to 'outside of training' pastoral support assisted in participation. This includes providing additional wrap around supports, often in the areas of housing, counselling and mental health support, navigating other service systems, and working to respond to family issues. Several of the community organisations engaged in this research also delivered other CALD and migrant supports. Where this occurred, they were often able to integrate supports from either the settlement or employment perspective.
- **Connecting training with practical based experience:** The majority of RTOs noted a strong preference to include hands on and workplace exposure/experience as part of training either formally or informally where resources allowed to assist in the application of training concepts, as well as providing the opportunity to build local experience. This was supported by feedback in focus groups.

The following areas were noted as barriers for CALD learners in participating in training:

- **Confidence in accessing support during training:** The level of comfort of individuals to access assistance and support, combined with the willingness of teaching staff to accommodate questions, and the infrastructure of the RTO supports participation and completion in training. The cultural capability of teaching staff is strongly connected to this.
- **Cultural capacity of staff and learning environment:** Where staff or the learning environment were not culturally appropriate it had a detrimental impact on participation.
- **Competing priorities:** A key barrier to completing training was competing priorities experienced by students. Priorities extended across a wide range of areas, including:
 - Family and childcare responsibilities
 - Employment and work requirements
 - Time constraints/requirements (including the need to travel to attend training, which in turn impacted on family and work commitments).
- **Location/Ease of Access:** The issue of distance to training, and the impacts in terms of investment in time to travel has an impact on training participation.

Completing Training

As noted, feedback and observations mentioned in the previous section are in the main applicable to completing training as well.

The following areas were noted as having a positive impact on completing training:

- **Connection to employment:** As noted throughout this report, the connection between employment and selected training was a key driver in completion of training. Where clear pathways could be seen to employment, CALD learners and RTOs indicated a stronger rate of completion.
- **Age is a factor:** Older people are less likely to complete training (as shown in the data analysis of the NCVET data). While not explored in detail during this research, it is anticipated that employment/income drivers, as well as competing family responsibilities falling more heavily on older learners would contribute to this.
- **Gender – Completion:** Women from CALD backgrounds tend to complete more programs than similarly aged CALD men. While men and women from CALD backgrounds complete their studies in similar volumes up to the age of 30, a higher number of older CALD women complete programs than similarly aged.
- **Active Monitoring of Participation:** RTOs who actively monitor participation and engage with learners see stronger completion rates. This includes educating CALD learners on the options within the training sector to

The following areas were noted as barriers for CALD learners in participating in training:

- **Competing priorities:** A key barrier to completing training was competing priorities experienced by students. Priorities extended across a wide range of areas, including:
 - Family and childcare responsibilities
 - Employment and work requirements
 - Time constraints/requirements (including the need to travel to attend training, which in turn impacted on family and work commitments).
- **Access to income:** Access to income during training impacted on the completion rates. Feedback strongly indicated the tension between financial requirements and the capacity to participate in training. Where an opportunity or necessity was presented to engage in paid work, this would often be taken at the expense of the learners training. Varied access to income support and family assistance influenced this.
- **RTO Competition:** RTOs highlighted the competitive nature of the sector as a potential detractor from the quality of training accessed, and completion rates for CALD students (where CALD learners move from one RTO to another for reasons).
- **Confidence in accessing support during training:** The level of comfort of individuals to access assistance and support, combined with the willingness of teaching staff to

accommodate questions, and the infrastructure of the RTO supports participation and completion in training. The cultural capability of teaching staff is strongly connected to this.

- Location/Ease of Access: The issue of distance to training, and the impacts in terms of investment in time to travel has an impact on training completion.