

**FINAL REPORT**

January 2018

**Raising university participation  
of new migrants in regional  
communities**

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## Executive summary

Regional campuses of Australian universities include large numbers of students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. On some campuses such as Mildura and Shepparton, over sixty per cent of students are from low SES backgrounds (Luckman, 2017). Despite this relative economic disadvantage, students at regional universities are typically more satisfied with their campus experience than students at metropolitan universities (Brett, Sheridan, Harvey, & Cardak, 2015), though regional students also record lower retention and completion rates than metropolitan students (Department of Education and Training, 2017; 2016). Previous research has addressed the broad experiences of regional university students, including the advantages of smaller class sizes and more connected communities, and the challenges of relatively low academic preparation levels and limited course offerings (Brett, Sheridan, Harvey, & Cardak, 2015; Burnheim & Harvey, 2016). However, over a quarter of Australians live in regional areas, and the diversity of these communities can be masked by a narrow focus on 'regionality'. Regional universities, for example, serve diverse communities of Indigenous students, people with a disability, and students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB).

In this project we examine the university experiences and motivations of new migrants in regional Australia. In higher education, students from non-English speaking backgrounds are defined as domestic students who have been in Australia for fewer than ten years, and who speak a language other than English at home. The NESB group includes students who have only recently moved to Australia, but who arrive into long established communities, e.g. Italian and Greek migrants. Other groups of NESB students include recent arrivals into much newer communities, e.g. Sudanese and Somalian migrants. Students from refugee backgrounds are also included within the NESB group, but not people seeking asylum or others whose visas consign them to the status of international students. Government migration policies have encouraged new migrants to settle in regional Australia, and areas such as Shepparton and Mildura include substantial communities of migrants from Iraq, Tonga, Afghanistan, Sudan and South Sudan, and the Congo.

Overall, Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds record relatively strong access to, and achievement in, higher education (Department of Education and Training, 2017; Naylor, Baik, & James, 2013; Norton, 2014). These data have led some commentators to advocate the abolition of NESB as a student equity group (James, Baldwin, Coates, Krause, & McInnis, 2004, p.42; Norton, 2014; Watson & Pope, 2000, p.6). However, strong overall performance masks significant differences within the group. In particular, students from refugee backgrounds, including from African and Middle Eastern countries of origin, and Muslim migrants, may experience lower levels of university access (Australian Survey Research Group, 2011, p. 18), and subsequently lower employment outcomes (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007) as well as unconscious bias and racism on campus (Mangan & Winter, 2017). The relatively poor graduate outcomes of some new migrant groups also suggests issues around perceived English language proficiency and unconscious (or conscious) bias among some employers. Understanding the educational experiences of new migrants in regional Australia is central to disaggregating the 'regional', 'low SES' and 'NESB' categories, and also to understanding how those equity categories overlap and may serve to compound individual disadvantage. The experiences of new migrants also reveal how universities are harnessing student diversity, and how campuses may be made more inclusive and effective.

Our research involved interviews and focus groups with a wide range of new migrants and related stakeholders in the regional Victorian communities of Shepparton and Mildura. Both regions host a university campus, substantial communities of new migrants, and a majority of people from low socio-economic status backgrounds. The views of new migrants within secondary schools were sought, as well as those who had either graduated from, or were enrolled at, the local university campus. In addition, school principals and ethnic community leaders were interviewed. Findings revealed both challenges and opportunities for universities across the student life cycle.

University aspirations and motivations among new migrant students were typically strong, though some restrictive factors were identified. In particular, boys and men from some communities were encouraged to work to support their families and get ahead, rather than studying towards a more distant goal through higher education. Equally, it was perceived as culturally difficult for some women to relocate to study, which intersected with a further barrier of limited course choice at the local campuses. Respondents consistently identified a paucity of local course offerings as a barrier to access or student satisfaction, with many enrolled students not undertaking a course of their first preference. This factor was related to a perceived gap between aspirations and achievement, with many new migrants seeking to study highly selective courses such as Medicine, but enrolling in Nursing as a pathway program instead. This finding is consistent with previous research around the relatively high but unfulfilled aspirations of students from refugee backgrounds (Gifford, Correa-Valez, & Sampson, 2009; Taiwo, Singh, & Tregale, 2017).

While new migrants were usually motivated to study at university, their awareness of university admissions processes, course offerings, and expectations was limited. Respondents identified the need for universities to work more closely with community groups, parents, and other stakeholders to promote greater awareness of higher education. Parents were perceived to be committed to the education and success of their children, but often limited in their ability to provide advice because of linguistic, cultural and financial barriers. There was an additional perception that some parents and communities were concerned about a potential loss of community, cultural and religious identity if their children attended university. This concern is central to the challenge for universities to create inclusive environments in which unprecedented student diversity is not only tolerated but supported and harnessed.

Of the respondents enrolled at university, most reported relatively high levels of student satisfaction, consistent with broader data on regional students. Students were broadly satisfied with the attitudes and teaching of their lecturers, the support services available, and the extent to which the campus community was welcoming. Indeed, some students found the campus to be a more tolerant place than the broader community, particularly in the case of Muslim women. Nevertheless, there were reported cases of unconscious bias by staff and students, and most new migrant students reported few friendships with Anglo-Australian students. While students typically formed strong friendships on campus, there was perceived to be little interaction between students of different ethnicities. Diversity was perceived to be tolerated but not actively harnessed, either within or outside the classroom. Consistent with international research, new migrant students appeared relatively unlikely to be involved in university clubs, societies and extra-curricular activities, though many were deeply engaged within their own communities.

University graduates who were interviewed had typically found positive employment outcomes, and highlighted the value of close regional networks and communities. However, unconscious bias among employers was also identified, along with relatively limited employment opportunities in the regions. Findings suggest that universities need to continue to work closely with employer groups to ensure effective engagement of all graduates within local communities and workforces.

Overall, our findings suggest a need for universities to work more expansively with schools and communities to support university awareness. In some cases, this work could involve working more closely with parents, community groups, cultural and religious organisations, beyond the traditional models of university outreach and in-reach with secondary schools. Universities may also need to expand and diversify their access policies, to consider the different forms of community, linguistic, spiritual and familial capital that students from different backgrounds can bring to the campus. Within the university, effective English language support remains critical, along with further strategies to promote understanding of diversity among staff. Harnessing diverse viewpoints within teaching and learning, and promoting a more inclusive campus climate remain areas of high priority. Finally, university staff will need to work closely with employers and community groups to minimise risks of unconscious bias and racism, and to promote the effectiveness of workforce diversity. New migrant groups represent an asset to regional universities and communities, but universities need to adapt to support the increasingly diverse communities they serve.



## List of abbreviations

<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>ATAR</b>	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
<b>ATSI</b>	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
<b>CALD</b>	Culturally and linguistically diverse
<b>DET</b>	Australian Government Department of Education and Training
<b>EAL</b>	English as an additional language
<b>GCA</b>	Graduate Careers Australia
<b>HEPPP</b>	Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme
<b>IRU</b>	Innovative Research University
<b>MELC</b>	Mildura English Language Centre
<b>NESB</b>	Non-English Speaking Background
<b>SHEV</b>	Safe Haven Enterprise Visa
<b>SEAS</b>	Special Entry Access Scheme
<b>SES</b>	Socio-economic status
<b>SMECC</b>	Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council
<b>TAFE</b>	Technical and Further Education
<b>TPV</b>	Temporary Protection Visas
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>US</b>	United States (of America)
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training
<b>WIL</b>	Work-integrated learning

## Recommendations for universities

1. Extend traditional university outreach activities beyond secondary schools to community, religious, and other forums that serve new migrant communities.
2. Engage parents and families of new migrant prospective students through tailored resources, including plain English explanations of university options and admissions processes, and translation of university information into community languages where relevant.
3. Develop alternative admissions schemes that recognise the strengths and qualities of new migrants and other diverse student groups.
4. Expand course offerings on regional campuses, including through online provision, and increase resources around pathways to preferred course destinations.
5. Increase provision and awareness of financial assistance for students from new migrant, low SES backgrounds.
6. Promote guided orientation and transition processes.
7. Provide targeted English language support, including through bridging and enabling programs, for new migrants, including students from refugee backgrounds.
8. Consult with students and communities to ensure greater inclusion of new migrants in university clubs and societies.
9. Ensure that multicultural events on campus are mainstreamed and conducted within broader diversity programs.
10. Develop online resources and modules on student diversity, including ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, to educate and inform all commencing university students.
11. Reform broader curriculum and pedagogy to promote positive diversity experiences and intercultural awareness.
12. Increase efforts to increase ethnic diversity among peer mentors and tutors, to better reflect the university community.
13. Develop structured education for both staff and students on the importance of classroom conviviality, across language, cultural, religious differences.
14. Collaborate with employers to create work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities for new migrants and to address unconscious bias in the workforce.
15. Ensure that university careers advice and services are promoted to all students, and monitor participation of NESB, low SES and regional students in WIL and other activities.
16. Increase research into student experiences of diversity, campus climate, stereotype threat, and different types of student capital.

# Background and report structure

## Background

This study was conducted by La Trobe University, funded through an external research grant provided by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (DET) through the 2016 National Priorities Pool, which is an element of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP).

The project explored the university aspirations and experiences of new migrants in low socio-economic status (SES), regional communities, and the extent to which regional campuses support ethnic, socio-economic and religious diversity. The project focussed on Shepparton and Mildura - two Victorian regional communities that host new migrants from diverse countries such as South Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Tonga. Each community is supported by a campus of La Trobe University, a member of the Innovative Research University (IRU) group within Australian higher education.

For the purposes of this report, 'new migrants' refers to cohorts of migrants who migrated to Shepparton and Mildura from the 1990s onwards from regions that had not previously been major sources of migration, including: Africa, Asia and the Middle East. New migrants often have differing visa status and this affects their access and participation in higher education. Australian citizens and permanent humanitarian visa holders have access to HECS-HELP loans, by which university tuition costs can be deferred. However, refugees on Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) or a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) and people seeking asylum are treated as full international students, with higher fees than domestic students and no access to loans (Refugee Council of Australia, 2017). For this group, university is virtually impossible unless access can be gained to full scholarships and cost of living bursaries. If considered an international student, a confirmed refugee is also generally unable to enrol in the enabling programs that effectively prepare students for undergraduate study. This report is funded through HEPPP and focussed on domestic students, so we have focussed here on Australian citizens and permanent humanitarian visa holders. Many of the issues covered, however, relate to broader student cohorts.

People within the Shepparton and Mildura regions are predominantly from the lowest socio-economic quartile according to Australian classification systems. Over eighty per cent of the Mildura area, and over sixty per cent of Shepparton, is classified as low SES (Luckman, 2017). These regions also now include large numbers of new migrants from countries that had not previously been sources of migration. Many of these migrants are from non-English speaking and refugee backgrounds and, despite a paucity of data, their higher education participation is estimated to be relatively low. The extent of under-representation is likely to be understated because of the breadth of the non-English speaking background (NESB) category. The Australian Government defines the NESB cohort as domestic students who were born overseas, have been in Australia for less than ten years, and who speak a language other than English at home (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2014; Martin, 1994). Although NESB students are one equity group, the category includes diverse groups of people, in which some over-represented migrant groups, typically in urban areas, are aggregated with extremely disadvantaged students from refugee and other

backgrounds (Mestan & Harvey, 2014). Our project addressed this issue by collecting qualitative data from a range of new migrant communities in Shepparton and Mildura.

Our research adopted a mixed methods approach involving:

- a literature review
- examination of demographic patterns within the Shepparton and Mildura areas
- interviews with new migrants in Shepparton and Mildura at different stages of the student lifecycle, including: school aged youth (i.e. year 11 and 12); university students; and recent graduates
- interviews with community stakeholders in Shepparton and Mildura, including staff at university; principals at local schools; and ethnic council members
- focus groups with community members in Shepparton and Mildura.

## **Report structure**

Our report begins with a contextual review of national and international research related to higher education experiences of new migrants. We highlight that university access, success and graduate outcomes of some new migrant groups, particularly from non-English speaking and refugee backgrounds, are estimated to be relatively low. This section also reviews national and international research related to notions of belonging on campus and campus climate.

Subsequently we examine the demographic patterns of the Shepparton and Mildura regions, including the intersectionality of low SES, regional, and new migrant identities.

We then provide an analysis of the interviews and focus groups with different new migrant communities and related stakeholders, across various stages of the student lifecycle. Our interviews and focus groups particularly addressed:

- university aspirations and motivations
- university awareness, choice and access
- campus experiences, including academic and social
- graduate outcomes, particularly focussed on employment.

Finally, we discuss our major findings and the overall picture emerging from the research.

## Section 1. Introduction

Many Australian regional communities now include large numbers of new migrants, from countries as diverse as Albania, Iraq, and former Sudan. In towns such as Mildura and Shepparton – the foci of this report – more than ten per cent of the population was born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017b; .id consulting, 2017). Ethnic diversity is significant – Shepparton and Mildura are two of Victoria’s main sites for regional refugee resettlement (Adult Multicultural Education Services [AMES] Australia, 2017). Many of these migrants are from non-English speaking and refugee backgrounds and, despite a paucity of data, their higher education participation is estimated to be relatively low. Under-representation creates both a recruitment and an equity challenge for universities in regional, low socio-economic areas. Further, while relatively little is known about the experiences of new migrants on university campuses, existing Australian and international evidence suggests that some students may face issues of unconscious bias and discrimination (Mangan & Winter, 2017; Morrice, 2013). Finally, the graduate outcomes of students from some non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) are relatively poor at national level (Graduate Careers Australia [GCA], 2015, 2016; Mestan & Harvey, 2014), suggesting issues of English language proficiency and potential employer bias.

The experiences of new migrants in Australian higher education remain under-researched and underestimated. Unlike comparable government departments in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US), the Australian Department of Education and Training does not collect data and track participation, success and retention on the basis of ethnicity, beyond the NESB category. Consequently, some new migrant groups in particular are marginalised by the numerical dominance of other, higher achieving groups who are typically based in the larger cities. This study addresses a research gap by exploring both the university aspirations and experiences of new migrants in regional communities, and the extent to which regional campuses themselves support ethnic, socio-economic and religious diversity. Universities can play a crucial role in the development of skills, social cohesion, and employment outcomes in regional communities (Moran & Mallman, 2015).

### **Equity groups and the Australian higher education student equity framework**

The current higher education student equity framework was developed from the 1990 Australian Government discussion paper, ‘A Fair Chance for All’ (Department of Education Employment and Training [DEET], 1990). The framework identifies the following six equity categories: people from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds; people from regional and remote areas; people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI; also referred to as Indigenous peoples); people with a disability; and, women in non-traditional areas, such as Engineering, Science and Information Technology (Martin, 1994). These six equity groups have been the focus of targeted support and policy attention in higher education since 1990. The cohorts were developed to account for indicators of participation, success, retention and completion (James, Bexley, & Maxwell, 2008), but the incentives to improve equity have typically focussed on access and participation (DEET, 1990; Harvey, Burnheim, & Brett, 2016).

Despite a policy focus on university access, different cohorts may also face disadvantage during and after their studies. For regional and low SES students, the primary challenge is still accessing university (Burnheim & Harvey, 2016; Harvey, Andrewartha, & Burnheim,

2016). For the overall category of NESB students, policy concerns have focussed more on levels of achievement and graduate outcomes, despite substantial differences between groups within the category (GCA, 2015, 2016; Li, Mahuteau, Dockery, Junankar, & Mavromaras, 2016; Mestan & Harvey, 2014). However, for the subset of NESB students who are from a refugee background, there are concerns of under-representation (Terry, Naylor, Nguyen, & Rizzo, 2016) as well as achievement and outcome issues. This report focusses on new migrants in regional Australia, who are typically members of at least three student equity groups: low SES, regional, and NESB. These factors often combine to create compound disadvantage, and create a unique set of challenges very different from those faced by the majority of NESB students attending urban universities. In addition, many of the migrants we interviewed were from refugee backgrounds, which is common in regional Australia given Government resettlement programs and broader migration trends. We examine equity issues across the student life cycle, from aspirations at school to graduate employment outcomes.

### **Students from non-English speaking backgrounds**

In Australia, NESB students form a single equity category, but that category includes diverse and distinct groups of people. The Australian Government defines the NESB category as domestic students who were born overseas, have been in Australia for less than ten years, and who speak a language other than English at home (AIHW, 2014; Martin, 1994). By contrast, several other nations collect disaggregated data on students from migrant backgrounds and/or of different ethnicities. In the UK, the category of 'black and minority ethnic' (BME) distinguishes between British people from five ethnicities: Black (typically from African or Caribbean backgrounds), Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and China. The US maintains a primary policy focus on African-Americans and Latinos/Hispanics, both of whom are significantly more likely than White students to come from low income families (Bond Hill, 2016). Data are also frequently collected on groups such as Asian American Pacific Islanders.

During the creation of the higher education student equity framework, the Australian Government noted that a number of ethnic groups were under-represented at university (Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, 1986; Department of Employment Education and Training [DEET], 1987). Nevertheless, the decision to create an overarching category of NESB students was justified primarily by pragmatic concerns (AIHW, 2014). As Martin (1994, p. 70) explained, distinguishing lingual groups would have made the categories too small to originate meaningful statistical conclusions. Adopting geographic regions was also considered but was not implemented because of broad diversity between the ethnic groups in Australia. The ten year clause is also contested, by some because of a belief that recently arrived migrants are frequently more advantaged than migrants who have been in Australia for a longer period of time (Birrell & Healy, 2008), and by others for a contrasting belief, i.e. that those who have already been in Australia for six years or more should no longer be considered disadvantaged (Monash University, 2017; The University of Melbourne, 2017). A further issue exists in the framing of NESB status as a deficit. The Australian Bureau of Statistics and Department of Immigration and Border Protection now use the term Culturally and Linguistic Diverse (CALD) instead of NESB. This decision relates to the view of the Ministerial Council of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs that 'NESB is seen as an oversimplified indicator of disadvantage, which may result in inappropriate

service provision and neglect the positive aspects of cultural and linguistic diversity' (Commonwealth Interdepartmental Committee of Multicultural Affairs, 2001, p. 3).

Despite these limitations, all Australian universities adopt the Australian Government definition of NESB for data collection purposes. However, institutions approach the category of NESB differently for equity purposes and this is reflected in the definition of NESB cohort for providing support. Many Australian universities award (different levels of) bonus entry points for NESB students, which enable the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) of those students to be recalibrated. In the state of Victoria, for example, there is a difference in the way some universities treat the length of time spent in Australia when considering applications through the Special Entry Access Scheme (SEAS). Universities such as Deakin and La Trobe maintain the Australian Government definition when considering applications through the Victorian SEAS (Deakin University, 2017; La Trobe University, 2017). However, Monash University and the University of Melbourne only provide preferential access to NESB students if they have arrived in Australia in the last six years (Monash University, 2017; The University of Melbourne, 2017).

Notably, the Australian Department of Education and Training does not collect data and track participation, success and retention on the basis of ethnicity, beyond the NESB category. Consequently, some new migrant groups in particular are marginalised by the numerical dominance of other higher achieving groups. Indeed, the NESB category encompasses a large number of diverse ethnic sub-groups and lingual minorities with varying degrees of advantage and disadvantage. For example, some studies have shown that certain lingual-ethnic groups, such as Chinese and Vietnamese, on average perform well in secondary school; while others, such as Turks and African groups, do not perform as well (Considine & Zappalà, 2002; James et al., 2004; Windle, 2004). The high performance of some lingual-ethnic groups may cover the relative disadvantage of other groups (Mestan & Harvey, 2014). Relatedly, public schools with high numbers of NESB students have seen a relative decline in university offers (Edwards, Birrell, & Smith, 2005, p. 27). Overall, the NESB group alone does not reflect the extent of disadvantage faced by some ethnic sub-groups, and does not enable redress for the level of disadvantage (Harvey, Burnheim, & Brett, 2016, p. 13).

Notably, NESB students face particular disadvantage at the graduate outcome stage of the student life cycle. Initial NESB graduates tend to earn lower salaries than English speaking backgrounds (ESB) graduates (GCA, 2016) and be more likely to work in professions for which their degree is not required or relevant (Chiswick et al. 2005; Ho & Alcorso 2004). The labour market for migrants and refugees is largely segmented, with new arrivals disproportionately ending up in low skill, low pay jobs (Colic-Peisker, 2009). 'Visibly' different refugees, particularly people from African and Middle Eastern countries, and especially of apparent Muslim faith, are more likely to experience under-employment through discrimination (Colic-Peisker, 2009). While new migrant university graduates have a higher education credential, they can find it difficult to link into social networks that would help secure higher pay and status employment (Kilpatrick et al., 2015). While the Australian student equity framework remains premised on gaps in university access and participation, current Government proposals to expand performance-based funding (PBF) in higher education would increase attention to the graduate outcomes of different student cohorts. Despite frequent calls to abolish the category, NESB students could potentially move from

the margins of student equity to a more central position if universities are further incentivised to improve student outcomes.

Education plays an important role in settlement for new migrants. Participation in meso level institutions, such as university in regional areas, can foster increased social and cultural participation (Wilkinson, 2002) and the development of social capital with local residents (Kilpatrick, Johnson, King, Jackson, & Jatrana, 2015). This type of social participation can lead to increases in respect and bonding amongst diverse populations (Ho, 2011), and even where there is conflict, participation in 'locally embedded activities' can build 'conviviality and inclusivity' (Harris, 2014, p. 579). Higher education participation has a positive impact on social participation as well as emotional and mental health for humanitarian migrants in particular (Bond et al, 2007; Ferede, 2012). University can provide new migrants with increased confidence in their skills and abilities (Joyce, Earnest, de Mori, & Silvagni, 2010), and capacity for confidently negotiating a differing culture and society (Harris, Lyons, & Marlowe, 2013). While higher education can be an alienating place for some new migrants, as we discuss later in this review of literature, it can also be an important source of positive social identity (Morrice, 2013).

### **Students from refugee backgrounds**

In Australia, students from refugee backgrounds are generally treated as a sub-group of the broader NESB category. However, the Australian Department of Education and Training does not specifically monitor the participation, success and retention of students from refugee backgrounds. People who have identified themselves as having settled in Australia as part of the Australian Refugee and Humanitarian Programme are likely to be included within the NESB group. A study conducted by the University of Melbourne's Refugee Studies Program and Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education found that most students from refugee backgrounds have been included under the NESB category, and many of these students may also be subsumed under the low SES and the regional equity groups (Terry et al., 2016, p. 24). The report found that, between 2009 and 2014, the number of students from refugee backgrounds more than doubled to approximately 3,506 students (Terry, 2016, p. 19). Although numbers are increasing, refugee communities are typically under-represented in Australian higher education.

Although different refugee communities may experience different obstacles when accessing and participating in higher education, commonalities exist. Students from refugee backgrounds may have experienced trauma, forced migration, lost loved ones, and are likely to have disrupted education (Terry et al., 2016). The serious loss and trauma that many refugee background students have suffered, as a result of forced displacement and experiences of political turmoil and violence, puts them at greater risk of emotional and psychological health problems (Burnett & Peel, 2001), increasing the difficulty of study (Earnest et al., 2010; Joyce et al., 2010). In the receiving country, new migrants often contend with social stigma based largely on misperceptions about abuse of welfare and unwillingness to work (Correa-Valez, 2013) as well as racism and discrimination due to ethno-lingual (Hage, 1998) and religious differences (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007). Other challenges include socio-economic disadvantage, language barriers and differing community norms regarding university. Brooker and Lawrence (2012) note that the largest challenge for students from refugee backgrounds is competency in English language.



Higher education research has the potential either to reinforce or to challenge the ‘failure to thrive’ narratives often promulgated about new migrants (Harris, Marlowe, & Nyuon, 2015). While challenges such as loss and trauma are real concerns, particularly for many on humanitarian visas, research also needs to acknowledge the resources and strengths of new migrants in order to avoid simplistic, homogenising and deficit-based views of migrants and their families and communities. Some studies highlight that students from refugee backgrounds have limited access to the social capital needed to navigate educational pathways (Ben-Moshe, Bertone, & Grossman, 2008; Hannah, 1999; Tregale & Bosanquet, 2011). Morrice (2009, p. 664) reveals that ‘in attempting to move into the field of HE [higher education] or employment refugees may not be aware of the rules of the game, the norms and expectations’. However, Morrice (2009, p. 664) also argues the need to focus less on what people from refugee backgrounds ‘lack’, and instead explore what the higher education sector or the employment market ‘fails to give value to or recognise’.

Students from refugee backgrounds often possess many alternative forms of capital, which may go unacknowledged or unrewarded by universities. As a consequence, students from refugee backgrounds may feel marginalised even as they possess qualities essential for perseverance and success. Students from refugee backgrounds may possess forms of capital such as ‘grit’ or determination, that could improve their chances of success (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Strayhorn, 2014). Similarly, Naidoo et al.’s (2014, p. 43) study found that students from refugee backgrounds interviewed ‘displayed a high level of resourcefulness, resilience and high aspirations towards educational attainment’. This form of aspirational capital is a strength often hidden by a more limited focus on cultural capital (see Yosso, 2005). Similarly, new migrants may possess reserves of familial and/or community capital that provide strength and purpose, but may also be marginalised within higher education discourse (Yosso, 2005). People from refugee and other migrant backgrounds often develop significant levels of resilience, focus, and determination as a result of hardship (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012), and demonstrate agency and resolve in responding to and countering stigmatisation and discrimination (Lamont & Mizrachi, 2012).

### **Support for students from refugee backgrounds**

Several Australian universities support students from refugee backgrounds through outreach and engagement initiatives, language and learning support, financial assistance, and employability programs. Many universities now host scholarships and bursaries, and this financial assistance is often complemented by broader strategies. La Trobe University, for example, employs a contact officer on each campus to help students from refugee backgrounds navigate university services and processes ([www.latrobe.edu.au](http://www.latrobe.edu.au)). Griffith University adopts a ‘Stepping Out’ program to enhance the employability of students from refugee backgrounds ([www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)), while the University of Canberra maintains a program to increase students’ sense of belonging and improve migrant and refugee retention and success ([www.canberra.edu.au](http://www.canberra.edu.au)). Macquarie University has developed a mentoring program for secondary school students from refugee backgrounds, highlighting the need to raise university awareness in surrounding communities ([www.mq.edu.au](http://www.mq.edu.au)). Despite the existence of these programs, our desktop search revealed very few universities to have websites that comprehensively collate the support services available to refugee students.

## University aspirations, motivations and access

In a study of Australian university student migrants of Middle Eastern and African descent, Earnest et al. (2010) found that conflicting information and/or lack of information about tertiary education posed a significant barrier to participation. There are significant gaps in information channels between universities and low SES new migrant individuals, families, and communities (Terry et al., 2016). These gaps includes awareness of processes both explicit and implicit, and are partly responsible for differences in educational attainment between new migrants and the general population (Baum & Flores, 2011). In addition to course information, financial aid has been found to be less effective when official forms and processes are complex and unpredictable (Baum & McPherson, 2008). Earnest et al. (2010) note that there is limited knowledge, in higher education institutions and academic research, regarding the influences and roles of families, communities, and local and higher educational institutions on the decision-making processes of refugee background youth. New migrant youth and families tend to choose institutions that are less selective (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005), and are far less likely to have 'hot' knowledge of distinctions between universities and courses that come with the cultural capital of the established, middle-class youth and their families (Ball, Macrae, & Maguire, 2013).

Despite informational barriers, many new migrants, including refugees, aspire to higher education (Stevenson & Willott, 2007). Australian students from refugee backgrounds are shown to demonstrate future goal orientation and determination, as well as high motivation and ambition for tertiary study (Joyce et al., 2010). However, university aspiration is often unfulfilled because of informational and financial barriers to access, language proficiency limitations and marginalisation within schools and communities, and external factors such as poverty (Baum & Flores, 2011). New migrants, particularly from refugee backgrounds, may also face challenges during high school, including linguistic and social disadvantages (Hatoss, O'Neill, & Eacersall, 2012), which 'often push refugee background students to the margins of the Australian educational system' (Naidoo 2015, p. 210). These disadvantages can result in university being an unrealistic option as young new migrants struggle to 'make up for lost time' through disrupted schooling (Cassidy & Gow, 2005). The reality of low-socio-economic disadvantage and social exclusion contributes to the often significant gaps between educational aspiration and attainment (Correa-Valez et al., 2010).

For those from refugee backgrounds who do participate in higher education, disruptions in primary and secondary school may carry over into disadvantage in university (Hannah, 1999), and the route to university can be arduous and complex (Morrice, 2009). Overseas skills recognition schemes have been criticised for devaluing the knowledge and cultural capital of migrants (Webb, 2015) and as racialized skills regimes that perpetuate inequalities (Fozdar, 2012; Guo, 2015). Because of both formal and informal barriers, humanitarian migrants are over-represented in lower pay and lower status jobs (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008). Such a loss of status and profession means skilled refugee background Australians are often restarting their higher education careers as well as re-developing their personal and professional networks (Harris et al., 2015). Collectively, evidence suggests an undervaluing or ignorance of many migrants' skills and capabilities, and this weakness arguably extends to the higher education sector itself. In the qualitative research that follows, we highlight the need for universities to recognise and reward different personal strengths and capabilities in their access programs and their approaches to curriculum and pedagogy.

One of the most direct challenges facing new migrant students in higher education is the continued acquisition and use of English as an additional language. Australian policies concerning English language classes for humanitarian migrants allow for between 6 and 12 months or approximately 500 hours of classroom instruction. Olliff and Couch (2005), in research with Australian refugee background youth and language instructors, found that this allocation of hours was typically inadequate preparation for higher education. Although low SES new migrant students are often deemed to have sufficient English language proficiency to be admitted to university, the added challenges with academic English can make study particularly challenging, as well as for instructors who want to assist but are concerned about some students' lack of preparedness (Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Kong et al., 2016; Olliff & Couch, 2005). Australian research suggests that, due to lack of confidence in English language, some low SES new migrants report reluctance to speak and participate in class, have difficulty understanding local accents of some lecturers and tutors, and find that more time is needed than granted to complete some coursework (Kong et al., 2016). Earnest et al. (2010) found that Australian refugee background students are less likely to attend tutorials in the first place, because of their concern over their English language abilities.

### **Negotiating study-work-family and community life balance**

Significant challenges confront many low SES new migrants outside of university, potentially affecting their balance between study, work, and life commitments. For those new migrant students living in low socio-economic circumstances, finances can be a source of stress, both for individuals and families (Joyce et al., 2010; Morrice, 2013). These stresses can include conducting extra paid work to meet obligations to help support family of origin (Kong et al., 2016), and remittances to family in the country of origin (Harris & Marlowe, 2011). Such work is typically low-pay and often physically tiring (Kong et al., 2016). For students in regional areas, limited public transportation makes commuting to university and work more burdensome (Kong et al., 2016), particularly if more affordable housing is further from town or city centres (Harris & Marlowe, 2011). New migrant students often have an important resource in the social bonds they form with people from their same ethno-lingual communities. These bonds can reflect strong community capital, which can be an asset both to the individual students and to universities if recognised and harnessed (Yosso, 2005).

Equally, social commitments to community have been found to be, at times, a source of stress as well. There may be pressure at home to 'succeed' and be a positive representation of the 'community' (Harris & Marlowe, 2011), as well as to be active in the community, giving extra time to relatives and others that puts a strain on some students' ability to find sufficient time for academic study (Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Kong et al., 2016; Naidoo, 2015). Turner and Fozdar (2010) found that Australian refugee background students viewed their participation at university as fulfilling a commitment to themselves but also to their ethno-lingual community. This included an obligation to themselves to put adequate time into study, getting the most possible from their education, while still fulfilling obligations to their community concerning 'immediate settlement needs' and 'financial issues related to relatives' (Turner & Fozdar, 2010, p. 370). Much of the literature points to a gendered difference in family and community responsibility, with female refugee background students often expected to bear the weight of home responsibilities, while male students are not (Harris et al., 2015; Joyce et al., 2010). Women in these studies expressed great frustration

over the struggle with and against shifting gender roles. Harris et al. (2015) argue that female migrant university students face losses as well as the gains of educational credentials: a threat to existing gender roles in the family and community that may threaten the loss of relationship. Participating in higher education can serve, paradoxically, to cause one to stand out and make family proud, but also to stand out and set one apart relationally (Harris et al., 2015), leading to intergenerational tensions.

### **Student concerns with university curriculum and pedagogical practices**

Low SES new migrants face practical challenges in their learning due not only to English language but to the need to learn the differing curriculum and pedagogical practices of Australian higher education, which often rely on unspoken or unarticulated knowledge (Leathwood, 2006). As Haggis (2006, p. 524) writes, '[pedagogical] underlying principles are usually only implicit in course outlines, assessment instructions and assumptions about the structuring of work, and are therefore difficult for those unfamiliar with the discourse to see and understand'. Studies from the UK (Morrice, 2013) and Australia (Earnest et al., 2010; Harris & Marlowe, 2011) found that low SES new migrant students often found additional difficulties learning and/or adjusting to differing assessment styles, workload expectations, and teaching styles. An overall independent learning model or expectation often differed from the teacher-centred styles of learning many were used to in their countries of origin (Earnest et al., 2010). Some researchers argue that Australian university curriculum itself needs to be made more culturally inclusive (Ben-Moshe, Bertone, & Grossman, 2008), as it is too Australia focused (Earnest et al., 2010). Cultural knowledge also needs to be reciprocated, argue Kong et al. (2016), with improved institutional and staff knowledge and recognition of cultural and religious practices represented by diverse students. Further, some refugee background students have particular concerns around academic essay writing in English, feel there is not enough time to complete assignments since it takes them longer to write, and desire more targeted support in academic writing (Earnest et al., 2010; Joyce et al., 2010; Kong et al., 2016). Students also report concerns with their unfamiliarity with information technologies and the increasing reliance on them in higher education in moves toward online learning, over in-person instruction and assistance (Kong et al., 2016). Earnest et al. (2010) and Kong et al. (2016) found that most of the Australian refugee background student participants in their research described having significant problems with computer and IT based learning, some saying these were the most difficult skills for them to acquire due to lack of prior experience.

There are often numerous points of disconnection between students and teaching staff, which can result in students having a negative experience of their interactions and affect their learning. Low SES new migrants report that some instructors speak too fast, are unwilling to re-cover course material in class when asked, or are impatient with students' replies when and if they are slow (Hannah, 1999; Harris et al., 2013; Harris & Marlowe, 2011). Students also felt frustration that some instructors seemed to weigh written expression and grammar too heavily in written assignments (Harris et al., 2013). Students report mixed experiences with staff, saying that some are supportive but some lack understanding of, or apparent concern for, their difficulties in studies (Earnest et al., 2010). Naidoo (2015, p. 215) found that, for secondary school and university new migrant students in Australia, there is great importance of an active 'culture of warmth, concern and understanding' amongst staff, as it has an impact on students' learning.

Refugee background students in Australia report feeling that few staff appear to understand, or care to try and learn about, their distinct backgrounds and the mobility and difficulty therein (Earnest et al., 2010; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Kong et al., 2016). Harris and Marlowe (2011) argue that staff do not need to be experts in their students' backgrounds, but that instructors' cultural competence goes hand in hand with quality educational experiences for refugee background students. Research also finds that low SES new migrants sometimes feel they are treated as inferior through staff and other students demonstrating low expectations of them, making assumptions about their abilities and intelligence, often expressions of implicit prejudicial treatment (Earnest et al., 2010; Harris & Marlowe, 2011). In all of these matters of student-staff disconnection, Turner and Fozdar (2010; p. 378-379) recommend that if staff consciously pursue 'a listening/learning bonding-focused role, as well as a teaching role, and thereby meeting the students halfway in their focus on relationships', this will help 'students navigate their learning in an inter-cultural context'.

From the perspective of teaching and support staff, there is typically a desire to assist low SES new migrant students but there are extant barriers to their optimal learning experience. Generally, teaching and support staff report trying to help, some even going beyond regular teaching duties, but finding that student under-preparedness is difficult to address (Harris & Marlowe, 2011). Some teaching staff are concerned about low course-material comprehension, and feel they are unsure about best practice for critiquing and assessing students' written work (Kong et al., 2016). Harris and Marlowe (2011) and Kong et al. (2016) argue that this is partly due to inadequate training and structural support for teaching staff. Staff report that new migrant helping-seeking behaviour is often low, including tutorial attendance and uptake of additional office hours and offers of help, and academic support services (Earnest et al., 2010; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Kong et al., 2016; Turner & Fozdar, 2010). Students who did demonstrate help-seeking behaviour were found to be the most academically successful (Turner & Fozdar, 2010). Campus services were often not taken up by students due to students' lack of awareness of them (Earnest et al., 2010; Turner & Fozdar, 2010), as well as students' apprehension about their usefulness (Turner & Fozdar, 2010), and/or their 'forbearance', or what Harris and Marlowe (2011, p. 193) describe as a 'tendency to minimize or conceal problems'.

While students report wanting more equitable assessment practices (accounting for their disadvantage with English language), there is limited knowledge amongst university staff about how to adjust marking to account for the additional challenges students face (Harris & Marlowe, 2011). Generalised academic and social support was found to be less effective than programs targeted to the specific learning needs of new migrant students (Earnest et al., 2010; Terry et al., 2016). Joyce et al. (2010) report that refugee background students found extant orientation programs were not suited to their interests, questions, and needs. All of these findings highlight the need for universities not only to support students to integrate into the existing higher education culture, but to adapt and diversify that culture. Pedagogical and curricular work, along with further research, is required to create a more inclusive university culture, rather than simply helping or expecting new migrant students to adapt to traditional, limited practices.

## Belonging and campus climate

Aside from specific issues of curriculum and teaching and learning, there are broader issues of campus climate that frequently affect new migrant students. These issues are complex and contain both challenges and opportunities for students and institutions alike. In this section we explore theories and issues of belonging and diversity, as well as considering the different forms of capital that migrant students bring to university.

Universities can be culturally alienating for many new migrant students. New migrants often find it difficult to make and maintain meaningful connections with staff and other students not of their same ethno-lingual background (Earnest et al., 2010; Kong et al., 2016; Morrice, 2013), due to perceived barriers of language and culture (Joyce et al., 2010). New migrant students are often less likely to participate in university culture and are prone to isolating experiences of university (Earnest et al., 2010; Joyce et al., 2010). Refugee background students are more likely to form university-based friendships with others from their ethno-lingual background and many find these relationships a strong support (Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Joyce et al., 2010). However, Harris et al. (2013) and Morrice (2013) found that some students try to distance themselves from their refugee backgrounds, including distancing themselves from other students, because they do not want to be associated with an identity that they experience as stigmatised, both nationally and in higher education. The difficulty with social connections is part of what many new migrant students report as a sense of non-belonging or disconnection (Earnest et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2013) and exclusion or marginalisation from university culture (Morrice, 2013).

Alongside these negative experiences, some refugee background students report finding an important sense of belonging at university (Harris et al., 2014) that contrasts with exclusion felt from the broader society (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008). Higher education can provide new migrants with a positive identity, building confidence and hope (Morrice, 2013). Universities profess to value diversity, and the benefits of 'inclusive excellence' are well-documented, where diverse viewpoints can strengthen the quality of the educational experience (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005).

Campus climate is a term used in studies of higher education to indicate the degree to which various forms of diversity are accepted, supported, and respected amongst students and staff of universities. Much of the relevant research uses quantitative, survey based research to measure campus climates within and across institutions (e.g. Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008). This report draws on the concept as a sensitising framework for an interview-based study based on a small number of individual experiences of campus diversity. We designed our study, in part, to address questions of campus climate. While our conclusions cannot be said to be an accurate 'measure' of campus climate, they are made on the basis of these qualitative interviews in relation to intercultural interactions and inclusiveness at two regional university campuses.

We draw here on Bowman and Denson (2014) and their exploration of diversity experiences and climate perceptions among Australian university students. The authors outline seven variables for measuring campus climate. The design of our interview and focus group questions was partly influenced by these variables, so we outline them here as presented in Bowman and Denson (2014, pp. 325-327). We do not explicitly use the authors' key terms in the analysis of this report, but what these terms indicate (e.g. 'multiculturalisation' indicates

‘acceptance and respect’) are of central concern to our research. We have bolded these key indicator phrases for emphasis:

- **Multiculturalism** – ‘constitutes a positive form of climate that is characterised by others’ acceptance of and respect for one’s ethnic/cultural identity (e.g. “People I meet respect my cultural identity”)’
- **Institutional discrimination** – ‘indicates perceptions of instructors’ mistrust, hostility, and discrimination toward people from one’s ethnic/cultural identity’ (e.g., “some lecturers/tutors don’t seem to trust people from my culture”)’
- **National discrimination** – ‘assesses the extent to which most Australians exhibit a sense of superiority, misunderstandings, and a lack of knowledge about people from one’s ethnic/cultural identity (e.g., “Most other Australians see their cultural values as superior to the values of my culture”)’
- **Positive diversity interactions** – ‘assessed the frequency of meaningful interpersonal interactions with students from a different racial/ethnic/cultural group’
- **Negative diversity interactions** – ‘measured the frequency of uncomfortable, insulting, or threatening interactions with students from a different racial/ethnic/cultural group’
- **Curricular/co-curricular diversity involvement** – ‘assessed student engagement in diversity-related course work, racial/cultural awareness workshops, and events sponsored by another racial/ethnic group’
- **Differences in cultural composition between high school and university** – ‘asked students the extent to which the race/culture of the student body and their friendship groups differed between their high school and the university’.

The diversity climate of a university campus has an impact on peoples’ sense of belonging, and subsequently their sense of legitimacy as students and members of the campus community. ‘Multiculturalism’, or ‘acceptance of and respect for one’s ethnic/cultural identity’ (Bowman & Denson, 2014, p. 325), implies the capacity for inter-ethnic interactions to affect individuals’ perceived inclusion or exclusion through a sense, or feeling, of belonging. Marco Antonsich (2010, p. 645), building on an extensive review of the topic, writes that belonging consists of: place-belonging, or a feeling of being ‘at home’, with positive emotional attachment to a place and or people, and; politics of belonging, constituting ‘a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion’. By this account, emotion-based comfort or discomfort – the sense of being at home in a place – situates people according to their social acceptance or rejection. In other words, a person’s felt sense of belonging coincides with the degree of acceptance and respect given by the people around them.

The positive and negative inter-cultural interactions that determine campus climate have an impact on student belonging and sense of social legitimacy. Students from established and advantaged ethnicities and socio-economic status groups are significantly more likely to feel a ‘natural’ sense of belonging at university, considering higher education institutions are for people like them, or the ‘authentic’ students (Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003). New migrant students are far less likely to have a positive sense of belonging on campus (Mangan & Winter, 2017; Morris, 2013; and as discussed in the findings of this report), which can affect not only their university experience but also potentially their continuing settlement in Australia (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008). Questions of campus climate and

belonging have particularly important equity implications for students who are refugee background and living and enrolled at university in low SES regional areas.

Relatedly, we examine a range of forms of student capital, beyond the traditional concept of cultural capital as outlined by Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Here we draw on Yosso's (2005) exploration of familial, aspirational, spiritual, linguistic, navigational, and resistance capital to understand the strengths that many new migrants bring to higher education. In some cases these strengths are rewarded and clearly contribute to heightened university access and success. However, in other cases it appears that university access programs and policies do not adequately consider the range of strengths held by prospective new migrant students. Equally, some new migrant students may be impeded by limited participation in clubs and societies, or in work-integrated learning (WIL) activities, both of which are typically highly valued by universities and employers. In many cases, new migrants are unable to participate in such activities because of deep engagement with their families and communities. These contributions to family, church, community, and other organisations are rarely recognised in the same way as more traditional extra-curricular activities. Similarly, while limited English language proficiency is frequently highlighted as an obstacle to university success, the multilingual capacities and strengths of new migrants are rarely acknowledged. Changing the culture and climate of university campuses involves a broader understanding of student strengths and differences.



## Section 2. Regional data

### Demographics: Mildura and Shepparton

#### Mildura

Mildura is located in Victoria's North-West on the Murray River at the border of New South Wales and close to South Australia. According to the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census, the usual resident population of the Mildura Region (Statistical Area Level 3) in 2016 was 53,878 (ABS, 2017a). Of these people, 49.1 per cent were male and 50.9 per cent were female. Mildura has a relatively large Indigenous community, with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples comprising 3.8 per cent of the region's population (ABS, 2017a). Mildura is an ethnically diverse regional area (Moran & Mallman, 2015), with the 2016 census data revealing that 10.8 per cent of the local population were born overseas (ABS, 2017b). The most common countries of birth other than Australia were England (1.4 per cent), Italy (1.2 per cent), New Zealand (0.8 per cent), India (0.7 per cent), and Turkey (0.5 per cent) (ABS, 2017a). The 2016 census also reveals that 15.3 per cent of the Mildura population had both parents born overseas (ABS, 2017a). Around 11.2 per cent of the local population spoke a language other than English at home (ABS, 2017a). The top five languages (other than English) spoken at home were Italian (1.9 per cent), Turkish (0.8 per cent), Greek (0.6 per cent), Mandarin (0.6 per cent), and Tongan (0.5 per cent) (ABS, 2017a).

Mildura has seen inflows of recent arrivals including refugees, asylum seekers and skilled migrants who are not always captured by the Australian census (Mildura Rural City Council, 2012). The region is one of Victoria's main sites for regional refugee resettlement (Adult Multicultural Education Services [AMES] Australia, 2017). According to AMES Australia (2017, p.1), Mildura 'has a blooming Afghan community and small but growing Tamil and Iranian communities'. The Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (SMECC) has provided settlement assistance to people from Afghanistan, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Iran, Sudan, Vietnam, Fiji, and Pakistan (Mildura Rural City Council, 2012). Between 2005 and 2011, Mildura's new migrants included around 1,000 overseas arrivals. The new migrants included people from India (14 per cent), Afghanistan (11.1 per cent), England (8.1 per cent), New Zealand (5.7 per cent), the Philippines (5.5 per cent), Iraq (3.2 per cent), Sri Lanka (3.2 per cent), South Africa (3.1 per cent), and China (2.5 per cent) (Mildura Rural City Council/Northern Mallee Community, Partnership 2012, p.30). Islam was the religion of 20 per cent of new arrivals, likely associated with the large number of migrants who were born in Afghanistan and Iraq (Mildura Rural City Council/Northern Mallee Community, Partnership 2012, p.30). Moran and Mallman's study (2015, p. 19) notes that SMECC's estimates of the migrant community members in Mildura include: '650 Afghans, 1,000 Tongans, 100 Cook Islanders, 500 Samoans, 50 Sri Lankans, 400 Indians, 80 Burundians, 30 from the Democratic Republic of Congo, 20 Sudanese, 250 Filipinos, 70 Nepalese, 50 Bangladeshis, 100 Chinese, and 200 Fijians'.

According to the 2016 census, 12.1 per cent of the people aged 15 and over reported having completed secondary school (Year 12) as their highest level of educational attainment; 17.7 per cent had completed a Certificate III or IV at a Vocational Education and Training provider; 7.1 per cent had completed an Advanced Diploma or Diploma at a similar provider; and 10.4 per cent had completed a Bachelor Degree level or above (ABS, 2017a).

These figures reflect significantly lower levels of educational attainment than the national average (ABS, 2017a).

## **Shepparton**

Shepparton is a regional centre in North-Eastern Victoria of similar size to Mildura. According to the 2016 ABS census of population and housing, the usual resident population of the Shepparton Region (Statistical Area Level 3) in 2016 was 63,649 (ABS, 2017c). Of these people 49.7 per cent were male and 50.3 per cent were female. As in Mildura, Shepparton has a relatively large Indigenous community, with Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander peoples comprising 3.4 per cent of the region's population (ABS, 2017c). Shepparton is also an ethnically diverse regional area (Moran & Mallman, 2015). In 2016, 14.8 per cent (9,459) of the local population recorded that they were born overseas, the majority of whom (7,354) were from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) (.id consulting, 2017). The most common countries of birth other than Australia were India (1.9 per cent), England (1.3 per cent), Italy (1.3 per cent), Afghanistan (1.2 per cent), and New Zealand (1.1 per cent) (ABS, 2017c). The number of NESB people in the City of Greater Shepparton increased by 22.8 per cent (1,366) between 2011 and 2016 (.id consulting, 2017). The largest changes in birthplace countries of the population in the City of Greater Shepparton between 2011 and 2016 were those people born in India, Afghanistan, Taiwan, and Philippines (.id consulting, 2017). The 2016 census shows that 21.1 per cent of people had both parents born overseas (ABS, 2017c). Around 14.8 per cent of people spoke a language other than English at home (ABS, 2017c), with the top five languages (other than English) spoken at home being Italian (2.1 per cent), Arabic (1.9 per cent), Punjabi (1.4 per cent), Hazaragi (0.8 per cent), and Turkish (0.8 per cent) (2017c).

Iraqi, Sudanese, and Congolese immigration has been substantial in Shepparton. Indeed, Shepparton is also one of Victoria's main sites for regional refugee resettlement (AMES, 2017), including a large inflow of Iraqi population since the 1990s (Moran & Mallman, 2015). The Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District estimates 'that approximately 500 families (4000 - 4500 people) from Iraq are residing in the City of Greater Shepparton. Another 70 families (300 - 400 people) reside at Cobram about 70 kilometres to the north of Shepparton' (Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District Inc., 2017a, p. 22). The Sudanese and South Sudanese communities also began to establish themselves in the region in mid-2006. In 2015, approximately 1,050 people from the former Sudan were living in Shepparton, and it is estimated that two thirds of these originated from South Sudan (Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District Inc., 2017b, p. 11). In Shepparton, refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) started to arrive in 2005 as part a pilot Humanitarian refugee resettlement program in regional Victoria (Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District Inc., 2017c). As at March 2017, the Congolese community in Shepparton had around 300 people and there were 30 families with a large number of children and young people (Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District Inc., 2017c).

Of people aged 15 and over, 12.2 per cent of respondents reported having completed Year 12 as their highest level of educational attainment; 17.2 per cent had completed a Certificate III or IV at a VET provider; 7.7 per cent had completed an Advanced Diploma or Diploma; and 12.2 per cent had completed a Bachelor Degree level or above (ABS, 2017c). As with Mildura, these figures represent significantly lower educational attainment levels than the state and national average (ABS, 2017c).

## Section 3. Interview and focus group analysis

This section explores the university experiences and motivations of new migrants in regional Australia. We conducted 52 individual interviews and four focus groups with people from different new migrant communities and related stakeholder groups, across various stages of the student lifecycle. Our interviews and focus groups particularly addressed university aspirations and motivations; university awareness, choice and access; campus experiences, including academic and social; and graduate outcomes, focussed on employment.

Interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded, transcribed and analysed inductively and deductively for content and themes using NVivo 10 software (QSR International, 2012). An interpretative phenomenological approach to the analysis was applied (Denzin 1989; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Given that the selected participants were voluntary respondents, the primary limitation of the qualitative research is that the population sample is likely to exclude those who had explicitly negative experiences. Full interview and focus group questions are located within Appendix B.

### University students

This section of the report analyses the interviews of new migrant students at La Trobe University. We conducted eighteen interviews with students enrolled at the time of interview, at campuses in Shepparton and Mildura. The students were all from new migrant backgrounds. Sixteen of the students arrived in Australia on Refugee or Humanitarian visas and had attained Australian citizenship or permanent residency at the time of the interviews. The other two students arrived to Australia on the skilled migration visas of a partner or family member and were Australian citizens at the time of the interview. Most of the students had been in Australia ten years or fewer, but several for longer, up to fifteen years. The participants migrated from global regions that historically had not been major sources of migration to Shepparton and Mildura, including Africa and the Middle East. These interviewees were primarily asked about aspirations and motivations, campus experiences, personal strengths and outcomes.

### Aspirations and motivations

Students reported that their aspirations were positively influenced by family encouragement. Most of the students said their parents were enthusiastic about their participation in higher education, even if they were unsure how to offer direct support. There were three students, young women, who described pressure from their families to get married, and that their families thought higher education was something of a distraction, though these families 'came around' after the student began their studies. Family support could even include relatives from their country of origin who, as one student said, would call and say 'Have you been studying? Always study. Don't work. If you need financial support we are always here for you' (Student F). There was one student, an exception, who said their family did not appreciate the time required for them to commit to their studies, and the resulting tension 'separates us' (Student D). Findings in other research literature (Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Kong et al., 2016; Naidoo, 2015) suggest some new migrant students find their family and community commitments require too much of them, interfering with their studies. However, most of the students in this research project lived with their families of origin, or with their own families, all of whom offered the support of time and care for focusing on their studies.

*[My parents] were not really sure [how to help]. All they could say was, 'Focus on your studies. Don't worry about anything else. Just do your studies. That will help you.'* (Student J)

The students' aspirations to study at university were strong enough to motivate them to enrol at their local regional campus, despite most (12/18) enrolling in a course they otherwise would not have chosen. The primary reason cited amongst these students was for staying close with family who were established in town. This included some students who had their own spouses and children and with employment they did not want to give up, as well as a student whose partner was on a skilled migrant visa, meaning they were bound to living in the region for a particular number of years. The female students, in particular, said they were unable to go to a metropolitan city by themselves for university because their family culture did not allow women to live apart from their families of origin before marriage.

There were, however, several students who said they preferred to stay in Shepparton or Mildura. The stated reasons included preferring regional town life as 'quieter', 'more peaceful', less expensive ('cheaper to live'), a better, safer place to bring up a family, the presence of community, and that it was overall 'easier to begin' life in a smaller town as a new migrant in Australia. These reasons were enough for some students to choose Shepparton or Mildura even if their preferred course was not offered. Enrolling in university locally provided a valuable source of security and stability as the students continued their settlement in Australia.

*When I visited Melbourne, I don't know how it is, how to describe it but I did it, I felt out of place. So, I wanted something smaller, something that could allow me to begin. I was just beginning in Australia.* (Student R)

As refugee background students struggle to 'make up for lost time' in schooling achievement (Cassity & Gow, 2005), many will not make it to university. Among those who do, some will have to adjust their aspirations to their final Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), as in the case of some of the interviewees. A common example among the interviewees was a desire to study a Medicine degree but eventually settling for Nursing, while Law was another preferred degree found to be out of initial reach.

*My plan was to study law and when I was very young I was dreaming to be a lawyer but when I came here, for months and my English was not very good and good enough for uni and then the other side was I didn't have any background. I didn't do high school in Australia.* (Student O)

The findings suggest that cultural expectations also have an impact on young men's aspirations within the Afghani community. Reports from students, and other stakeholder interviewees, suggest that young males were often encouraged to seek employment rather than being encouraged to go to university. This was described as an explanation for why there appeared to be so few Afghani men participating in regional university.

*I know some [male] friends, they left university because one of the guy who was studying engineering and his dad told him that ... He left his university I think just after he finish third year but he didn't complete his study and he left study because he is also from Shepparton but now they live in Canberra. The reason he*

*said that his dad told him that, 'What are you going to do after you finish?' He said, 'I'm going to be like engineer.' His dad said, 'How much you make money?' he said, 'This much.' He said, 'Don't waste your time. I have this much money. We can go. I work and I save this much money and we can go open a business or something different from that.'* (Student O)

Some of the students felt compelled to stay in town with their families in order to continue assisting with family needs. Family commitments and employment were deciding factors in choosing to stay in Shepparton and Mildura despite their preferred course not being available. Additionally, the cost of living made moving to a metropolitan area untenable.

Most of the students reported being motivated by their family trajectory, that is, the sense that their family had been through difficulties and they were now in a place where they can take advantage of opportunities. There were numerous references to family inheritance, of unfulfilled potential, and a sense of responsibility to make family proud, such as one student whose father encouraged him because 'he never had the opportunity to study' (Student F). These students linked their ambitions with their family's story. There was a sense of responsibility to family as well as a desire to expand their own life horizons, build employment opportunities, and pursue their own love of learning.

Other students talked about their own ambitions or dreams that they had carried since childhood. After a few years of settlement in Australia, and employment in other fields (mostly low-skill labour), they decided to pursue higher education with hopes of different and improved employment options and conditions. Two other students wanted to continue higher education trajectories they had begun in their countries of origin or in the country where they lived in refugee camps. Their disrupted higher education trajectories were due, in part, to difficulties with qualifications recognition in Australia, resulting in their overseas qualifications going unrecognised. There was equal parts frustration and resignation over this challenge, as well as resolve to take the opportunity to begin their higher education again.

The desire to help people, to give back to others in their ethno-lingual communities and/or to society at large, was another key source of motivation for the students' aspirations for higher education. This desire to help was rooted in their families' difficult pasts as migrants and refugees.

*I didn't care about study till [year] 10. In 10 I was reading a book which was about the history of Hazara and genocide, those things. It was the first time that I began studying a book beside my school book and I was more interested in those things. I decided that, okay, you have to study. I decided to study very well, go to uni and study law to be a lawyer and defend.* (Student O)

*I feel the need to be ... part of something bigger, like home where I come from, Congo. I read about the news, it's bad. Things are bad. And I don't want to be one of those people that just said, 'Okay it's bad.'* (Student R)

These deep commitments to family and social justice represent strengths and qualities that universities claim to admire but often do not capture well through their standard application processes. Such experiences highlight the need to move beyond ATAR but also

beyond limited notions of volunteering and community work when adopting alternative admissions schemes.

Additionally, some students cited a love of learning, curiosity, and a desire for independence. Importantly, most of the students said their aspirations for higher education were also shaped by a desire for better employment outcomes.

### **Awareness, choice and access**

The university students reported that secondary school practices for informing and assisting them regarding higher education were helpful, including personalised guidance from some teachers and from school careers counsellors. La Trobe University's presence at schools was also described as effective, including visits from lecturers talking about courses, admissions processes, and answering questions. However, many of the students felt that outside of school-based assistance, they were on their own, with nobody to assist or guide them. This was due largely to their families' unfamiliarity with higher education and gaps in communication between educational institutions and these same families. This finding affirms in regional contexts what other research (Terry et al., 2016) reports about information channels between universities and new migrant communities in metropolitan areas. The regional context, despite its propensity for increased local social connections, does not automatically bridge this divide. Numerous students talked about feeling they were left to figure things out for themselves, and found the process 'pretty hard' (Student B) and 'not straightforward'. (Student D)

*You just have to get through it yourself, I guess. There's no one really to help you. Family don't know how to help. They say, you know, you can go to uni. That's it. They can't really support you in saying 'oh, which course do you want to do, what do you enjoy', because they really don't understand anything, so it's just what you can do for yourself. (Student D)*

However, direct family involvement was limited due to unfamiliarity with higher education as well as to a language barrier. English as an additional language was described as a significant barrier for parental participation, one student saying their parents do not attend parent information sessions at La Trobe University 'because they don't really understand any of the information that they give because they don't speak English'. (Student E)

There were other notable sources of information and awareness for some of the students, including the help of a sibling or peer in the community attending university. Over time a small momentum of interest in participation may spread through networks of peer groups. One student talked about an established member of the local community, a fellow church member, who acted as a source of knowledge, encouragement, and guidance for participating in university. Such mentoring was rare amongst the study participants, but very effective in this case for awareness and support in participating.

*There is one of our church members who actually knows the head of the campus... another person, so I'm just talking about the people in church who know people from La Trobe just in the community. No, we came here, so because of him ... he's Australian so was here for a long time, so he knows about universities. We met at church. (Student C)*

This findings and other findings from the research suggest that connections between the university and local religious, civic, and other organisations can be an effective way of disseminating knowledge, understanding, and improving personal relations, for increasing participation of new migrant communities in regional cities.

Most of the students who were not enrolled in their preferred course (12/18), however, said it was not a matter of choice. This was because of limitations in course offerings at regional campuses in combination with the inability to leave town for a metropolitan city for university. These students said they could not and or did not want to leave their families. Their families were unable to afford to move to the city or to pay for their children to live away from the family of origin. For female students, there was also much discussion of the cultural, community expectation that women stay with their families of origin until they are prepared to be married and start their own families.

*When I applied for a health science subject, a course at ----- University in Melbourne, I couldn't travel. Culturally, we don't let our girls go far away and study. My dad said, 'Come to La Trobe, see what they have for you.' I came [to Shepparton] instead. I withdrew from ----- University. I came here and I asked the careers counsellor and she said, 'Well at the moment, we have business, nursing and arts here, so which one are you keen to do?' I didn't like business in high school. I wasn't into nursing because my dad just wasn't a fan of nursing. He said, 'I don't think you can do nursing.' Then I thought, my only option is arts. That's how I got into arts because it was the only choice left.*  
(Student E)

In addition to limited course offerings, financial difficulties were a noted issue. Some new migrant students struggle financially, particularly for those who have their own families, who are often trying to balance work and study and family. However, most of the students who live with their families of origin say they did not have financial stress to deal with while studying. Most cited the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS-HELP) loan program as what enabled them to attend university without great financial concern. This scheme, combined with supportive families, was one of the reasons that some chose not to attempt to move to the city and study. For those who would have liked to relocate to study, most said their families would have found it financially unviable. While many of the younger students did not experience great financial stress, there were some students, particularly those with their own families, who had trouble making it work. The added financial pressure included inability to afford textbooks and difficulty paying bills.

Most refugee background students did not receive direct financial assistance (11/18) and/or were unaware of it. Negative responses to a question about receipt of financial assistance ranged from students saying they had not heard there were any relevant scholarships for them, to those who applied and did not receive assistance. 'Nobody from the uni helped me' (Student D), said one student, a common experience amongst this group. Another student said that without financial assistance from people in the broader community, they would not be able to stay at university. One of the students who applied but received no assistance reflected on the arbitrariness of limiting assistance for new migrants who have been in Australia longer than ten years:

*Being in a country like Australia and starting life from zero, you'll be suffering for more than 15 years to get yourself into the right position or to the ... It should be, the support should continue. (Student S)*

For those students who did receive financial assistance (7/18), the receipt of a bursary made a significant difference in their capacity to participate. These students talked about the great encouragement that came with the financial assistance, improving their morale for study, in addition to providing for their practical needs (in particular textbooks and or help accessing a laptop computer). In most cases these students had a particular person assist them with finding and applying for a scholarship or bursary, including particular teachers at secondary school or La Trobe staff members who personally intervened.

## **Academic and social campus experiences**

### *Academic Campus Experiences*

The majority of the students reported that English as an additional language (EAL) was the greatest challenge to their pursuit of a degree. For the students who reported struggling with academic English, there was an even split between those only in the country for only a few years and those as long as twelve and even fifteen years, suggesting that it is inappropriate to assume English language capability based on number of years living in Australia. The challenges included understanding assignments, the time it takes to complete assignments, and the frustrations of verbal communication, in and out of the classroom.

Students reported EAL requiring a greater effort and amount of time for the requisite mental language translation for assignments. It had a negative impact on their marks, meaning they could not express in English, written and verbal, their level of thought and comprehension of the subject material. Some students discussed difficulty with understanding assignments, requiring, as one student said, 'someone to actually explain to me what the question is before I can start doing it' (Student A). Accents were also named as a confounding factor in verbal communication, with some students feeling frustration at being misunderstood in class discussions and asked to repeat themselves, a source of great frustration and self-conscious self-censoring.

*Also, when I speak, they don't even understand. Sometime I try to evaluate myself. Am I speaking correctly? Is my English okay or what is wrong? I think it's the accent. Most of the students here have never interacted with people from outside before, particularly the Africans. So they couldn't quite get that accent. They will always want to ... I mean, when you're talking because since it is group work, we need to understand what is the other one saying. So I'm always forced to repeat myself and that is a bit discouraging sometimes. (Student G)*

This particular difficulty, of being misunderstood and the resulting frustration, is, as one student said, 'one of the things that keeps us silent sometimes' (Student S). Classroom participation is hampered through anxiety over verbal expression, the fear that 'I'll make a mistake' (Student S). Challenges with EAL and participation in the classroom interact with the challenges of connection with other students. Some uncomfortable encounters result in embarrassment or disappointment. Some students reported experiences when others appeared to 'make fun' of them.



*I was trying to participate but, because my English was not very good, and some of the things which I wanted to explain and I couldn't do that. Sometime in the class, I was trying to not participate much. Everywhere you can find some people making fun of you. (Student O)*

In addition to the relational divide these interactions can cause, several of the students mentioned the negative impact on their confidence as students. It is discouraging to be able to think at an advanced, university level, but to be unable to articulate those thoughts or to be perceived by one's peers and lecturers that one is intellectually astute. This student described this experience this way:

*When I came to Australia, I went from being the smartest kid from a family to feeling like I was a damaged kid at school. Yes. That's how I can describe my experience. To go from being quite good in school, studies, and then, because of the language. That's the most challenging thing, in terms of my studies. Yeah. I would say, I don't think I found the studying very hard. However, I literally found very hard, in terms of putting all this in English. (Student Q)*

We asked students about the greatest challenge to their participation in higher education, to which most said EAL. We also asked them what they thought their personal strengths were that helped them deal with these challenges. The personal strengths most cited were high motivation and passion for learning, along with persistence and resilience. We mention these qualities here because they were part of what carried the students through the various difficulties they confronted, not only EAL. Most said they were highly motivated to learn and earn a degree, and that persistence itself was a mark of their success as students.

*I always tell myself that the only way to fail in life is to quit. If you don't quit, you don't fail. Yes, and that has kept me going ever since. (Student I)*

The first year transition for new migrant students was well supported for students who sought assistance, but there was no formal transition support in place for new migrant students. A number of students reported having great difficulty with the first year transition, and some felt they were on their own to figure it out. Later findings suggest the additional challenges faced by new migrant students, particularly in the first year, warrant consideration of guided transition processes. When asked whether they thought there were any specific supports in place for them as they transitioned into their university first year, most said no and that they felt, as Student E said, 'I was by myself'. While some students did not find this to be an issue, others said their transition was problematic. Two students commented on the strength of the guided transition processes they experienced at larger universities before transferring to La Trobe University Shepparton or Mildura.

*The first semester, the beginning of first semester, it didn't go really well, like not at all. With the subject, confusing, the timetable, the language, it was too hard. Very hard. (Student P)*

Some students found help from particular staff members or from particular skills seminars. These can be attributed partly to the personalised nature of the learning experience that nearly all the students discussed. However, specific interventions of assistance came about by chance rather than as a structured model for assistance with the transition. For example, one student had a lecturer who stepped in and assisted them with enrolment and other

logistical issues. Another student made an observation about their own and other new migrant students' experiences of lack of confidence and its impact on their capacity to seek the transition assistance that is available if one looks for it.

*One of them is confidence. We struggle with that. The other one is, I think because of our past, we tend not to trust people very easily. The other, third one, is fear. Sometimes we need help but we are afraid to ask. We are not that confident to put our hands up. I just feel like, maybe there are enough supports from universities, however, we are not that confident enough to come out and say, 'We need help in this.'* (Student Q)

One of the challenges for participation that some of the students (4) encountered was the difficulty of living and studying with the emotional weight of traumatic pasts. Global news, social media, phone calls from relatives and friends in the country of origin all posed a regular emotional disruption to their lives that they said impacted their studies.

*I think there are a lot of factors, I know affecting my study. Being a migrant it's different you know? A lot of people are thinking that they need to study, and finish and get employment, but for us we are fighting a lot of devils, at the same time.* (Student K)

*[University staff] just need to understand that we not only struggle with everything here, but we do struggle with ... Like, half of our body is here, the other half is back home. Everything that goes wrong in our home, affects us. Everything.* (Student Q)

Most of the students reported no involvement with campus groups or societies. A few, particularly those with their own families, said they did not have time for involvement beyond the classroom. However, there was a general expression of interest for all the other students, but statement that there were no relevant campus groups or activities that were of interest. Some said they thought that was because the campus was small, and others said they would have been interested had there been something that suited them. There were three students who said they were involved in student associations and that their involvement marked a turning point in their experience of university life toward something more positive.

*The first year was really hard. Second semester, almost half way through the second semester, I was thinking, 'Oh, I'll just finish the first year and I don't think I can continue this. I'm very lonely. I don't enjoy it as much.' Then I finished it. Once I got into second year and then I was like, 'I'll give it a go. If it's not changing at all, I'll probably just drop out,' but then thankfully it changed. I met new people [in the student union].* (Student E)

In comparing their university experience to that of secondary school, the main response from most was that university is more independent. This was framed as a positive thing, across the board, including for those who said that transitioning to an independent learning mode was challenging. (Though two students said they felt unprepared for how independent it required them to be). There were also comments about appreciating the open nature of discussion on political, cultural, and other meaningful topics.

*We discuss a lot of things here with open mind. Any political issues or cultural issues or anything like that, we sit as a class and discuss it very openly, without having to make each other feel bad about our differences. (Student E)*

*It's very independent. Everything is on yourself. ... Which is ... Somehow it's good, it's preparing you for ... Depending on yourself, rather than depending on someone else, so it's good. (Student F)*

Most of the students answered affirmatively regarding their appreciation and enjoyment of the curriculum. The nursing students were particularly positive about the value of what they learned in their course. Though there were comments that some students prefer in-person lecturing components over online lectures.

*You do hand-on nursing, taking care of patients and all that. You do it in class, but you have to watch all the lectures that are done online. They're not actually on campus. I think it will be more benefit if it is on campus, like if you attended more face-to-face, I think you would learn more than if you sit at home and watch like a YouTube thing. (Student B)*

Nearly all of the students reported satisfaction with the way their courses were delivered and taught. There appeared to be high student satisfaction with regards to teaching delivery. However, some notable issues arose. A number of students reported difficulty with online lectures, and/or with the online learning management systems. Another one was a concern with some lectures or tutorials not being interactive enough, difficult to follow because of long stints of lecturing without discussion, making it difficult to follow.

*It depends on the lecturer. Like, some lecturers do like, the style I like but some just talk and I'm like I don't get anything out of this. Like, they expect you to write while they're talking and you're just like, do I listen to you or do I write? Like, you can't do two things at the same time so it's really hard and they go really fast and you're just like, can you just slow down a bit? Because you know, you're trying to process the information while writing everything down so it's actually really hard. It's difficult. (Student D)*

### *Social Campus Experiences*

The students reported unanimously that their experiences of the lecturers and other teaching staff were highly positive, describing them as: supportive, helpful, patient, encouraging, approachable/friendly/kind, and available. Students said lecturers were quick to reply to email and they could 'always find them' on campus. Some said they thought the teaching staff went out of their way to be supportive and helpful. These qualities were the primary reason students said they thought they were getting a high quality educational experience at a regional campus, compared to their notions of what it is like at a large metropolitan university. Students were equally pleased with the academic support and the administrative staff. Numerous mentions were made of the peer learning advisor program as particularly helpful. Most students used the services, and found them effective for addressing some of their academic challenges. Some students discussed the refugee contact person, a new La Trobe University initiative, and described this resource as highly supportive and useful.

Students talked about being able to get to know lecturers and receive personalised assistance, a valued 'face-to-face' education. Despite the issue of limited course offerings, nearly all of them said they thought they were getting a more personalised and therefore superior educational experience compared to a larger city campus. Lecturer accessibility and approachability, along with smaller class sizes, were compared to city-based subjects with '300 students'. They felt they were recognised as a person and student, not lost to the anonymity of crowds. This overall experience is in stark contrast to that of new migrant students discussed in much of the literature, who felt in various ways disconnected from lecturers and other teaching staff.

*I went to ----- University before, which is a big university so there was not that teacher-student conversation, like I know my lecturers here. In Mildura, I can walk up to the lecturers and talk to them, so that made it easier that I didn't do first year here, but I could easily access the lecturers and ask for help and for assistance. It's more accessible. They're more people-orientated. I've had lecturers come up to me and ask me, 'You're doing the transition to nursing so how are you coping? Do you need any more help?' That makes a big difference. (Student M)*

*Within our community, [other young people] ask 'Oh, how's La Trobe?' Being a small campus, they always have the negative aspect of it. They don't offer much courses or they don't have much classes running or there's not much students and everything. But, whenever they say those things I can always say 'Oh, being a small campus there's just always advantages to it.' One of the best things, I would say, is getting to know your lecturers, getting to know them. It will help you hear a lot because you can sit down and have a conversation about your work or your struggles and everything. We get to know them face on face. I'm really happy here. (Student F)*

Student F's statement above demonstrates that perceptions of campus disadvantages, such as limited course offerings, are to some degree offset by the convivial interactions students have with University staff (and this message is communicated to peers – potential students – in the community). These interactions are a significant aspect of the campus climate. These 'positive diversity interactions' (Bowman & Denson, 2014) go toward building an inclusive environment, where students feel not only supported but included. Student L's comments (below) on staff-based conviviality are indicative of how such inclusiveness impacts student sense of belonging and identity:

*One of my lecturers, she's very supportive because she's interested in multiculturalism and she loves things like that. She just comes up to me sometimes and talks to me and we talk about stuff. She's very friendly with me. And [another lecturer] wants me to do really well so when she heard about how I'm volunteering she kind of made me apply for this scholarship. She's like, 'No, you have to do it.' So I applied for it and I got it. She tells you what she actually thinks of you, like she tells me how proud she is of me and how she thinks what I'm doing is really good. So just things like that makes you feel so good about who you are. (Student L)*

Student L says 'you feel so good about who you are', because inter-ethnic interactions on campus impact feelings of belonging. There were some notable, very occasional exceptions. Some of the students reported instances of negative encounters with lecturers or tutors. They were quick to point out that these rare cases happened to be guest lecturers from a different campus. This ranged from the more benign instances where it appeared a lecturer assumed a student's low comprehension, to cases where the interaction left students feeling belittled. There were few instances of such 'institutional discrimination' (Bowman & Denson, 2014) with staff in the students' accounts, though their negative impact on campus climate and belonging should not be ignored. Overall, students' interactions with staff reflected acceptance and respect important to 'multiculturalisation', or a positive campus climate.

In contrast to interactions with University staff, most of the students reported feeling barriers of interaction between themselves and other students. 'Negative diversity interactions' refer to 'uncomfortable, insulting, or threatening interactions with students from a different racial/ethnic/cultural group' (Bowman & Denson, 2014, p. 327). The interviewees' accounts of classroom dynamics suggest that, amidst the everyday convivial relations on campus, they experience a degree of negativity in their interactions that makes many feel they are not accepted as legitimate members of the student community. This was described as being partly related to awkwardness or discomfort over the students' English as an additional language, i.e. the discomfort of being asked to repeat oneself several times. However, the students did not report the same degree of negative interactions with University staff, even though lecturers and others sometimes asked students to repeat themselves. The difference was in the way the interactions were negotiated, and in the case of other students, predominantly Anglo-Australians, the interviewees reported these encounters left them feeling excluded socially on campus. As Student J said, 'I feel the gap between me and them.'

*Sometimes you don't even have that courage to say Hi, maybe you'll say Hi and the person doesn't want to respond back. Then the next time you won't say Hi because you know that maybe they won't respond. (Student C)*

*It's not like I don't want to talk, but I felt like they didn't really want to talk to me. Because whenever we have group work assignments, the lecturer will be like, 'Choose your group, someone you've never worked with before', they kind of avoid me, I feel like. Because when I go up to them they're like, 'Oh, we've already got someone.' You can kind of feel it, you can kind of see it. Some of them, like I said, make me feel like I'm invisible. They think I actually can't do much. (Student L)*

These new migrant students felt that other students were unwilling to interact with them, negatively affecting a sense of belonging amongst their peers. Student L's comment on feeling 'invisible' is apt, given the capacity for such negative interactions to reinforce invisible, or symbolic, boundaries separating people into socially hierarchical groups (Pachucki et al., 2007). The micro-interactions of everyday campus life, such as facial expressions or a response to a greeting, can bring people of diverse backgrounds together or serve to establish and reinforce separation. The negative diversity interactions experienced with other students affected the new migrant students' sense of legitimacy.

Most of the interviewees reported finding it difficult to form friendships with Anglo-Australian students. Among those who said they did have friends at university, almost all were friendships with students of other ethnic minority backgrounds, that is, non-Anglo. Eight of the students said they had formed meaningful friendships with other students of diverse, non-Anglo backgrounds, but all the students indicated, in the words of Student M, 'it's really hard for us to meet or even to try and blend in with the other students'. One student commented on the need for long-established resident students to be educated on how to interact with new migrant students, suggesting the interaction gaps are due in part to lack of interpersonal cultural competence.

*I don't think it's them not wanting to make friends with us. I think they just don't know what to say to us. In terms of students, there's a lot of improvement that needs to be done in those areas. Maybe educating them about how to form friendships with us. (Student Q)*

There were, however, some students who described having open, positive interactions between themselves and other students. Five of the 18 students offered differing perspectives on inter-cultural interactions. These students said their experiences were largely positive.

*I think so far like all the people I've been meeting they've been so nice. They've been very good people. I'm a Christian, but I've been also been meeting Muslims. People who are Muslims. People who are Hindu, so we've been getting on really well. We just tend to talk. We talk about their religion. We talk about my religions. We talk about our experiences and how we feel about it. It's been very good so far, like encouraging too. (Student A)*

*If anything, I have experienced warmness, so that's a relief really. I've heard of other people talk about [negative experiences] but I believe friction is where people are, there'll always be a little bit of friction. I mean, you can't get along with everyone. But other than that, really, this community has been very respectful and accepting. (Student R)*

The above two comments are promising in their suggestion that not all the interviewees reported 'negative diversity interactions', however, even these quotes suggest room for improvement given the 'friction' that Student R refers to. Interviewees were asked a question regarding to what extent they thought La Trobe University campus was a welcoming place for cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. Their responses indicate that more deliberate efforts at recognising and celebrating multicultural diversity would increase students' sense of inclusivity. Most students explained, in varying ways, that their regional University campus was simultaneously a welcoming place and in some ways not. Student S said, 'I feel that I'm studying here, but I don't belong here'. This apparent contradiction sums up the sentiments of many of the students who, as a result of interactions with University staff, felt they belonged academically, but who, as a result of negative diversity interactions with some students, felt they did not belong at university socially.

The students nearly all said they were not aware of curriculum specifically designed to address cultural diversity (excluding Indigenous culture, as discussed below). Bowman and Denson (2014) argue that 'curricular/co-curricular diversity involvement' is an important aspect of building a positive campus climate. They suggest that 'diversity related course

work, racial/cultural awareness workshops, and events sponsored by another racial/ethnic group' help build multiculturalism on campus. Two student interviewees commented on the need for and benefit of more direct efforts at building activities and/or campus based groups dedicated to cultural diversity.

*I think at university we don't really promote multiculturalism and there are people who are from different backgrounds. [My campus] hasn't really done that. I've been here for four years now and this is the first year where we kind of did a multicultural day, but not too many people were involved. Because the posters were out for weeks so everyone knew it that it was multicultural day at uni but we didn't have as many as we wanted. So I think promoting multiculturalism in a way ... I think that's really important. (Student L)*

The students were asked about how they thought Indigenous Australian culture was acknowledged in the curriculum and otherwise. The responses were positive, suggesting appreciation for the Indigenous Womenjika online module, as well as students of the education, nursing, and arts courses commenting on their enjoyment of course specific subjects on Aboriginal culture.

*I think Indigenous culture is acknowledged very well here. Since I've started uni, I've learned so much about Indigenous culture and Aboriginal people that I did not know throughout my high school and primary school. It's opened up my understanding of learning more about Indigenous people. (Student E)*

The students' responses indicate La Trobe University's active efforts at incorporating some awareness and understanding of Indigenous people and culture into curriculum made a positive difference toward a campus climate of multiculturalism, and has implications for work that can be done to incorporate curriculum about the diversity of cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity represented on the campuses.

### **Graduate outcomes**

New migrants are at a disadvantage regarding the benefits of social capital that come through established relational networks (Webb, 2015). Universities, particularly in regional areas, may be a source of building social capital for new migrants, as a meso-level local institution (Moran & Mallman, 2015). However, most of the university student interviewees did not answer affirmatively that La Trobe University was providing them with useful social connections for employment within the community. There were three exceptions, two education students and one nursing student, who thought their placements would benefit them for employment.

When asked whether they planned to stay in Shepparton or Mildura after graduating, the students were nearly evenly split between those who wanted to, or had to, go to a larger city to find employment or for a graduate degree, and those who wanted to, or had to, stay in Shepparton or Mildura. Those who planned to move after graduating cited the lack of appropriate employment opportunities locally, many saying they otherwise preferred to stay in Shepparton or Mildura but would not be able to find work relevant to their degree. Those who planned to stay in Shepparton or Mildura were mainly those whose course (particularly nursing and education) was likely to help them find work locally. Most of these

students said they were hopeful to stay and did not want to leave their families and communities.

When asked about what they felt they had gained and how they had changed since beginning university, in addition to hope for better employment prospects, the students talked about the desire to help others, their personal development, and the impact on their relations with other people, mainly family. Some students said that participation in higher education allowed them to assist and inspire others including their children, siblings, extended families and communities. Several students talked about being role models. They suggested that some of the most important influencers for higher education participation of new migrants are their friends or family members already participating.

Many of the students said they had grown personally as a result of being a university student, citing broadened perspectives and understanding, capacity for critical thinking, and increased openness to differing people and ideas. Other students cited increased independence and confidence in decision making and in their self-identity. This was a point made particularly strongly by some of the young women.

*Within our community, even back at home, our women, our ladies, are very ... I don't know, how should I put it? Because they don't really get their education or they don't get the opportunities back at home. I would say I have more opportunities. I am more capable of, I would say, surviving than someone who is back at home. I would say I'm more independent, I can go and find my way.*

(Student F)

A notable finding was the way that students talked about their participation affecting relationships within their communities. Many of the students talked about their increased prestige. This included regard amongst their families, ethno-lingual communities, as well as in the local community.

*One thing is that it's given me a different status. I mean, it's good. This is gonna sound funny, but again, like I said, in our culture it's good that a girl goes to uni. I want people to respect me. I want people to respect my parents. And, coming to uni, they will respect me, you know? They'll say, 'Oh, she's going to uni. She wants to become something. She's studying. She's handling a job.' I want all of them to say, 'Yeah, she's doing good.' You know? That's one of the reasons why I came to uni.* (Student J)

### **Summary: University students**

The interviewee accounts described in this section demonstrate the compound disadvantage faced by new migrants in low SES, regional communities. Most of the students and their families were unfamiliar with higher education processes, and had little social capital connecting them to the university, leaving students feeling alone or unguided (despite otherwise effective school-based assistance). Regional contexts may have increased local social connections, but refugee background families are less likely to be linked in with these networks, and the universities did not have direct communication with most of the families or other mediating, religious or other civic organisations. Students were highly motivated, a characteristic described by participants as an advantage deriving from their family narratives of tribulation, mobility, and hope for new opportunity. There were high



levels of enthusiasm and encouragement from families, though most families were low SES, and were less likely to be able to offer the cultural and/or economic capital to directly support the students' studies. Approximately half of the students were not enrolled in their preferred course, indicative of the limited access to course offerings at regional campuses and the students' inability to afford relocating for university elsewhere. All of the students reported needing financial assistance to enable their studies: half received scholarships and said they were essential for enabling their university participation; the other half did not receive scholarships and described financial struggle and sacrifices as a result. In addition to the economic uncertainty of being in low SES circumstances, students from refugee backgrounds reported the psycho-emotional disruptions to study resulting from post trauma for them and their families.

Students from refugee backgrounds described their greatest challenge academically was English as an additional language. They described difficulty understanding and completing assignments as well as the frustrations of verbal communication with peers. Due to some difficulty in making themselves understood by other students related to their accents, they were likely to limit their classroom participation as well as social interaction with other students, and to report disruptions to their confidence as students. There were also numerous reports of unconscious and conscious bias from other students. The students reported few friendships with Anglo-Australian students, and on the regional campuses there was perceived to be little meaningful interaction between students of different ethnicities. These factors negatively affected interviewees' sense of belonging and legitimacy socially, amongst other students. Our findings highlight that student diversity needs to be actively managed and harnessed by universities, in order to avoid surface segregation, negative diversity interactions, unconscious bias, and limitations of pedagogy and curriculum.

In contrast to their peer social experience, the interviewees reported high positive ongoing interactions with university teaching and support staff. Students said lecturers and other staff were supportive, helpful, patient, encouraging, approachable/friendly/kind, and readily available, going out of their way to assist and get to know them. This overall experience is in stark contrast to those of new migrant students discussed in much of the broader literature, who felt in various ways disconnected from lecturers and other teaching staff. However, in regard to outcomes, most students thought La Trobe University could be providing greater resources to support their employment within, or outside of, the local regional community.

## **Secondary school students**

This section of the report analyses the interview accounts of ten new migrant secondary school students at a local school in Shepparton/Mildura. The students were all from new migrant backgrounds, with seven arriving to Australia with their families on humanitarian visas, and three arriving with their families on guest worker visas. These students had been in Australia fewer than ten years and spoke a language other than English at home. They were asked interview questions about their aspirations regarding university, their sources of information and assistance for possible university attendance, and any knowledge or perspectives they had on La Trobe University in Shepparton/Mildura.

## **Aspirations and motivations**

Fewer than half of the students with whom we spoke had intentions to pursue higher education. Among those who did, one student had a clear notion of how a university degree would assist in achieving a desired career. The others who were interested in university had aspirations tied to the notion that a higher degree would serve them well in securing employment, though they were not sure specifically how. One young female Afghani student said she was 'nervous' about the three to four years of time commitment required to complete a degree. She, like a number of the university students, described a sense of urgency felt in meeting other expectations of family. The student who wanted a specific course of study said that he would prefer to stay in Mildura for university because he could be closer to family and he thought life would be easier, safer, and less distracting than in the city.

*It's pretty good here, because it's small, and people know each other. And people welcome another. You can feel more confident. Yeah, you don't feel like you're lost in the big city. Like, if you start away in the big city, you'll feel lost, because many people don't know each other. Here, it's a small town, people know, they're welcoming you, they know that you are new, so they try to help you, and that's a good point here.*

This student knew, however, that his desired course of study was not available in Mildura and he was preparing himself to have to move away from his family. Two of the female students who discussed the possibility of university said that their decision to stay in Mildura or relocate for a course was entirely dependent on their parents' decision whether to stay or move.

## **Awareness, choice and access**

The secondary school students gave mixed responses to questions about how they received information and assistance regarding university. Some received details primarily from school services, such as careers counsellors, which affirms what the university student interviewees said about their best source of information. Others said that a friend or acquaintance already attending university was their best source of information. However, there were two students who said they did not have much information about university and that they were unsure who to speak to about it. These two may be an anomaly, given the apparent effort and care local schools and La Trobe University make in disseminating information and assistance. However, it is worth noting that there are students who, despite efforts, are not being reached through school-based programs alone.

## **Academic and social educational experiences**

The students who discussed interest in higher education each said that, to differing degrees, English as an additional language was a hindrance to their desired progress. One student said she felt that she was always behind other students and trying to catch up.

*There have been others that when they were, like, 16 years here, they have really good English. But we're the first in our family to ever start speaking here.*

Students were aware they were at a disadvantage in their aspiration for university because of the additional challenge of EAL and its impact on their school and university entrance

exam achievement. The flow-on effect of difficulties with EAL in secondary school can be seen in the aspirations, success, and outcomes of students as they consider higher education. As seen in the previous section, EAL poses both academic difficulties and issues of belonging.

The secondary school students described difficulties in making friends at school with those from other ethno-linguistic backgrounds, even though students felt that the school staff were supportive of cultural and religious diversity. 'It's hard to change your life [migrate], and find new social [connections]', said one student, 'It's hard to make friends in a second language'. The university student interviews indicate that these secondary school students may experience negative diversity interactions at university that reflect those experienced at school. When asked what they had heard about the level of acceptance and celebration of diverse cultures and languages at La Trobe University in Mildura, or whether they had heard that La Trobe was a welcoming place, none of them were able to offer views on this issue. The lack of response may indicate that they have not heard negative feedback from their peers or community members, but it may also be indicative of a gap in knowledge and connection between the local university campuses and the local ethnic communities.

### **Summary: Secondary school students**

The year 11 and 12 student interviews affirmed the findings from university students and graduates regarding some of the difficulties faced by new migrants in low SES regional communities. Awareness of higher education processes was limited due to family lack of familiarity and perceived disconnection between La Trobe University campuses and local ethnic communities. Students relied on secondary school services, which were helpful but may need to be supplemented with improved relations between universities and community families and organisations. Refugee background students confront the challenge of 'catching up' with spoken and written English language capability, this being one factor in students' reported difficulties preparing for higher education. Some students aspired to participate in higher education but were wary of the costs in time and finances, and reported feeling a sense of urgency from family members to finish school in order to meet other obligations such as marriage and or earning an income. Female students said their university decisions, about where to attend, depended on whether their family stayed in the regional town or moved to a larger city.

### **Graduates**

This section of the project captured the voices of new migrant graduates from La Trobe University. We conducted six interviews with recent graduates in Shepparton and Mildura. All participants were from non-English speaking and refugee backgrounds. The participants had migrated from regions that had not previously been major sources of migration in Shepparton and Mildura, including Africa and the Middle East. Several participants noted that they were on a humanitarian visa when they arrived to Australia but since then have become Australian citizens. These interviewees were primarily asked about their aspiration and motivations, university awareness and choice, campus experiences, and graduate outcomes.

## Aspirations and motivations

When students were asked if the course they were undertaking was their first choice, there were mixed responses. Similar to the university student participants, several graduates said their course was not their first preference (Interviewee B, C, E, F). Further, a few participants noted that they had to adjust their aspirations to their school outcomes. As a participant explained:

*I wanted to study medicine when I came to Australia, but... My teacher told me that you have to do your year 11 and 12 twice so you can get the highest mark, and ... because my English was very low, I found it very challenging and still hard to spend long time in high school (Interviewee B, Graduate, Mildura).*

A different graduate noted that they had decided to study something as a pathway to their preferred course: 'my aim at the time was to make a pathway into medicine, and nursing to me at the time was the best pathway that could lead me to medicine (Interviewee F, Graduate, Shepparton).

By contrast, a few interviewees (Interviewee A, D) said their course was their first preference. For example one graduate noted: 'It was my first preference. I always thought teaching would be a wonderful thing to do. Enjoying it' (Interviewee A, Graduate, Mildura).

Several graduates' decision to enrol at university was influenced by factors such as encouragement from family and teachers, personal development and career advancement. For example, one participant claimed that her decision to attend university was influenced by encouragement from family and personal development:

*I always told my parents if we ever move to a good country, I would want to be something, do something with my life. My mom agreed with me and my dad thought it was a good idea. He's a bit more open-minded than the traditional dude. He agreed. When we came here, he always pushed us into studying, all of us. I can say it proudly that now all of us, well most of us nearly, are graduating from uni (Interviewee A, Graduate, Mildura).*

The same student noted that the decision to study teaching at university was also influenced by her school teachers: 'It was my teachers actually. I was a student at this school too and then I went to senior college up the road. I met some really wonderful teachers and I thought that would be a good career' (Interviewee A, Graduate, Mildura).

Another participant outlined the importance of personal development when deciding to attend university: 'I've always wanted to go to uni. That has always been my dream and my goal, was to go to university and be something or be someone through education' (Interviewee F, Graduate, Shepparton). A different participant highlighted that the decision to enrol at university was influenced by career advancement: 'if you can't do your study here, if you can't go to school, I'm not sure how you can survive in Australia. Otherwise you get those jobs without qualification, which is not good' (Interviewee C, Graduate, Shepparton).

## Awareness, choice and access

Similar to school and university student respondents, several graduates noted that school services were important sources of information when deciding to attend university.

Graduate participants also remarked that school and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) services provided them with guidance and assistance when deciding what and where to study. This support is demonstrated by one person's account: 'the career coordinator. She's really good in finding exactly what every student wants. I did say I want something easy, accessible, and that I can do. She said, 'Yeah, why don't you choose [La Trobe University]?' I did choose [La Trobe University]' (Interviewee A, Graduate, Mildura). A different interviewee, who finished school overseas and undertook a TAFE course before attending La Trobe University, claimed it would have been really difficult to apply to university without the assistance she received during the application process, including assistance with applying for a scholarship (Interviewee F, Graduate, Shepparton).

Another participant said that the career consultant at school informed her about the possibility of having access to HECS-HELP and that was an important factor when deciding to attend university: 'So, at the start, I thought that I have to pay for everything, and I have to work. And, then, with the career consultant at school, she told me that, "No, you can study and pay later"' (Interviewee B, Graduate, Mildura).

Also significant is the fact that a few participants outlined that their decision to study in Shepparton or Mildura was influenced by campus accessibility and proximity to family and community. A participant said: 'for me, it was accessibility. La Trobe was in Mildura and I was too scared to go and live by myself since I've lived with my family my whole life. I thought La Trobe would be good because it was in town' (Interviewee A, Graduate, Mildura). Similarly, another interviewee described choosing to stay locally because her partner and children were established with the local Afghani community (Interviewee F, Graduate, Shepparton).

Similar to the university student respondents, a few graduates noted that having access to financial support such as HECS was really helpful when deciding to attend university (Interviewee B, C, E). The following comment was representative:

*Well, the really helpful thing for me was the Government that they allowed people to study with the HECS-HELP.... I think if it wasn't for the Government help I would have stayed working, or doing something different until I could go to university. (Interviewee B, Graduate, Mildura)*

A different student advocated that the scholarship offered by La Trobe University made a big difference for her studies:

*It was a great help [the scholarship], because my husband wasn't working at the time. Both of us were studying and not working. I had a part-time job but only one or two days a week. And we had started a new life from scratch, so we needed a lot of help. And the scholarship helped me with so many things -- books and uniform and a lot of equipment for nursing. (Interviewee F, Graduate Shepparton)*

### **Academic and social campus experiences**

Most graduates noted that the support offered by La Trobe University such as academic advisors and counselling helped them with their studies (Interviewees A, B, C, D, E). For example, one participant noted: 'PLA [Peer Learning Advisors] is a great example of how students can be helped' (Interviewee A, Graduate, Mildura). Another interviewee remarked

that the orientation day organised by La Trobe University was very beneficial socially because it allowed her to meet people from the same background: 'the orientation day was really good. It helped me to find a lot of other girls, Muslim girls, in Uni and stuff and we became friends (Interviewee E, Graduate Shepparton).

However, participants suggested that regional universities could do several things to better support new migrant students. A few respondents said that new migrants would benefit from more targeted support, including language proficiency (Interviewee D, F). For example, one interviewee said:

*It could be to strengthen the help to the migrant, because you know, for example being a mature stream student, it's difficult, because the language you have to learn, English for example. If you're not born with English and, grow up with English it's difficult to learn. (Interviewee D, Graduate, Shepparton)*

A different graduate remarked that having Peer Learning Advisors from different backgrounds in the regions would be beneficial for new migrants: 'I think if they [PLAs] had some people from different backgrounds in that group, they would be more approachable' (Interviewee A, Graduate, Mildura). Another participant outlined that running workshops around diversity would be beneficial for all students: 'I think La Trobe should think about organised workshops about other cultures' (Interviewee C, Graduate, Shepparton).

Similar to the university student participants, when graduate interviewees were asked what were their personal strengths that helped them with their studies most responded; persistence, confidence, and resilience. For example, one student noted, 'perseverance and I think I just don't give up' (Interviewee A, Graduate, Mildura). A different student outlined: 'I guess believing in myself, that I can do it. And never giving up I guess' (Interviewee F, Graduate, Shepparton). Another student illustrated:

*I was confident in myself, and in what I was doing. And I was patient, and I persevered in everything, because the first time I had a feeling to give up. And I thought that giving up is not an option, the main thing is to try, and try again. And to see, how the future would be for me. (Interviewee D, Graduate, Shepparton)*

The graduate interviewees were ambivalent, similar to the university students, about their sense of belonging and La Trobe University campus as a welcoming place. Several participants felt La Trobe University was a welcoming place (Interviewee C, D, F, E). One respondent noted that La Trobe University's environment was very supportive and that was fundamental for them to complete their degree: 'the environment basically and the atmosphere, everyone in the University was supportive, kept me going and helped me through my education, otherwise I wouldn't be finishing' (Interviewee E, Graduate Shepparton). Still, several participants felt they were the only person from their background in the classroom or at the regional campus (Interviewee A, B, C and F). This is illustrated by one person's account: 'I was the only Afghani in La Trobe at the time. So I had no one from my community. It was all Australians, like all Caucasian people' (Interviewee F, Graduate, Shepparton). The same participant also said they did not feel part of the university community: 'I think I have at some point, that I didn't belong there... In university I think at some stage I did think that I didn't belong there' (Interviewee F, Graduate, Shepparton).

The way that graduates had felt academically supported by university staff contrasted with the sense of disengagement from other students. A few respondents also said that sometimes the lack of interactions with their classmates made them feel isolated (Interviewee B, F). Also significant is the fact that a few interviewees believed that others thought they were not academically capable (Interviewee A, B, C). Nevertheless, that changed when they started working with students from different backgrounds. For example, one participant said:

*In group work, I think they [other students] thought that I don't have as much knowledge as them, back when we started. They thought I was stupid. That changed as we did our projects together. Slowly they started depending on me. We got on well together...* (Interviewee A, Graduate, Mildura)

Similarly, one graduate highlighted that interacting with students from different backgrounds helped improve their language proficiency: 'while I went to University, and that did help my English as well, because I was more with them and talking and improving my English and it did help' (Interviewee E, Graduate, Shepparton). These were promising indications that, for some students, time enabled them to get to know their classroom peers better. However, their sense of belonging was impacted by the felt interactive and relational distance between them and the predominantly Anglo-Australian student body.

Similar to the university student respondents, all graduates reported that they encountered language proficiency barriers when studying at La Trobe University. This was demonstrated by the following comment: 'it did get challenging [university] because I am from a different background and my English wasn't perfect back then' (Interviewee A, Graduate, Mildura). Another graduate said: 'my age, was challenging. And my background also, as non-English speaking. Non-English speaking it was challenging for me' (Interviewee D, Graduate, Shepparton). A different participant highlighted that they encountered language barriers because they only undertook three years of high school in Australia:

*Language and that's all, English basically. I did have challenge with my language because of, I just did three years of high school in Australia so that's doesn't make my English perfect, but it just gets me through.* (Interviewee E, Graduate, Shepparton)

### **Graduate outcomes**

Almost all participants were working in their field of study, typically education and nursing, when the interviews were conducted (Interviewee A, B, C, E, F). Further, most noted that they intended to live and work in Shepparton or Mildura (Interviewee, B, C, D, E). Graduates said that developing connections within the community assisted them in finding employment. When asked what role La Trobe University played in finding their current job, a few noted they would have liked more support from the institution. For example, one participant noted: 'I had to do everything by myself, actually, applying for jobs and things like that' (Interviewee F, Graduate, Shepparton). This participant also said that they were not aware of the career development and support services offered by La Trobe University. A different graduate remarked that new migrant students would benefit from receiving career development support once they finish their degree:

*It would be helpful to, you know, especially with finishing and, to be able to go back and get advice from the uni [with employment and other things], that'd be good. (interviewee E, Graduate, Shepparton)*

Another participant said that La Trobe University gave them basic information but that they would have preferred to get clearer and more involved guidance when it came to applying for a job:

*Not really, yeah. They [La Trobe University] do help you search a little bit, but yeah, not really help you with the resume or how to job interview but they give you basic information. (Interviewee E, Graduate, Shepparton)*

The same student also noted that peer networks helped them with the job application process, confirming that these type of networks may sometimes guide and support students through the process of finding employment.

*The Facebook group that we created with all students, so we're still on that page as well and that did help, got me through the interviews, so asking other students about their experience, how did they win and how did they apply and getting help from them was helpful. (Interviewee E, Graduate, Shepparton)*

Similarly, a few interviewees said that developing relations/connections with the regional community helped them to find employment. For example, one said:

*One of my past teachers at the school was one of the interviewers. He'd known my work ethic and all of those sort of things. He interviewed me and then, I think, the others, they also liked me when I was doing the interview. That helped. (Interviewee A, Graduate, Mildura)*

Another interviewee said they found their current job through someone they already knew who worked there. 'One day I was visiting one of the doctors at [the work place]. He asked me, "Why don't you join us?" I said, "Okay". And then I gave my resume there.' (Interviewee B, Graduate, Mildura)

Overall, the interviews confirmed that universities could play a larger role in supporting students from non-English speaking and refugee backgrounds to find employment after they finish their studies. Institutions need to better promote the employability services already offered, but also to provide targeted support for cohorts who may face workforce discrimination. Several universities already offer specific employability programs for NESB students but further work is also required to ensure that new migrants and other under-represented students can access university work-integrated learning programs, as well as clubs and societies. Our findings also reveal that developing connections with members of the community can assist new migrant students to find employment, and universities can help to facilitate such connections.

### **Summary: Graduates**

The graduate interviewees described similar challenges to the university students in negotiating compound disadvantages that come with being a new migrant student in a low SES, regional community. There were reports of some students studying non-preferred courses due to financial and cultural constraints on relocating, as well as some disconnection between family social capital and local university information. Graduates



reported positive, helpful interactions from university staff, but also barriers to social interaction with other (predominantly Anglo-Australian) students, affecting their sense of belonging at university. Graduate employment outcomes were mostly reflected upon positively, though some unconscious bias was experienced from prospective employers in the regional communities. Engagement with specific careers and employability services was limited. Findings suggest regional universities could more actively foster employment development and linkages within and beyond the community for students and graduates from new migrant backgrounds.

## **Stakeholders**

This section of the report analyses the interview accounts of eighteen stakeholders as well as participants in ethnic community leader focus groups. We conducted interviews with lecturers, support, and administrative staff at the two university campuses. Additionally, we interviewed staff of local ethnic councils (Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District [ECSD], and Sunraysia-Mallee Ethnic Communities Council [SMECC]), local council employees, and secondary school teaching, administrative, and support staff. Focus group interviews included community members considered leaders in the relevant ethnic communities, as well as focus groups conducted with additional staff of local ethnic councils. Interview and focus group participants drew on years of direct and or personal experience working closely with new migrant youth and secondary and university students. Interviewees were primarily asked questions regarding their knowledge and experiences of young people and their families in regards to aspirations and motivations, university awareness, choice and access, observations of campus experiences, graduate outcomes, and of their efforts to teach and/or support young people from new migrant backgrounds.

## **Aspirations and motivations**

The issue of course availability and the impact on individuals and families in Shepparton and Mildura, arose in nearly every interview with stakeholders and community members and leaders. The limitation of courses was voiced as a significant concern for new migrant families who want their children to be able to pursue and fulfil their specific aspirations for higher education. Stakeholders, including a member of local council in Mildura and a representative of SMECC, commented on the impact on settlement and the need to move to a metropolitan area for their children's higher education opportunities. The implications were that Mildura is losing community members it wants to keep. It is difficult to chart the number of families making such moves, but several stakeholders suggested a significant number of families eventually do move away if they are able.

*We know it impacts on families, in terms of having to move once they've settled. So they've settled for a period of time and they don't have traditional roots here, so there's really nothing that holds them. People will sell their house or rent it out and move to the city, in order to give the children opportunity to study whatever the course it is that they study or want to study. So the scope of university courses locally is limited. So that's part of the impact on the brain drain that we have locally. (Mildura SMECC Chief Officer)*

This sense of loss of valuable community members and families was echoed by a La Trobe University staff member who said she sensed the town losing young people due to its difficulty catering to their educational and employment needs. She said, 'when you look at

the demography of the town, there's that dip in the 25 to 40 age group. It's quite noticeable, and a lot of these people are moving elsewhere'. A staff member at the Mildura English Language Centre (MELC) commented on the educational disadvantage for such families and their children of living in Mildura, given fewer course options. When asked, several stakeholders suggested that, to their knowledge, many of the families who leave would stay in Shepparton and Mildura if their children's desired courses were available locally. For those families and youth who stay in Shepparton and Mildura and attend university, a number of them enrol in courses that are not their preferred area of study, as demonstrated in the section discussing university students. A La Trobe Mildura support staff member commented on the observation that, because a number of students they work with are doing their non-preferred courses, they are more likely to struggle academically and motivationally as a result.

While some families leave the region out of necessity for improved opportunities for their children, it appears at least as many families stay. Often families stay locally because of financial limitations, which may also limit desire for university participation. One of the community leaders in a focus group said he was aware of 'numerous' young people in the community not attending university because they do not have a suitable choice (as opposed to those who may attend La Trobe University at a regional campus despite the course not being their preference). It is too expensive, in the words of another community leader, to cover the cost of 'two households'. This same man related his family's experience of trying unsuccessfully to make such an arrangement work. He and his wife wanted their daughter to have an opportunity to study at a university in Melbourne but his job was in Shepparton, so his wife and daughter moved to an apartment in Melbourne during the week while he maintained his job and their house in Shepparton. Eventually, before his daughter finished her first year of university, they realised it was not financially viable for them after all and his daughter and wife came back to Shepparton.

A number of stakeholders were aware, from their work with youth and their families, that the families were limited in their options not only by the financial barriers of relocating but also because they desired to keep their families in close proximity, to live near their children to offer support and maintain family relational bonds. There was also discussion of concern over losing a family's culture and way of life.

*Because I know that family is important to those kids. They want to be close to the family. And the way somebody put it to me, I thought was so profound, is that a lot of these families have lost so many of the family members, they've lost so much already. The parents, they don't want to lose their kids. And then they go to the city and they're not happy. So we've heard of some families that they're locked in with their mortgages in Melbourne, don't know how they're going to get out, but they were actually happier in Shepparton but did it thinking it was better for the kids. (Shepparton English Language Centre Manager)*

The community leaders interviewed discussed the concerns of their communities, as well as their own experiences and concerns, in relation to finding suitable university options for their children. A primary concern for many, they say, was the tension between a desire to keep their families together in close proximity and the financial difficulty of relocating to a city. Amongst community leaders there was expression of both frustration and resignation regarding limited course offerings, including online options. One community member

expressed resignation and suggested the community members come up with other solutions for being able to afford to send their children to the city campuses.

*At the end of the day, I know we can't get La Trobe to put medicine, engineering, whatever. It's never going to happen. How best do we work as communities so that our kids can go to Melbourne? They can go to Sydney? They can go to Adelaide and make it in life and then say, 'We did something.'* (Shepparton-Community Leader Focus Group)

Gender-based expectations and practices within the communities were discussed as an important factor amidst the other concerns with aspirations and access to university. For many of the families, women are expected to live with their family of origin, in most cases up to the point when they might find a partner for marriage. The community leaders discussed this expectation and said that it was largely the reason a family would move away from Shepparton or Mildura. By contrast, if the family could afford it financially, they were much more likely to give a man the opportunity to move to a city university campus on his own (though, in many cases the family could not afford to do so).

*We are really very careful about these kind of things. Here, if we have all the courses in La Trobe University here, we'll be very happy to send our daughters there. For the boys, we don't have a problem. We don't have a problem with the boys, but we have problem with our girls. We don't want them to go out without us knowing how they leave, how they move, how they do these kind of things. That's why ----- was saying that there are many girls around Shepparton not attending universities because they don't find courses here, and they're not allowed to go to Melbourne. Otherwise, the whole family will move to Melbourne.* (Shepparton-Community Leader Focus Group)

Community leaders explained also that, even if individual families were comfortable having a daughter move by herself to a city, there was an issue of accountability to the wider ethno-lingual community norms.

The aspirations of young people in some new migrant communities are also shaped by particular non-academic expectations. Stakeholders and community leaders commented on the differing impact of these expectations on young men and women, namely, an expectation for young Afghani males to work and females to get married. One school principal noted the disruption to education of some female students who are persuaded to go overseas to get married, saying that several students do this each year and miss half a year or more of school. She said these matters arise in discussions with students, families, support and teaching staff on a regular basis. Two school principals observed that, due partly to these expectations, a number of otherwise qualified students do not go on to study at university. These perspectives from community members and leaders were affirmations of what the secondary students, university students, and graduates all said about the influence their family and cultural expectations had on their decision making about higher education.

Young Afghani males were said by some stakeholders to appear to have lower aspirations for university due to expectations that they become earners when they finish school. This observation would affirm what some university students (male and female Afghani students) said in regard to some of their male peers and family members.

*We always talk about higher education's lifelong financial benefits. It's like yeah, when you get to 45, you'll be in front. But, actually, if you really need money from 18 to 21 or 18 to 25 to support your family or for other reasons, it's not gonna add up. A lot of people think that way, particularly in the regions. They just want to get ahead and they want to earn money. I think there is an expectation to push stuff that, you need to find a job. Doesn't matter if it's a low-paying job. (Mildura English Language Centre, two staff members)*

Another concern of stakeholders concerned a gap between aspiration and achievement. Aspirations were generally considered high amongst new migrant students, as well as their parents, but challenges with EAL and resulting school achievement meant lower ATARs. Several stakeholders noted that these high aspirations were not coupled with an understanding of what it takes to achieve scholastically high results, and therefore parents may not know how best to support their children in the pursuit.

*The difficulties for families in navigating our education system and understanding the steps to get to where they want to go, so a number of our refugee families have very high aspirations. The families do for their children. The children do, as well, but understanding the steps to get there can often be quite different to what they may expect. Really high aspirations to be doctors or go into medicine, but not necessarily understanding how to get there in terms of, if you're not at school every day... (Mildura school principal)*

### **Awareness, choice and access**

There was a clear sense amongst various stakeholders that, despite many new migrant families having high aspirations for their children's participation in higher education, there were gaps in knowledge that posed barriers. The education system, including primary, secondary, and higher education, was not in all cases easily understood or accessible for parents. One community leader, for example, said that some refugee background families, having spent years 'in a detention centre, or a refugee camp, they're in survival mode...they don't have an understanding about the education system...and they're happy for their kids to actually support them financially, rather than going and actually get their education'. A staff member of ECSD said that a point of feedback they receive, particularly from different African and Afghani communities, is the difficulty in maintaining connection between the education system and parents:

*Not enough, say, connection between the school and the families. And not a lot of guidance for what they should be doing. What the future prospects of the course that they choose, and they basically make the choice depending on whatever they have. But do they have enough information to make that choice? The answer is no. (Shepparton ECSD Focus Group)*

Such gaps in understanding about education processes and requirements can be bridged partially through parental communication and participation with educational institutions. Stakeholders and community leaders cited several reasons for this disconnection between new migrant families and educational institutions, including English as an additional language, little former knowledge of higher education, along with other challenges of migration and settlement. Simultaneously, stakeholders said that La Trobe University does

not have an articulated, or formalised, approach to reaching new migrant communities. A La Trobe staff member said in regard to student recruitment:

*People coming in as refugees, we don't have a strategy. I think they've 'fallen in the door' to be honest. Then when one came and then other family members they came in too. Because we're seeing families, but we don't seem to be going beyond that.*

A local council member suggested that efforts to reach new migrant communities in regard to educational processes is 'something that's overlooked and perhaps not delivered in a way that families are understanding'. One community leader said '[La Trobe] doesn't have any connection with us.' Strikingly, an Afghani community leader said that some families are 'not convinced there is a university here', explaining that if they have heard of it they might assume it is limited and would not meet their needs. He further said that he has seen a lot of families leave town over the last seven years, for the specific purpose of accessing higher education in a larger city.

All stakeholders we interviewed said, in various ways, that increased efforts to connect local communities with La Trobe University were welcome and necessary. In a focus group with community leaders, one man suggested La Trobe University maintain a connection with community leaders who can discuss recruitment and information dissemination strategies, as well as liaise with networks of families. This, he suggested, might be a 'cultural diversity' officer at La Trobe University, who maintains these community relationships. A further suggestion from another community leader was to invite families formally to attend information and meet-and-greet sessions where the families could become more familiar with the campus, people, and programs at La Trobe, with the assistance of a translator. This same community leader said they thought it important to begin such relationship building early on, while the children are still in secondary school. A La Trobe staff member commented on a third area of potential connection between La Trobe University and the ethno-lingual communities, that is, through local civic and religious organisations. They named, for example, organisations contracted for settlement services (such as local ethnic councils or organisations like Uniting Care) and religious groups centred around local mosques, churches, and temples. This same La Trobe University staff member suggested the value in translating important university information into relevant languages, for example, Arabic, Swahili, and Dari. Another La Trobe University staff member suggested formalising the involvement of graduates from CALD backgrounds to be 'ambassadors' to the communities.

A school principal discussed a concern about efforts to reach families. They said that their school regularly invites parents to engage with the school but often has low participation. The principal said the school is currently considering strategies for reaching families that may be relevant also for La Trobe University to address this barrier, including accessing meetings and events of existing groups. That is, going to the communities and families in addition to the expectation the families come to the institution.

*We're looking at [how to attend] existing groups that are already happening. A lot of families are reluctant to come in and engage with the school, English being the biggest barrier. Also a couple of things that we've been doing is working with [local ethnic council] to provide translators that the families may feel*

*comfortable with to come to the school for parent/teacher interviews, to go around with the mums, and they feel more comfortable going together. (Mildura school principal)*

There were several accounts from stakeholders of how the connection between a staff member at La Trobe University and the local ethno-lingual community lead to positive outcomes for recruitment and support of students. These were, however, coincidental rather than part of intentional efforts. The benefits of reaching parents, said one secondary school EAL support officer, is that the parents are highly invested in their children's futures and are keen for further knowledge and understanding about how to assist them. She said further that these families have 'a strong bond' and will influence and support one another, passing on information within the community. Stakeholders spoke also of the consequences of disconnection between La Trobe University and families. A council member said that cases of misinformation and/or lack of understanding led to negative experiences, which have a particularly profound impact on new migrants' settlement in Australia.

### **Academic and social educational experiences**

La Trobe teaching staff affirmed what students in this research reported, that is, that English as an additional language is for many the largest barrier to achieving their potential. Most of the teaching and support staff said they spent extra time with some students, working through difficulties with written expression. Some said that extra, targeted EAL support is appropriate for some new migrant students. One lecturer raised concerns about the amount of time required to assist some students. One lecturer noted that English language skill level varied a lot by student, but that one could not always be sure which students needed support based on initial impression, or by verbal presentation in the classroom.

*A couple of students last year, I referred to our student learning person for one-to-one intensive sessions, because they kept, seemed to be having the same grammatical errors. When they talked in class they were quite coherent, but when it came down to going down on paper, there was some filtering going on and the grammar was going out the door. (Shepparton La Trobe University Lecturer)*

Stakeholders who work with new migrant students in the secondary and higher education systems commented on the strengths they observe in the students despite the additional challenges they face. Similar to the observations of the students themselves, these stakeholders noted impressive displays of resilience and a determination to improve through hard work, as well as an enthusiasm for learning. Stakeholders also noted the maturity of many new migrant students. This maturity was described as probably a result of having more responsibility within the family and community than some of their peers, as well as having come through sometimes very difficult circumstances.

The lecturing and support staff at both La Trobe University campuses had similar perspectives to the students about the close proximity and cultivated connection between staff and students. The lecturers were glad to say they knew their students' names, could recognise their particular needs and offer support, and would see their students on a regular basis, greeting them on campus. They said that small campus meant they could 'see' and 'hear' when students needed their assistance (La Trobe University lecturer)

The lecturers said that they did try to go out of their way to assist students, and that it was a conscious effort to do so, but that it also seemed to come with the nature of a small regional campus. One La Trobe University lecturer said, 'I mean, we spend a lot of time...and hopefully that breaks down some of those barriers students may feel'. This perceived accessibility of teaching and support staff was described as having a positive impact on student help-seeking behaviour.

The perceptions of La Trobe University staff were largely that the Shepparton and Mildura campuses provided safe spaces in which students appeared to feel welcomed. Some commented on the space of the campus itself as a place where students could study, socialise and interact with others from their own and diverse ethno-lingual backgrounds, and said that it was well used. This observation aligns with most of the students' accounts (with the exception of some having had uncomfortable and negative interactions with other students). The campus space was noted as a particularly welcome place for Muslim women students to socialise.

*One of my students who was wearing [a black burqa for a religious holiday] here on the campus said to me, 'Yes, I feel safe to wear that here, but I wouldn't be wearing it in the public, out there in the public here, because I'd be too obvious. I'd be drawing attention to myself.'* (La Trobe University lecturer)

The size and use of the physical space of the campuses was described as related to the sense of belonging and personal connection students were presumed to have with La Trobe University staff.

*I think in a general sense, I think we're really good at doing that. I think the thing with a small campus is, you've really got nowhere to hide, so you're kind of exposed in every sense. I think that in itself creates that 'You're one of us,' kind of attitude, you know? For everyone. I think the university climate is very accepting. Yeah. I haven't had any experience where I've seen students being segregated or disadvantaged. If anything, we do the total opposite.* (La Trobe University Support Staff)

Some La Trobe staff commented on the value they think having a culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse student population brings to their regional campuses. Diversity was said to broaden the views of longer established resident students and add to the variety and richness of classroom discussion. One lecturer described classroom discussions enriched through the differing perspectives and experiences new migrant students bring to the conversation.

There were some comments from La Trobe University staff, however, indicating that there is some room for further understanding that could influence campus activities and groups to make them more inclusive and welcoming to cultural diversity. Examples included considering venues, food, and drink that would feel inviting to people of all backgrounds (as opposed to a local pub). Two university staff suggested a need for more cultural awareness for staff and students to reflect the diversity of the students.

### **Summary: Stakeholders**

Stakeholders, including community leaders, offered important perspectives on the issues related to new migrant students in low SES regional communities. Stakeholders reflected on

the gap between high aspirations amongst young people and their families and the rate of actual participation and successful outcomes. These gaps were related to refugee background families having fewer social and economic resources to link them to the people and processes of higher education, including unfamiliarity with primary, secondary, and higher education systems in Australia. Several stakeholders noted that high aspirations were not coupled with an understanding of what it takes to achieve scholastically high results, and knowledge about how best to support their children in the pursuit. Stakeholders in all sectors described a need to connect regional university campuses with mediating organisations and institutions run by, or involved with, new migrant communities, including civic and religious organisations and community leaders. Overall, there was a stated need for greater, proactive university outreach, working more closely with parents, community groups, cultural and religious organisations, beyond traditional models of university to school engagement. As with La Trobe University student interviewees, stakeholders and community leaders voiced concern over regional campus limitations in course offerings and the impact on their communities' participation and aspirations. Many of the families in regional new migrant communities are from low SES backgrounds and are unable to afford sending their children away for higher education. University staff noted the discouragement and academic challenge for students studying a non-preferred course.

La Trobe University teaching and support staff noted the additional targeted EAL support necessary for students from refugee backgrounds. Staff spent extra time with some students, working through difficulties with written expression. This was an advantage for students of staff availability at the regional campuses. However, staff were investing their own time for this support, and the issue highlights the need for strong English language student support and for bridging and enabling programs that would enable more new migrants to transition to university effectively. University staff noted the need for further cultural diversity training and understanding amongst all staff, as well as students, to actively facilitate tolerance and belonging for diverse students.



## Conclusion

New migrants face particular challenges in regional, low socio-economic communities. Such communities are often marked by low educational attainment, travel limitations, and a lack of economies of scale, which can limit the breadth and depth of educational provision and other services. In cities such as Mildura and Shepparton, many new migrants are from refugee backgrounds and face particular challenges of poverty, discrimination, lack of recognition of their prior educational attainment, and limited English language proficiency. Recently arrived migrants, however, can also provide much-needed resources and strengths to regional universities and communities more broadly. Equally, regional communities can provide a more welcoming and convivial environment for new migrants than large urban centres, and enable personal and community connections to be made easier.

Understanding the educational challenges of new migrants is therefore complex. Our contextual research suggested that higher education participation of new migrants would be impeded by: a general lack of university information; paucity of educational networks and access to 'hot' knowledge; aspirations unmatched by educational achievement levels; costs of tuition and living, particularly in light of commitments to send remittances and support families and communities overseas; and cultural expectations and/or gender norms. Research also indicated that new migrants would be disadvantaged while studying at university, including through negative diversity interactions, surface segregation on campus, and pedagogical and curricular limitations in working with diversity. Employer bias and limited English language proficiency were highlighted as likely barriers to successful graduate outcomes, and national data confirms that new migrant graduates are less likely than others to find employment that is matched to their degree.

Our wide-ranging interviews and focus groups in Shepparton and Mildura confirmed much of the established research but also revealed some new and pressing challenges for universities, as well as opportunities. We found relatively high university aspirations among new migrant students, but difficulty in them accessing preferred courses, often because of limited prior achievement and/or limited course offerings at their local campus. Many of those interviewed were in a course of their second or third preference and still hoped to transition, e.g. from Nursing to Medicine. Gender was another relevant factor. Boys and men from some communities were encouraged to work rather than study, with economic needs perceived to be pressing. Equally, it was culturally difficult for some women to relocate to urban areas to study.

Awareness of university admissions processes, course offerings, and expectations was limited, particularly among parents of prospective students. There was an additional perception that some parents and communities were concerned about a potential loss of community, cultural and religious identity if their children attended university. Nevertheless, the satisfaction of new migrant students with their campus experience was typically high. Here the advantages of smaller regional campuses were often highlighted, with students perceiving an overall friendliness and ability to establish personal relationships with fellow students, staff, and university lecturers. There were, however, notable exceptions and a common sense of 'surface segregation', with groups of new migrant students remaining isolated from their Anglo Australian peers. Diversity was

perceived to be tolerated but inadequately harnessed, with few curricular or extra-curricular initiatives designed to provoke deep intercultural engagement.

Our research reveals multiple challenges for the higher education sector, from diversifying university outreach, admission schemes, and pathways to facilitating more inclusive courses and campuses. In an era of unprecedented student diversity, too many university practices remain based on notions of 'traditional' students which thus limits the access and success of new migrants (and others). The challenge to universities also represents opportunity, particularly in regional, low socio-economic areas. New migrants bring the potential to improve the university experience for all students, by enabling a richer exchange of ideas and a more challenging intellectual environment. To be effective, however, student diversity needs to be harnessed through deep and structural change, including to university curriculum and pedagogy.

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## Appendix A: Methodology

This project sought to explore the university aspirations and experiences of new migrants in low SES and regional communities, and the extent to which regional campuses support ethnic, socio-economic and religious diversity. Ethics approval for this research project was granted by the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee (ref: E17-018) on 5 April 2017 and the Department of Education and Training (DET) (ref: 2017-003321) on 15 May 2017.

The first stage of the project was a review of international and national research on the higher education experiences of people from recent immigrant backgrounds. There is a wealth of research literature relevant to diverse NESB students, however, we focus this report on literature most relevant to students from refugee backgrounds, which highlights how their perceptions and experiences of accessing and participating in higher education differs from other groups of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Stage two of the project examined the demographics of Shepparton and Mildura regional areas.

Finally, stage three of the project involved collection of qualitative data, including:

- 10 interviews with school aged youth (i.e. year 11 and 12) in Mildura;
- 18 interviews with La Trobe University students in Shepparton and Mildura;
- 6 interviews with La Trobe University graduates in Shepparton and Mildura;
- 3 interviews with key community stakeholders in Shepparton and Mildura;
- 7 interviews with secondary school principals and support staff in Shepparton and Mildura;
- 8 interviews with lecturing, administrative, and support staff at La Trobe University campuses;
- 2 focus groups with ethnic council members in Shepparton and Mildura; and
- 2 focus groups with community members and leaders in Shepparton and Mildura.

The interviews and focus groups were semi-structured and covered: university aspirations and motivations; university awareness, choice and access; campus experiences, including academic and social; and graduate outcomes, particularly focussed on employment. Research participants were recruited based particularly on their status as new migrants, using purposive sampling (Tranter, 2010). We did not limit 'new migrants' to those who had been in Australia fewer than 10 years (as per the NESB definition), because some students and others who have lived in Australia for longer self-identify as new migrant. Using an emergent sampling technique (Liamputtong, 2012, pp. 18-19), and subsequently snowball sampling (Liamputtong, 2012, p. 17), the research team was assisted informally by University staff, as well as local ethnic councils (the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District [ECSD] and the Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council [SMECC] in Mildura) to identify potential interviewees from members of local new migrant communities. Interviewees were recruited primarily from some of the most recent new migrant groups to settle in Shepparton and Mildura (as determined with the assistance of the local ethnic councils). These include residents from Afghanistan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, and Zimbabwe.

Whilst not representative in size, this exploratory sample of people in regional areas from new migrant backgrounds allows the identification of key issues and patterns in the varying experiences of students of culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse backgrounds. All interview data was de-identified. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and analysed inductively and deductively for content and themes using NVivo 10 software (QSR International, 2012). An interpretative phenomenological approach to the analysis was applied (Denzin, 1989; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This allowed us to draw on the interviewees' personal perspectives, reflections, and narratives to examine the meanings the participants made of their own experiences, as well as the interpersonal interactions and relational dynamics within La Trobe University campus and the local community.

## Appendix B: Interview and focus group guidelines

**Table 1: Interview guidelines with school aged youth (i.e. year 11 and 12) in Mildura**

Questions
<b>General questions</b>
Can you tell me a bit about your background: age, country of origin, visa
Can you tell me about any work and education your parents have done overseas and/or in Australia?
<b>Accessing higher education</b>
What would you like to do after finishing high school?
What are your thoughts and feelings about going to university? Why do think you feel this way?
Is there anything you are looking forward to about university? Are there things about university that you are nervous or concerned about?
What makes you want to attend university?
Where do you hear about or get information about university?
What do you think will assist you in being able to attend university?
What do you think might make going to university challenging?
Where do think you will go to university? What is your preferred choice for course of study?
Does your school have any programs/activities to help you think about university?
What about your experiences here at high school? What has it been like?
Do you feel you are or will be prepared academically for university?
<b>Anticipating university culture</b>
Do you have any friends or family at university?
From what you know about the university in Shepparton/Mildura, do you think it seems like a welcoming place for people from different backgrounds? Do you think you would feel a sense of belonging?
Do you feel that Shepparton/Mildura is a welcoming place for people from different backgrounds? Did/do you feel a sense of belonging in Shepparton/Mildura?
What would you say are the best sources of support for your school work?
What do you think are your personal strengths that help you with your studies?
Are there any things that make your school work more difficult?
<b>Outcomes and aspirations</b>
What do you think you may gain from going to university?
What would you like to do after you finish school and university?
Is there anything about being in a regional town that you think makes the school and university experiences different to being in or near a city?
Do you want to live and work in Shepparton/Mildura?

**Table 2: Interview guidelines with university students in Shepparton and Mildura**

Questions
<b>General questions</b>
What are you studying at La Trobe University? Is this course your first choice?
Do you intend to continue this course, or transfer to another?
Mode of entrance/enrolment
Previous tertiary education/qualifications overseas and/or in Australia
Parents' occupation/education background overseas and/or in Australia.
Living arrangements
Countries/places you lived before Australia?
Visa status, on arrival and current?
<b>Accessing higher education</b>
What would you say motivated you to attend university?
Where did you hear about or get information about university?
Is there anything that assisted in being able to attend university?
Is there anything that made and/or still makes attending university challenging?
Why did you chose to stay in Shepparton/Mildura for university?
Are there programs, people, activities, etc. that helped you adjust when you started university?
Were you offered any type of support – academic, financial – to aid in attending university?
<b>Experiencing university culture</b>
What has your experience of university been like so far?
How does it compare to your experience of high school?
Are you involved with any university clubs, activities, sports, societies or any other groups?
Have you met any new friends at university?
What things do you do outside of university with your time? How do these impact your university experience?
Do you do paid or unpaid work? How does this impact your university experience?
Can you tell me about some specific experiences you have had interacting with students from different backgrounds- cultural, ethnic, and religious?
Does La Trobe University feel like a welcoming place for people from different backgrounds – cultural, ethnic, and religious? Do you feel a sense of belonging?
Do you feel that Shepparton/Mildura is a welcoming place for people from different backgrounds, cultural, ethnic, and religious? Do you feel a sense of belonging in Shepparton/Mildura?
Is there anything about being in a regional town that you think makes the school and university experiences different to being in or near a city?
Can you tell me about your views on how Indigenous Australian culture is approached at university?
<b>Learning and support</b>
What has your experience of the lecturers/teaching staff been like so far?
What about support staff, administrative staff?
What things do you like most about learning at university?
What do you think about the way things are taught?
What do you think about the curriculum, the things you have learned?

Questions
Do you feel that La Trobe University is giving you any connections or contacts within the community for your future, for example for work?
Who helps you the most academically and/or personally while you study?
Are there any things, inside or outside university, that make it challenging to be a university student?
Can you tell me about any diversity related course work, racial/cultural awareness workshops or programs, or events sponsored by racial/ethnic groups at university?
Outcomes and aspirations
What do you feel you have gained from going to university? Do you think you have changed in any way?
During your time at university, have your relationships with your family and/or other friends stayed more or less the same, or have there been any changes you have noticed?
What do you want to do when you complete your degree?
What do you think are your personal strengths that help you with your studies?



**Table 3: Interview guidelines with graduates in Shepparton and Mildura**

Questions
<b>General questions</b>
What did you study at La Trobe University? Was this course your first choice?
Mode of entrance/enrolment: e.g. ATAR; TEP; mature-age; Aspire
Background: age; country of origin; visa status; current residence location
Tertiary education/qualifications experience overseas and/or in Australia.
Parents' occupation/education background overseas and/or in Australia.
<b>Accessing higher education</b>
What would motivated you to attend university?
Where did you hear about or get information about university?
Is there anything that assisted you in being able to attend university?
Is there anything that made and/or still makes attending university challenging?
Why did you chose to stay in Shepparton/Mildura for university?
Was university part of reason for coming to Shepparton?
Are there programs, people, activities, etc. that helped you adjust when you started university?
Were you offered any type of support – academic, financial – to aid in attending university?
<b>Experiencing university culture</b>
What was your experience of university like?
How did it compare to your experience of high school?
Were you involved with any university clubs, activities, sports, societies or any other groups?
At university, who did you spend time/hang out with?
What things did you do outside of university with your time? How did these impact your university experience?
Did you do paid or unpaid work? How did this impact your university experience?
Can you tell me about some specific experiences you had interacting with students from different backgrounds?
Did the university feel like a welcoming place for people from different backgrounds- cultural, ethnic, religious? Did you feel a sense of belonging?
Did/do you feel that Shepparton/Mildura is a welcoming place for people from different backgrounds- cultural, ethnic, religious? Did/do you feel a sense of belonging in Shepparton/Mildura?
Can you tell me about your views on how Indigenous Australian culture is approached at university?
<b>Learning and support</b>
What was your experience of the lecturers/teaching staff? What about support staff, administrative staff?
Did you use any support services at La Trobe University?
What did you like most and least about learning at La Trobe University?
What do you think about the way things were taught?
What do you think about the curriculum, the things you learned?
Did you feel that La Trobe University gave you any connections or contacts within the community for your future, for example for work?
What would you say were the best sources of support for your studies?
Were there any hindrances to your studies?
Can you tell me about any diversity related course work, racial/cultural awareness workshops or programs, or events sponsored by racial/ethnic groups at university?

Questions
<b>Outcomes and aspirations</b>
What have you been up to since finishing at La Trobe University?
Do you want to live and work in Shepparton/Mildura?
Is there anything about being in a regional town that you think makes the school and university experiences different to being in or near a city?
What has your work been like for you?
What do you feel you have gained from going to university?
Do you think you have changed in any way?
Has university played a part in you doing the work you are currently doing? How so? If not, do you think it will eventually?
What other things have helped you find your desired employment?
Have there been any barriers/challenges regarding finding your desired employment after university?
During your time at university, have your relationships with your family and/or other friends stayed more or less the same, or have there been any changes you have noticed?
What do you think are your personal strengths that helped you with your studies?

**Table 4: Interview guidelines with key community stakeholders in Shepparton and Mildura**

Questions
Can you describe a little bit about your work, especially around issues of youth and/or education?
Can you tell us about the young people in Shepparton/Mildura with recent migrant backgrounds and your thoughts on their participation in university?
For those who go to university, are many of them staying in Shepparton/Mildura, or going to other cities?
What do you think assists these students in being able to attend university?
What challenges are you aware of that some of these students may face in accessing university?
What about for achieving at university?
Do you think families in these communities have any concerns or issues about their children attending university?
Are there any specific programs/efforts for collaboration between your organisation and the represented communities, the schools, and/or the university in regards to these young people attending university?
From what you hear, does the university feel like a welcoming place for people from different backgrounds? Do they feel a sense of belonging?
Do you think these young people feel that Shepparton/Mildura is a welcoming place for people from different backgrounds? Do they feel a sense of belonging in Shepparton/Mildura?
Is there anything about being in a regional town that you think makes students' school and university experiences different to being in or near a city?
What strengths/advantages do some of these students have/bring with them regarding the prospect of accessing university? And succeeding at university?
What do you think is needed to improve/increase university participation of students from new migrant backgrounds?

**Table 5: Interview guidelines with secondary school principals and support staff in Shepparton and Mildura**

Questions
<b>University participation for new migrants</b>
Can you tell me about your students who are new migrants
What are your impressions about how they're going? Their experiences? Does it vary by group?
Does your school have any programs/activities to help students think about university? Anything specifically tailored to recent arrival background students? Any programs/efforts to work collaboratively with either parents, community groups, with the university, ethnic council?
In your view, what is the 'climate' like at this school, that is, in regards to overall intercultural/interethnic relations amongst the students, and between staff and students?
Are you aware of many new migrants going on to attend university? Of those who do, do many seem to attend here in Shepparton/Mildura?
What do you think assists these students in being able to attend university?
What challenges are you aware of that some of these students may face in accessing university? And for achieving at university?
Is there anything about being in a regional town that you think makes the school and university experiences different to being in or near a city?
Can you tell me about your own experiences working with students from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds?
How do teachers/staff approach diversity, especially around teaching?
What strengths/advantages do some of these students have/bring with them regarding the prospect of accessing university? And succeeding at university?
In your view, what is needed to improve/increase university participation of students from new migrant backgrounds?

**Table 6: Interview guidelines with lecturing, administrative and support staff at La Trobe University campuses**

Questions
<b>University participation for new migrants</b>
Can you tell me about your students who are new migrants
What are your impressions about how they are going? Their experiences? Does it vary by group?
Does the university/campus have any programs/activities to assist students from recent migrant backgrounds?
Any programs/efforts to work collaboratively with either parents, community groups, with the schools, ethnic council, etc.?
What do you think assists these students in being able to attend university?
What challenges are you aware of that some of these students may face in accessing university?
What about any challenges they face in achieving at university?
In your view, what is the 'climate' like at this campus, that is, in regards to overall intercultural/interethnic relations amongst the students, and between staff and students?
Are you aware of differences of experience within and between groups of students from different migrant backgrounds?
Can you tell me about any diversity-related course work, ethnic/cultural awareness activities, workshops, programs etc., or events sponsored by ethnic/cultural groups?
Is there anything about being in a regional town that you think makes the school and university experiences different to being in or near a city?
Can you tell me about your own experiences working with students from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds?
How do teachers/staff approach diversity, especially around teaching?
What strengths/advantages do some of these students have/bring with them regarding the prospect of accessing and succeeding at university?
What do you think is needed to improve prospects for university participation of students from new migrant backgrounds?
What about for improving their potential achievement at university?

**Table 7: Focus group guidelines with community members and leaders in Shepparton and Mildura**

Questions
Can you say a little bit about your community in Shepparton/Mildura?
Can you tell us about the young people in Shepparton/Mildura of your community and your thoughts on their participation in university?
For those who go to university, are many of them staying in Shepparton/Mildura, or going to other cities?
What do you think assists these students in being able to attend university?
What strengths/advantages do some of these students have/bring with them regarding the prospect of accessing university?
What challenges do some of these students face in accessing university?
What would you say are the greatest sources of support for your young people in their studies?
What challenges do some of these students face while they are at university?
Do families in your community have any concerns or issues about their children going to university? Or any concerns or issues about them <i>not</i> going to university?
From what you hear, does the university feel like a welcoming place for people from different backgrounds-cultural, ethnic, and religious? Do students feel a sense of belonging?
Do you think these young people feel that Shepparton/Mildura is a welcoming place for people from different backgrounds?
Is there anything about being in a regional town that you think makes students' school and university experiences different to being in or near a city?
What would be your hopes and goals for the young people of your community?
What do you think is needed to improve/increase university participation of students from new migrant backgrounds?