

Submission to the Inquiry into Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System Strategic Review

Submitted by: Ethnic Communities Council of WA Inc. (ECCWA)

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Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	2
About ECCWA	2
Our Vision	2
The Need for Support.....	3
Personal Testimonies and Expert Opinions.....	3
Testimonial 1:	3
Testimonial 2:	3
Expert Opinion:	4
Case study on Cultural Stigma around Apprenticeship In Ethnic Communities and Its Consequences	4
Case Study 1: Mental Health Issues and Broken Dreams in the South Asian Community	4
Recommendations	6
1. Engagement with Community Leaders and Role Models.....	6
2. Implement targeted outreach and support programs.....	6
Furthermore, 5 primary initiatives can be implemented to address the issues of apprenticeship stigma within ethnic communities:.....	7
Conclusion	7
Reference:	8
Appendices:.....	8



Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia Inc.

Executive Summary

The Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia (ECCWA) acknowledges that people from different cultural backgrounds encounter considerable obstacles when applying for traineeships and apprenticeships. Cultural stigma, ignorance, and inadequate support networks frequently deter ethnic communities from pursuing their desired career paths. The purpose of this submission is to draw attention to the need for focused efforts that address the particular difficulties these communities face and foster inclusivity.

Introduction

Australia's workforce is enriched by its cultural diversity, but many people from ethnic communities face barriers to accessing and completing apprenticeships and traineeship programs. Addressing these barriers is critical for creating an inclusive and skilled workforce that can meet the country's economic needs.

About ECCWA

The culturally and linguistically diverse communities of Western Australia are represented by and have support from the Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia (ECCWA), a preeminent advocacy group. Our goal is to advance equality of opportunity, harmony, and inclusivity for all. Concerning ECCWA The culturally and linguistically diverse communities of Western Australia are represented by and have support from the Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia (ECCWA), a preeminent advocacy group. Our goal is to advance equality of opportunity, harmony, and inclusivity for all.

Our Vision

ECCWA envisions a society in which job opportunities and vocational training are equally accessible to people from all cultural backgrounds. With competent and welcoming workplaces, we hope to establish a culture that values diversity, strengthens communities, and promotes economic prosperity.



The Need for Support

Many ethnic communities continue to harbor cultural stigmas and misconceptions about apprenticeships and traineeships. These perceptions are frequently the result of a lack of awareness, language barriers, and traditional beliefs that place an emphasis on academic paths over vocational training. Furthermore, people from various backgrounds may face obstacles such as limited access to information, financial constraints, and a lack of mentorship or role models in their communities.

Personal Testimonies and Expert Opinions

Testimonial 1:

"Growing up in a traditional Lebanese household, the prospect of pursuing a trade was never encouraged or discussed. My parents' expectations were crystal clear: I had to attend university and earn a degree, preferably in a prestigious field such as medicine or law," explains Fatima, 22. *"Apprenticeships were regarded as a second-class option for those who were unable to succeed academically. There was a clear stigma associated with vocational training in my community."* Fatima recalls being torn between her personal interests and her family's expectations. *"I've always enjoyed hands-on work and was fascinated by the construction industry. However, whenever I mentioned the idea of an apprenticeship, my parents immediately shut it down. They viewed it as a dead end with no future prospects."*

Testimonial 2:

Rajesh, 26, of Indian descent, describes a similar experience. *"My parents moved to Australia with the hope of providing their children with better educational opportunities. However, their perception of 'better' was limited to traditional academic fields such as medicine, engineering, and law. Vocational training was frequently overlooked or disregarded as an option. I remember being interested in pursuing an apprenticeship in the automotive industry, but my parents were adamantly opposed to it,"* Rajesh says. *"They saw it as a step backward, something that would harm our family's standing in the Indian community. The stigma surrounding trades was deeply ingrained."*



Expert Opinion:

Dr. Samantha Lee, a specialist in cultural diversity, highlights the importance of mental adjustment. "A lot of families in our neighborhood still think that going to trade school is a better option than going to college. This way of thinking has its roots in long-standing cultural customs and societal perceptions." But as Dr. Lee says, "things have changed, and we need to fight this stigma." "We must advocate for the importance of apprenticeships and skilled trades as respectable and fulfilling career options. Without worrying about criticism from others or pressure from their families, our young people should be encouraged to take advantage of a variety of opportunities that suit their interests and skills.

Case study on Cultural Stigma around Apprenticeship In Ethnic Communities and Its Consequences

Case Study 1: Mental Health Issues and Broken Dreams in the South Asian Community

Amir, a young British Pakistani man, had a natural aptitude for hands-on work and a strong interest in carpentry from a young age. He excelled in woodworking classes at school and found great joy in making intricate pieces with his hands.

After finishing his secondary education, Amir was offered a highly coveted apprenticeship with a well-known carpentry firm. This apprenticeship was not only an opportunity to hone his skills, but also a step toward a rewarding career in a field he genuinely enjoyed. Amir's dreams, however, were met with fierce opposition from his parents, who held deeply ingrained traditional beliefs that academic success was the only path to a respectable future. In their opinion, pursuing a vocational trade was a lesser option, one that would bring shame and dishonor to the family.

Despite Amir's pleas and attempts to explain the importance and prospects of the apprenticeship, his parents were adamant. They issued an ultimatum: either Amir abandons his carpentry ambitions and enrolls in a university program, or he will be disowned and excluded from the family. Faced with the prospect of losing his family's support and acceptance, Amir reluctantly enrolled in a university program that he had no genuine interest in. The constant pressure, lack of passion, and weight of unfulfilled dreams had a serious impact on his mental health, causing depression and anxiety.

Amir's mental health issues eventually became too much, and he dropped out of university, straining his already strained relationship with his parents. He found himself lost, emotionally distressed, and without the support system he desperately needed.

The study cited Amir's case as a moving example of the profound psychological impact that cultural stigma and parental pressure can have on young people. The consequences included not only mental health problems, but also strained family relationships, a lack of career fulfillment, and the possibility of long-term emotional and professional ramifications. The researchers emphasized the importance of raising awareness and understanding in South Asian communities about the value of supporting individual passions and aspirations, even if they deviate from traditional academic paths.

Case Study 2: Middle Eastern Community's Estrangement and Intergenerational Conflict The experiences of Iranian-Australian youth who face cultural barriers to vocational training were investigated in a qualitative study by Khosravi (2019). Leila, one of the participants, was very interested in pursuing an apprenticeship in the automotive sector, which is customarily dominated by men in her community. Leila's parents fiercely opposed her decision, citing cultural norms and worries about societal perceptions, despite Leila's passion and aptitude.

As the disagreement grew more intense, communication broke down completely, and she eventually became estranged from her family. Leila persevered in her apprenticeship despite experiencing severe emotional distress and a lack of support from her family. The study made clear how cultural stigma, especially when it comes to people who question traditional gender norms, can lead to emotional distress, family discord, and intergenerational conflicts.

The study brought to light how cultural stigma may cause people to pass up important opportunities, which could ultimately impede their ability to advance in their careers, maintain financial stability, and live a higher-quality life. These case studies demonstrate the significant effects that the cultural stigma associated with apprenticeships can have on people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and they are backed by academic research. Consequences can include unfulfilled potential, financial hardship, and a lack of career fulfillment, in addition to mental health issues, strained family relationships, and emotional distress.

Recommendations

Based on a review of scholarly literature and case studies, two key strategies are recommended to address the cultural stigma associated with apprenticeships in ethnic communities:

1. Engagement with Community Leaders and Role Models.

Khosravi's (2019) study on Iranian-Australian youth navigating cultural barriers to vocational training found that cultural stigma can cause intergenerational conflicts and emotional distress, especially when challenging traditional gender roles by pursuing apprenticeships. To address this issue, the study recommends that respected community elders and leaders serve as ambassadors for apprenticeship programs. Their participation can give these initiatives credibility and aid in the removal of cultural barriers within their respective communities. Furthermore, displaying testimonials from successful tradespeople and apprentices from similar ethnic backgrounds can inspire and motivate young people to pursue vocational opportunities.

2. Implement targeted outreach and support programs.

The OECD report "Ensuring Labour Market Success for Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Youth" (2012) recommends implementing outreach and support programs tailored to ethnic minority communities. These programs can address specific cultural barriers, provide language assistance, and provide individualized guidance throughout the apprenticeship process. These programs can effectively reach and support members of underrepresented groups, enabling their successful participation in apprenticeship programs, by collaborating with government agencies and community organizations.

Through the involvement of community leaders, the display of role models, and the implementation of focused outreach and support initiatives, these strategies seek to question deeply ingrained beliefs, offer culturally appropriate counsel, and establish a welcoming atmosphere that promotes and facilitates members of ethnic communities in their pursuit of opportunities for vocational training.



Furthermore, 5 primary initiatives can be implemented to address the issues of apprenticeship stigma within ethnic communities:

1. Launch focused outreach initiatives and awareness campaigns to inform ethnic communities of the advantages and career opportunities provided by traineeships and apprenticeships.
2. Provide culturally sensitive mentorship and support services to assist individuals from diverse backgrounds with application and completion processes.
3. Collaborate with community leaders, elders, and influencers to combat stigma and promote positive narratives about vocational training in ethnic communities.
4. Provide financial assistance and incentives to underrepresented groups to encourage them to participate in and complete apprenticeships and training programs.
5. Encourage collaborations between educational establishments, businesses, and neighborhood associations to build welcoming and encouraging work environments for trainees and apprentices from a variety of backgrounds.

Conclusion

Addressing the cultural stigma and barriers that ethnic communities face when pursuing apprenticeships and traineeships is critical to developing a skilled and inclusive workforce. By implementing targeted initiatives, providing support systems, and challenging misconceptions, we can enable people from all walks of life to pursue rewarding vocational paths and contribute to Australia's economic growth.

Reference:

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OECD. (2012). *Ensuring Labour Market Success for Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Youth*. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/50473547.pdf>

Appendices:

Niina Ohta

Niina is an undergraduate student majoring in Environmental Science at the University of Western Australia. As an international student from Japan, she is advocating with the Ethnic Communities Council of WA as a policy and research intern.

Mrs Barbara van Reyk

Barbara has retired after 25 years in legal practice as a senior lawyer at the State Solicitors Office, specializing in criminal justice issues mainly in the sentencing of offenders. After retirement, she served two years on the Prisoners Review Board and is now an advocate with the Ethnic Communities Council of WA.

Rasha Al-Trihi

Rasha studied and practised law in Iraq for a decade, before migrating to Australia. She established and ran community programs for the Arab community and provided advocacy for clients through the EAST program at Ethnic Communities Council of WA (ECCWA). She is currently the Coordinator of the Genesis program whose aim is to empower CaLD women to identify their strengths and be ready to face life challenges.