

## Study reveals experiences of students from refugee backgrounds

December 11, 2018

Recommendations for better navigating refugee education, improving educational outcomes for students of refugee backgrounds and enhanced participation of these students and their families in school communities are included in a new report, launched at Federation's December Council.

The union commissioned professors Megan Watkins and Greg Noble from Western Sydney University to comprehensively map the educational experiences of students from a refugee background in NSW public schools, as a Federation centenary project.

The study involved research into the needs of refugee students and their families in NSW and how teachers in public schools can be best supported to meet these needs.



The 18 recommendations in the report, *It's Complex! Working with Students of Refugee Backgrounds and their Families in NSW public schools*, address school processes and procedures; staffing and workload; teacher professional learning; curriculum materials for students; centralised support for teachers; and working with external agencies.

Western Sydney University will develop professional learning resources early next year based on identified gaps as a result of this research.

Federation will now seek to brief the Department on the findings of this significant research, as well as other key stakeholders such as the state opposition, the P&C Federation, Multicultural NSW and other peak bodies.

The report dedicates a chapter to each of the key actors in this area of public education and themes throughout the research include, but are not limited to:

- increasing complexity of student populations posing challenges for classroom teaching
- exemplary schools and IECs as resources for others
- overwhelmingly positive feedback from refugee parents and students as to the support schools and teachers provide
- counselling needs for students and teachers
- reported racism by refugee students within schools
- funding issues
- transition challenges
- English language needs
- first language needs
- and EAL/D (English as an additional language or dialect) pedagogy.

The qualitative enquiry drew on interviews and focus groups with principals, teachers, refugee and non-refugee students, refugee parents and representatives from key government, non-government and community organisations together with observations of a range of school-based activities, including in the classroom, playground and beyond.

Ten schools, including primary, secondary and Intensive English Centres (IECs), representing metropolitan and regional student populations, of high and low numbers of students from refugee background, were involved in the project.

The union cannot thank these schools enough for their participation in such a vital work for public education. Every public school will receive a copy of this report during January.

For more information, send an email to [multicultural@nswtf.org.au](mailto:multicultural@nswtf.org.au).

— Amber Flohm, Multicultural Officer/Organiser

<b>Recommendations</b>	
	Improve procedures <b>Recommendation 1</b> of students of refugee backgrounds in mainstream high schools and primary schools
	Semesterise the transition <b>Recommendation 2</b> from IECs to mainstream high schools
	Develop the use of youth <b>Recommendation 3</b> groups, with positive settlement experiences, to act as a resource for newly arrived students
	Improve communication <b>Recommendation 4</b> and parents and carers of students of refugee backgrounds
	Appoint EAL/D-qualified <b>Recommendation 5</b> EAL/D positions across IECs, high schools and primary schools
	Ensure compliance a <b>Recommendation 6</b> nd procedures for EAL/D and mainstream teachers to undertake lesson planning and review and enhance accountability procedures in relation to this
	Ensure compliance a <b>Recommendation 7</b> nd procedures for staff performing community liaison work when assisting students of refugee backgrounds and their families
	Improve counselling <b>Recommendation 8</b> nd support for students whose health and wellbeing have been affected by vicarious trauma
	Increase the number of <b>Recommendation 9</b> schools with significant numbers of students of refugee backgrounds
	Improve the understanding <b>Recommendation 10</b> across the curriculum, of EAL/D pedagogy
	Develop professional <b>Recommendation 11</b> around cultural understanding and the refugee experience that would include separate modules for schools with large numbers of students of refugee backgrounds and those with limited numbers
	Improve mechanisms <b>Recommendation 12</b> across schools
	Improve the training <b>Recommendation 13</b> for support officers — ethnic
	Deploy the expertise <b>Recommendation 14</b> developed in IECs across a range of schools
	Develop curriculum <b>Recommendation 15</b> around cultural understanding and the refugee experience
	Ensure the refugee <b>Recommendation 16</b> initiatives are ongoing
	Ensure there is central <b>Recommendation 17</b> Multicultural Education support for NSW public schools
	Improve the coordination <b>Recommendation 18</b> between government and non-government agencies that work

with schools around supporting students of refugee backgrounds and their families