

Summary of evaluation of SSI Allianz Refugee Scholarships Program

This summary was compiled in February 2021.



A big thing I got from this scholarship was confidence. As a refugee, alone in a new country, knowing there is a program and people there to help me provided a lot of confidence. This was as helpful as the financial support.”

(Scholarship recipient)

1. Background

The Scholarships Program, with funding support from Allianz, has been facilitated since 2016. Through the awarding of annual educational grants distributed across four streams – Secondary, Vocational Education and Training (VET), University, and Skills Accreditation and Qualifications Recognition (“Skills”), – the program intends to enhance refugee inclusion in the New South Wales education system by reducing financial barriers.

As the first outcome evaluation of the Scholarships Program since inception, Settlement Services International (SSI) sought to identify the impact achieved i.e. has the program developed the capacities of refugees to contribute in a meaningful way to social and economic life in Australia. The evaluation analysed results from 2016 to 2020 inclusive.

2. Methods

The pro-bono evaluation was led by postgraduate students in the University of Sydney’s School of Project Management. The evaluation explored scholarship recipient outcomes relative to costs using quantitative and qualitative evidence, identified additional positive recipient outcomes, and benchmarked criteria, performance and unique aspects of the program against similar initiatives.

The evaluation involved desktop research, document and literature review, surveys, and self-nominated recipient and stakeholder interviews. The survey data was supplemented through key stakeholder interviews with former recipients, SSI staff, and other program stakeholders from SSI and external partners.

In total, over 60 recipients and stakeholders engaged in the evaluation. While this is not a statistically representative sample of participants, every effort was made to gather feedback from across a broad spectrum of recipients and stakeholders, and ensure as balanced a sample as possible. Further limitations included: absent, invalid, and inconsistent program data; no baseline dataset; and self-select and self-report methods (e.g. 26.5% survey completion rate).

As such, the themes drawn from the data provide SSI with an *emerging picture* rather than a *definitive picture* of program results.

3. General results

Evaluation findings indicate that the SSI Allianz Refugee Scholarships Program is realising its aim of developing the capacities of refugees to contribute in a meaningful way to social and economic life in Australia.

Additional benefits include reduced financial stress, improved self-confidence, a greater feeling of motivation, and feeling more welcome in Australia. Scholarship recipients often reported that they had more focus and positive attitude towards their education and plans for their future and developed social connections.

In summary, considering limitations, the data demonstrated:

3.1 Outcomes

- Over 70% of scholarship recipients strongly agreed or agreed that the Scholarships Program had a positive impact on their life and/or career in Australia.
- Over 60% of recipients strongly agreed or agreed that they were more confident in their own ability because of the scholarship.
- Over 70% of recipients from Secondary, University, and VET streams strongly agreed or agreed that they were more motivated to succeed, had a more positive attitude, and were focused more on their education and study because of the scholarship.
- 65% of respondents from the Secondary and University streams consider the grant was of extreme importance to their education.
- Over 80% of Secondary recipients (that participated in the evaluation) had moved onto further education. Benchmark: 41% of Australian 19-year-olds are enrolled in higher education¹.

3.2 Outputs

- 515 applications were received during the evaluation period.
- 182 scholarships were provided (35% success rate).
- Most recipients were in the 12 to 24 age bracket and the gender distribution was equal.
- \$412,000 of scholarship grants were disbursed.
- Most of the funding was allocated to Secondary (reflecting recipient volume) and University streams (reflecting high grant value per recipient).
- Average scholarship value per person per stream shows Skills Recognition and VET stream grants are lower than University. However, in some individual cases the cost for qualification recognition and VET can be as high as university grants.

¹ Mapping Higher Education, Grattan Institute, 2018

Case study: University stream

Mohamed* arrived in Australia in 2014 as a refugee. He is now at university studying commerce.

Mohamed spoke no English when he arrived and had to “start from scratch”. He “spent years honing my language skills”. After relocating from Queensland to New South Wales, Mohamed continued to work to improve his English and support himself through TAFE for University entrance. All the while he searched for refugee education support opportunities. An online search led him to SSI. Mohamed decided to “give it a go”.

Mohamed stated that the Scholarship Program greatly reduced his financial stress and that he was “very grateful for every dollar” he received.

When asked how the Scholarship had impacted his life in Australia, Mohamed said it had “transformed my life”. Coming to a new country alone as refugee, he gradually built his self-confidence with the support and help from “organisations like SSI”, this is “more helpful than cash”. “Knowing there are organisations caring about refugees and there to help”, made him feel part of society. He has made friends at university and is engaged in the community. He has also worked as a volunteer for SSI, which made him “feel great”.

Mohamed was also proud that he would soon have an interview for the Allianz Graduate Program.

From refugee to successful University student to potential Allianz employee – quite a journey.

* has been changed

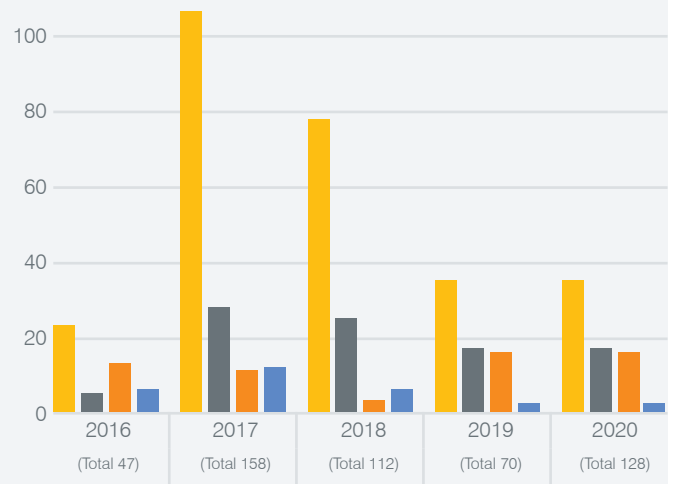
4. Findings

4.1 Applications

Secondary received the highest number of applications (303; 59%) and the lowest was Skills Recognition (30; 6%). 2017 saw the largest number of applications (159; 31%) and the lowest was 2016 (47; 9%). Consistently each year Secondary received the largest number of applicants while Skills Recognition received the least. VET applications were stable from year to year (+/- 12).



Figure 1
Applications disaggregated by year and stream

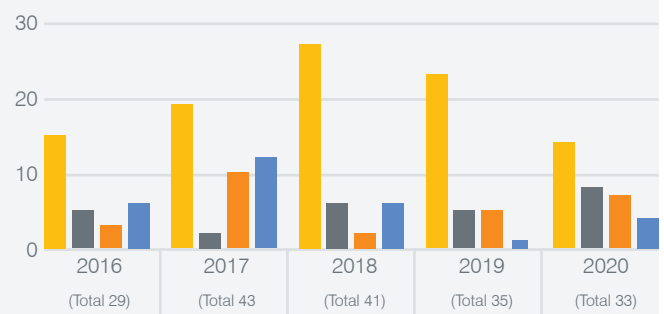


4.2 Recipients

182 scholarships were granted. The average number of recipients per year was 36. 2017 saw the largest number of scholarships provided (43; 24%) and the lowest was 2016 (29; 16%). The Secondary stream has the most recipients (98; 54%) and VET the least (27; 15%).



Figure 2
Recipients disaggregated by year and stream



4.3 Scholarships financial value

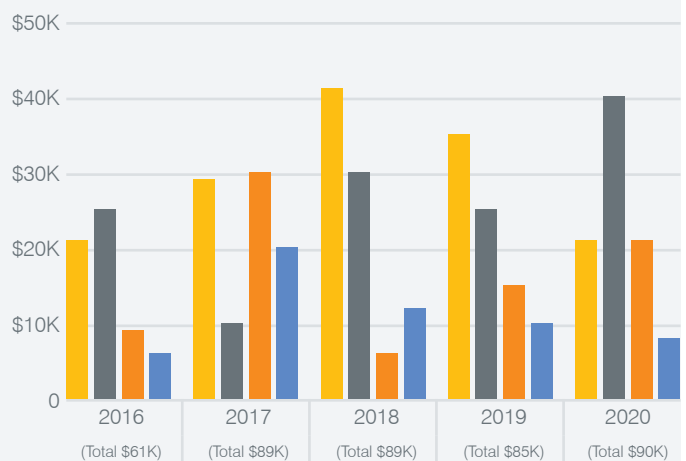
The total value of scholarships grants disbursed over 5 years was **AUD\$412,000** with an average annual distribution of AUD\$90,000 (excluding 2016, AUD\$61,000).

The majority of funds were provided to Secondary (AUD\$145,000; 35%) and University (AUD\$130,000; 31%) streams. VET and Skills Recognition were the least funded streams.

On average, a scholarship recipient received approximately: Secondary AUD\$1,500; Skills AUD\$2,300; VET AUD\$3,000; and University AUD\$5,000.



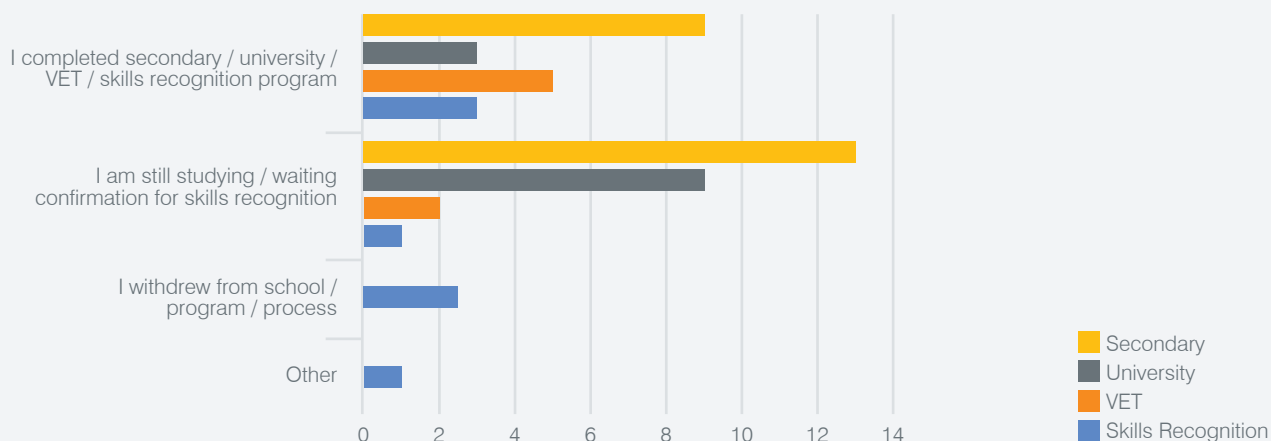
Figure 3
Scholarship grant distribution by stream and year



4.4 Further studies

Eight (of 9) respondents from the Secondary stream who have completed their studies have moved onto further studies. 1 of 3 and 1 of 5 respondents from the University and VET streams, respectively, have moved onto further studies. Further studies included; Bachelor's and Master's degrees in architecture, web development, medicine and medical science.

Figure 4
Survey respondent study status



4.5 Education outcomes

Figure 5
Secondary outcomes

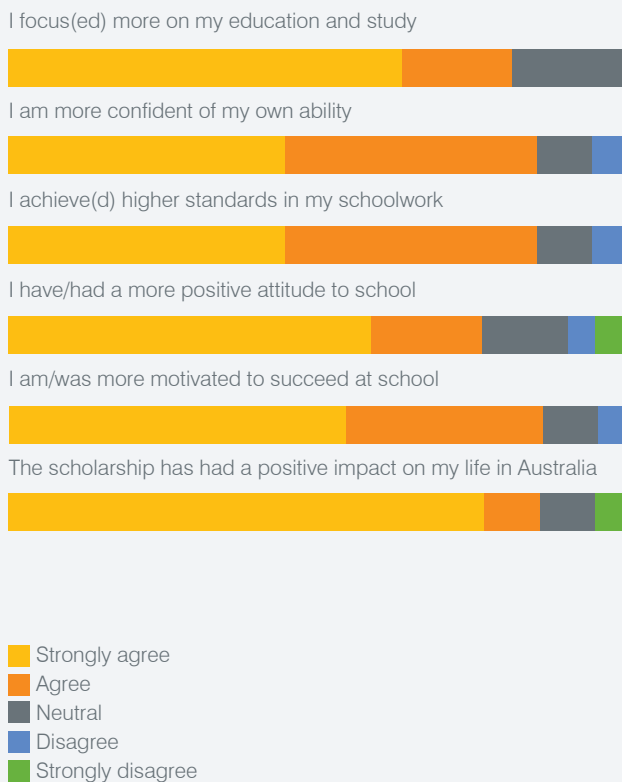


Figure 6
University outcomes

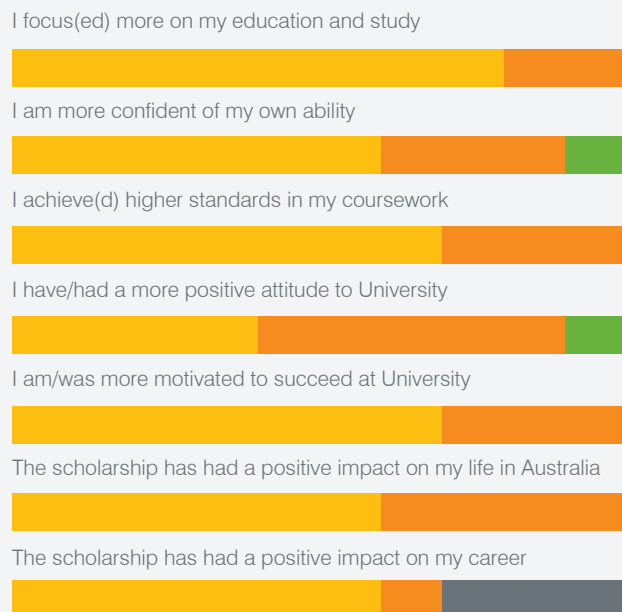


Figure 7
VET outcomes



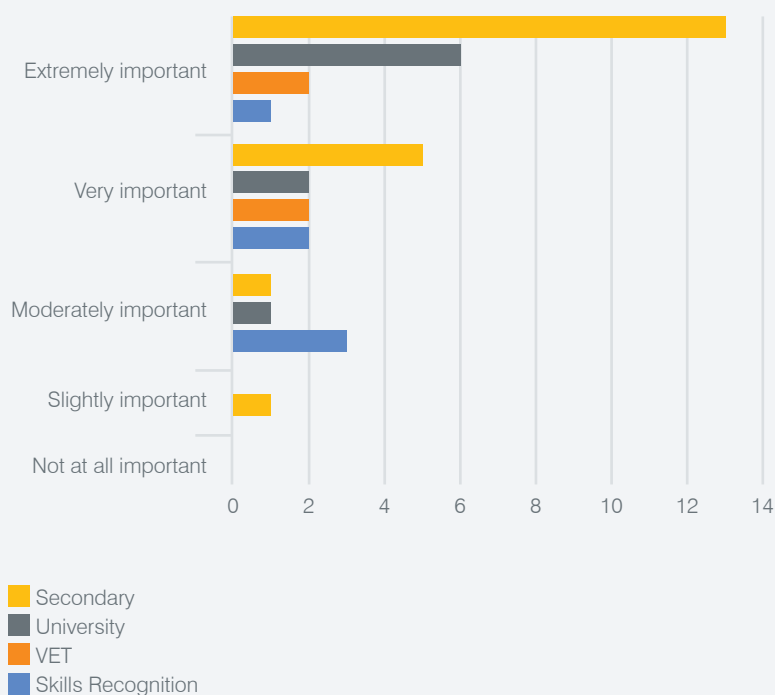
Figure 8
Skills Recognition outcomes



4.6 Scholarships social value

In general, most respondents considered that the financial support from the Scholarships Program was important for their education or recognition process. Over 65% of the respondents from the Secondary and the University streams consider it is of *extreme importance* for their education.

Figure 9
Importance of financial support for respondents



4.7 Recipient qualitative feedback

Overall, recipient interview feedback was positive and supported the quantitative findings. A common theme that emerged was the importance of the grant for reducing financial pressure. The recipients liked that they had the flexibility to spend the grant based on their unique needs e.g. tuition fee support, purchasing of IT equipment, or to put towards living expenses. Another theme was recipients felt encouraged and more confident to continue their study and connect with other students at school. And,

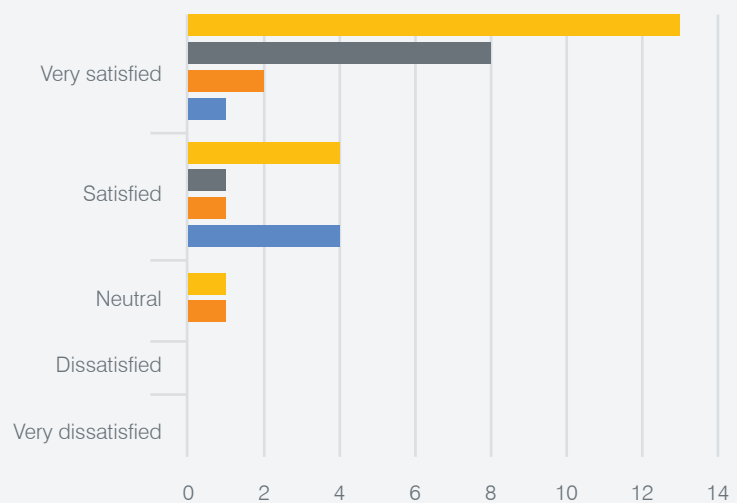
after study completion, recipients were more motivated to look for jobs.

They agreed that the scholarship improved employability and helped them to reach their potential. Recipients also highlighted how the support extended to their families, by reducing household financial stress and families being encouraged by the positive attitude of recipients.

4.8 Overall satisfaction

The majority of respondents from all streams were satisfied with the Scholarships Program.

Figure 10
Respondent program satisfaction



5. Future directions

Evaluation findings², combined with current Australian education and labour market trends, suggest a demand for, and opportunity to, expand the program. SSI can leverage the workforce reskilling demand by emphasising that low socio-economic communities must have equal access to education and reskilling opportunities and, thus, access to sustainable employment.

Citation

Aisautova A, Huany S, Liu G, Wang Y, Ye I (2020). Evaluation Report of the SSI Allianz Refugee Scholarships Program. Postgraduate Capstone Unit (PMGT5850), School of Project Management, University of Sydney.

² The evaluation report made a series of recommendations that are to be prioritised and resourced.