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Avoiding stuck places: University educators' views on supporting migrant and refugee students with transitioning through and out of higher education

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Avoiding stuck places: University educators' views on supporting migrant and refugee students with transitioning through and out of higher education

Abstract

University student equity cohorts experience inequitable graduate/ employment outcomes. These challenges are magnified for Culturally and Linguistically Marginalised Migrant and/or Refugee students (CALMMR). Consequently, this study aimed to investigate the views of Australian university educators on the transitioning of CALMMR students from higher education into employment. Employing mixed methods, this study commenced with a survey of university educators (n=40) followed by semi-structured interviews (n=13). Findings highlighted that specialised, diverse support is needed for CALMMR students across studies and into careers. Specifically, students faced additional challenges, which are not being met in a fragmented university system. Universities need to provide support that is more holistic, targeted, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive, to address the inequity in graduate/employment outcomes experienced by CALMMR students.

Practitioner Notes

1. Culturally and Linguistically Marginalised Migrant and/or Refugee students (CALMMR) experience inequitable graduate and employment outcomes.
2. Currently university services for CALMMR are fragmented.
3. We know little how university educators perceive the transition and support needs of migrant and refugee students.
4. More specialised, diverse support is required for CALMMR students across studies and into careers to prevent student 'stuckness'.
5. Universities must generate holistic, targeted, trauma-informed and culturally responsive support for CALMMR students.

Keywords

migrant and refugee students, transitions, stuck places, graduate employability, higher education, equity

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Introduction

While the relationship between education and employment may appear to be self-evident, the role of universities in producing 'work-ready' graduates remains contested. While Tomlinson and Anderson (2021) argue that "Higher education is not, nor has historically been, a training provider that meets very specific employer demands" (p.385–386), a public expectation persists that universities will provide opportunities for social mobility and pathways into meaningful employment. This is particularly important for so-called 'equity cohorts', who experience inequitable post-graduation outcomes (Carroll & Li, 2022; Merrill et al., 2020; Pitman et al., 2019). In Australia, three equity groups are formally identified: students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Indigenous students, and students from rural and remote locations.

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Transitioning from university into meaningful opportunities — whether employment, future study, or other options — is a piece of the 'equity puzzle' that has attracted limited, albeit growing, attention (Newman et al., 2021; Baker, Due & Rose, 2021). Underpinning a disproportionate focus on access is an institutional assumption that once in, students will experience smooth movements and linear transitions through and out of their studies (Baker & Irwin, 2021; Gale & Parker, 2014; Gravett, 2021). This assumption is based on assumptions about personal skillsets and academic skillsets of an imagined 'ideal student' (Wong & Chiu, 2020) — someone who has navigational knowledge of systems and processes, and who will develop independence and make agentic decisions as they move through their studies. However, for many students, this institutional logic transition — as a unified entity that can be atomised and managed — hinders their navigation and movement through their studies, creating 'stuck places' (Baker & Irwin, 2021).

Researchers have explored the conceptual and logistical puzzle of supporting students to transition *into* higher education (see, e.g., Baker & Irwin, 2021; Gale & Parker, 2014; Gravett, 2021), often captured under 'first year experience' or 'transition into university'. However, that there is little that has explored transitions *through* or — critically — *out of* their studies into employment or further study. This is particularly problematic for the graduate outcomes of traditionally under-represented (henceforth 'equity cohort') student groups (Carroll & Li, 2022; Pitman et al., 2019). These challenges are magnified for Culturally and Linguistically Minority Migrant and/or Refugee students (CALMMR), who already experience disadvantage with employment in the workforce due to a range of intersecting challenges, including language, unfamiliarity with host country workplace culture, and family and caring responsibilities (Bajwa et al., 2018).

We know little about how university educators (lecturers, convenors, tutors working in ongoing, fixed term, and sessional bases) perceive the transition and support needs of these students. In this article, we respond to two research questions to explore university educators' perceptions of

how CALMMR students transition through their studies, and their views of why this cohort experiences inequitable graduate outcomes:

1) What are university educators' observations of CALMMR students' experiences of transitioning through and out of their studies?
2) What supports do university educators view as needed to support CALMMR students to transition through their studies and into meaningful employment?

Literature

(In)equitable transitions out of higher education and into employment

There are clear patterns in the challenges that educationally disadvantaged students face with employment and graduate outcomes (Carroll & Li, 2022; Pitman et al., 2019; Tomlinson, 2012, 2017). As Tomlinson wrote in (2012), the stratification of educational opportunities translates into similar stratification when students exit their studies:

> Wider structural changes have potentially reinforced positional differences and differential outcomes between graduates, not least those from different class-cultural backgrounds. While mass [higher education] potentially opens up opportunities for non-traditional graduates, new forms of cultural reproduction and social closure continue to empower some graduates more readily than others ... The challenge, it seems, is for graduates to become adept at reading these signals and reframing both their expectations and behaviours. (p. 427)

Despite scholarly interest in issues of widening participation in higher education for under-represented groups, a commensurate lack of focus on graduate outcomes can be explained by a narrow policy that has focused detrimentally on increasing access, rather than on transition out success (Baker, Due & Rose, 2021). This has resulted in a "general assumption that increased access and participation for disadvantaged students will lead, ipso facto, to consequential post-graduation benefits" (Pitman et al., 2019, p. 46). However, there is clear evidence that equity students need equitable supports to 'even the playing field' of employability and graduate outcomes (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; Pitman et al., 2019). For example, Pitman et al.'s (2019) analysis of the Australian Graduate Survey (now called the Graduate Outcomes Survey, and funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment) dataset found that 60% of the respondents reported that their qualification was somewhat or not useful for their employment, suggesting a continuation of existing work that is unrelated to degree. These authors found that of the equity cohorts examined, CALMMR students and women studying in non-traditional areas (WINTA) had the poorest employment outcomes.

Given the consistent patterns of inequitable graduate/ employment outcomes for equity students, it is perhaps surprising that there is little scholarly work examining equitable careers services, as opposed to the strong and growing body of work that has explored employability (see, Merrill et al., 2020; Tomlinson 2012, 2017). There are two studies of note that offer insights into what universities are doing (or not) to support equity cohorts with graduate employability. Andrewartha and Harvey's (2017) Australian study suggests that challenges are caused by "a paucity of tailored services for specific under-represented groups, a lack of staffing and financial resources,

and a dearth of data to inform strategies and priorities" as well as "issues of reluctance and ambivalence, fear of negative preconceptions, and other disincentives among some equity groups" (p. 71).

Moreover, the human capital drivers that push responsibility onto individual's to 'invest in their futures', with students held responsible for 'selling themselves' in the graduate job market, exacerbate inequity (Rice, 2017; Tomlinson, 2012, 2017). Educationally disadvantaged students are less likely to engage in activities that will increase their employability, such as attending careers services, undertaking work placements, or engaging in extra-curricular activities, than their more advantaged counterparts (Christie et al., 2018). Furthermore, the imperative to support equity cohort students to transition out of their studies is magnified when time is factored in. As Okay-Somerville and Scholarios (2017) argue, university-to-work transitions can be particularly challenging because they "happen at a time when graduates make decisions about the most important things in life while not having much experience in doing so" (p. 1276). The inequitable disparities that are evident on graduation and entering the job market therefore warrant further exploration of the role that universities should play in not just addressing under-representation of equity cohort students in terms of access (*transition in*), participation (*transition through*), but also in terms of graduate outcomes (*transition out*).

Inequitable graduate outcomes for CALMMR students

There is clear evidence that CALM students are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to transitioning out of their university studies and into related employment (Carroll & Li, 2022). We include international students in discussions of this workforce marginalisation but recognise that international students typically receive targeted supports during their studies that domestic CALMMR students cannot access.

Language proficiency and accent are both noted as barriers to both work-integrated learning, and postgraduate employment for both CALMMR (Lee et al., 2020; Ramjattan, 2022) and international students (Pham et al., 2018), but with little tailored language provision offered in careers services (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017). Moreover, significant cultural issues in the Australian workplace — labelled 'the canvas ceiling' by Lee and colleagues (2020) — create barriers for CALM employees.

As work integrated learning plays a key role in higher education institutions policy agendas in developing the employability of students, lack of support for these students in this phase of their studies may impact on their transitions to employment. A key source of support for the development of language and cultural navigation exists outside of the careers/ 'transition out' space; however, little is known about how services interact (if at all) and how university educators perceive the challenges that CALMMR face, and the opportunities for improving supports for their ongoing engagement with their studies as they transition through and out of higher education.

Conceptual framing

The conceptualisation of transition that underpins our argument is guided by the view that students experience a series of continuous but fragmented transitions as they move into, through and out of the various components that construct their lives, with their higher education trajectories one of several in an individual's life course (Gale & Parker, 2014; Gravett, 2021). Our

thinking about transitioning out of higher education has been informed by Gale and Parker's (2014) conceptualisation of 'transition as becoming', characterised by a rhizomatic rather than linear pattern, which "symbolises the diversity and multiplicity of not just experiences but of the self, and the concept of becoming indicates the ongoing and evolving nature of transition" (Gravett, 2021, p. 1511). This view stands in sharp contrast to the dominant institutional view of transition that persists in universities, which takes a normative, ritualised, and linear view of how students move between educational spaces (sectors, disciplines, courses) over time. While this serves to partition students' movements in ways that are easier for institutions to bracket and manage, it does a disservice to all students, whose lives rarely align with ritualised and archaic assumptions about how learners access, travel through and exit their university studies.

Transitions are complex and, despite good intentions and opportunities to access university, many students get 'stuck' due to "monolithic assumptions about what students bring with them and can do, and unrealistic expectations of individuals' capacity to help themselves without targeted and responsive supports" (Baker & Irwin, 2021, p. 91). The rhizomatic, 'becoming' view (Gravett, 2021) that informs this article is particularly appropriate for thinking about educationally disadvantaged students—particularly CALMMR students, whose experiences resist the simplistic application of normative expectations—because it provides a conceptual frame for understanding and working with transition in the context of the chaotic messiness of life. As Baker, Due and Rose (2021) argue, CALMMR students' experiences of transitioning into and through higher education can be characterised as a process of constant negotiation: with institutional assumptions about familiarity with educational systems, structures, epistemologies practices and conventions creating fertile conditions for students getting 'stuck' betwixt and between the various thresholds that construct higher education (Baker & Irwin, 2021).

Method

We report from a mixed-methods study, with data collected via a national survey and optional follow up individual interviews with survey respondents. We gained ethics approval from the University of New South Wales (HC190129) and participants were recruited through formal organisations and social media accounts, including refugee education/ higher education network mailing lists and by circulation to Australian universities, as well as through our own networks. The survey was conducted online, and the interviews were conducted remotely via teleconferencing software with survey respondents who signalled willingness to speak to us. This paper focuses on the qualitative interview data with university educators (see Baker et al., 2021 for an account of the survey findings).

Interviews

The interviews with educators (*n*=13; see Table 1) from 13 different universities sought perceptions of CALMMR students' needs and the participants' experiences of teaching this cohort. The participants who took part in these interviews represented a mix of disciplines, contracts (ongoing, fixed term, or sessional), genders, and relative years of experience. We did not gather information about the interviewees' our migration histories or ethnicities, but when pertinent, some participants did share this information. The interviews explored participants' experiences of working with CALMMR students, their observations of transitional experiences,

and their awareness of available institutional supports and students' uptake of these. The individual interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed.

Table 1

Overview of Interviewed Participants

Pseudonym	Role in University
Helen	Lecturer
Lisa	Research Fellow
Alyce	English as Second Language Teacher
Brenda	Lecturer
Connor	Sessional Teacher
Carina	Student Welfare Support Officer
Mike	Sessional Teacher
Isaac	Equity Practitioner (working with CALMMR students)
Fred	Lecturer
Gina	Professor
Tammy	Senior Lecturer
Valerie	Sessional Academic; Higher Degree Research Coordinator
Melanie	English as Second Language Teacher

Analysis

We inductively analysed the transcripts thematically in order to identify the key concerns and issues of the educators we interviewed. This method takes a collaborative approach to coding to ensure both reflexivity and inter-rater reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2019). To this end, initial coding was undertaken by Megan and Prasheela, which was then reviewed by Sally and Clemmi. We then all reviewed the themes together, leading to critical insight into how the quotes used were interpreted. For example, Prasheela used her teaching experiences to help interrogate the teacher's assertions, while Sally and Megan provided with clarity on their views, using their experiences of doing the interviews. Our approach is what Braun and Clarke (2019) describe as 'reflexive thematic' in that we recognise and work with our own positionality, commonalities, and differences as university educators. All team members are university educators teaching into Education, Psychology or Social Work programs, half with ongoing employment and the other half employed on a sessional basis. In practice this enabled a robust and multi-dimensional analysis of the transcripts to capture the various ways that educators identify and reflect on the support needs of CALMMR students. Our analysis suggests that educators view institutional assumptions about CALMMR students' needs and experiences as barriers to their transitions through and out of their studies. In the following section we discuss this in relation to themes of

assumed independence, language proficiency, and help-seeking. We then present the educators' recommendations on how to develop better transition support.

Educators' observations of how CALMMR students transition through and out of their studies

The educators who participated in this study discussed myriad barriers that create 'stuck places' for CALMMR students, impeding their capacity to transition through (participate in) and transition out (gain meaningful graduate employment) of their studies. These barriers are arguably created by institutional assumptions about independence, language development, social connections, and familiarity with western ways of knowing and doing. These challenges are perceived as being exacerbated by the experience of forced migration.

Assumptions of independence

Primary amongst these challenges is the pressure to independently succeed, which results in CALMMR students carrying and not sharing burdens of language difficulties, social isolation, trauma and economic precarity. Participants discussed how such assumptions of independence — based on ideas about 'ideal' self-determining students — position students as savvy navigators in the system who will intuitively seek help and opportunities to succeed both in coursework and to become 'job ready'. However, such assumptions create pressure for many equity cohorts, particularly CALMMR students. The bureaucratic barriers to navigating and accessing supports were described as traumatising for students, Melanie reporting that she "had a lot of students say, 'Well it's just like Iran again, because they didn't want me to have an education there and people don't want me to have an education here'", Helen (herself from a CALM background) outlines this struggle as follows:

> *It's the students' burden to catch up with the language even cultural issues, right? And once you get into the program, we pretend that we are providing the same care and opportunities for the students and if there are any linguistic, cultural issues that prevent you from mastering the skills and knowledge that we provide [we say], "Well, it's your problem.*

This framing of 'transition as problem' casts transitional 'stuck places' in a different light — as an institutional rather than an individual responsibility. Additionally, CALMMR students were perceived by participants as entering programs with a range of responsibilities that may not be experienced by other domestic students (notably with the exception of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, where literature also demonstrates a range of additional responsibilities that may impact upon university study, and which are not accounted for within institutional policies and practices; Oliver et al., 2013). For example, participants discussed many CALMMR students' ongoing responsibilities for their families — both in Australia and overseas — as having a key impact on their capacity to engage in their studies. As Brenda articulates:

> *In many cases, they will have been chosen out of a family to be sent overseas to come, so they have a responsibility to pave the way for other people. So, I think that weighs heavily on some students.*

While most participants considered the strength CALMMR students demonstrate in persevering as admirable, it was also felt to be unfair given the pressure for them to manage systems alone, without community supports in place. Forging social connections when new to a space/ community was also noted as a challenge for CALMMR students. Participants noted how losing social connections through migrating to Australia, combined with a lack of opportunity to connect with domestic students, hindered CALMMR students' ability to develop 'soft skills' and find the social supports necessary to transition through their studies and into meaningful employment.

The social networks that CALMMR students have also impact on their own communities of practice in how they are able to develop and improve their language proficiency independent of the classroom. Not having social support for reading work before submission, or offering feedback was identified as another 'stuck place'. While many students can experience precarity in their familial and social networks, CALMMR students' social supports can be further fractured because of their forced migration journeys. Helen explains that while many students can ask friends and family for help with their university work, the CALMMR students she works with do not have this support and that suggestions to 'ask a family member to help' deny the complexity of some students' circumstances. For instance, one refugee student said to her that he could not ask for help and said: "I don't have a father, my mother is now sick, my siblings are all irresponsible… what can I do?" All participants also pointed to the significant amount of pressure placed on CALMMR students, as "many of the families are scraping money together to fend them, so there's a huge pressure to succeed on top of everything else" (Carina).

Developing language proficiency while studying

While higher education study can (and should) challenge all students to learn and grow, the pressure to independently catch up with peers whilst also learning (often in a new language) and becoming 'employable', creates an additional layer of disadvantage. Our participants described awareness of CALMMR students' efforts to improve their language abilities, understand course content, and navigate policies and conventions. However, the language load created by translating language and concepts was observed to create additional challenges for both students and educators. As Helen articulated,

> *I don't think that non-native speakers' problems are being shared by any institution at any level. If we have to spend 50% more time to read or write this assignment that's not taken as part of our workload or student workload.*

In addition to learning new workplace cultural practices through their programs, CALMMR students have the additional labour of learning another language (disciplinary terminology, professional conventions) 'on the go'. The layered challenges for students who are unfamiliar with the workplace culture or are still developing language proficiency cannot be met in a system that valorises one-size-fits-all transition through/ out supports. For instance, as Lisa explains, careers support also fails to recognise burdens associated with learning language and other new conventions:

> *You still only get 15 minutes consultation, the same as all domestic students and the same as all international students. You get 15 minutes. They don't even take into consideration the background of these kids, and the kids don't share those experiences.*

Here, the application of equal timeslots is indicative of an inequitable system. Without recognition of the amount of effort studying in a different language requires, the burden of transition and being job ready is left to CALMMR student cohorts. Moreover, CALMMR students are unlikely to develop Tomlinson's (2017) five graduate capitals (human, social, cultural, identity, psychological) at a commensurate rate to their Australian-born peers, who can take more of the social and cultural capital for granted, with correspondingly less need for support (Baker et al., 2021).

Participants observed how 'stuck places' were compounded by institutional misrecognition of the complexities of language acquisition as a non-linear process. In particular, indicators of language proficiency, such as English language tests used to predict students' linguistic capacity to engage in higher education, are often interpreted by the total aggregated mark rather than the results of listening, reading, writing, and speaking components. Often students will have a 'jagged profile', with some 'skills' better developed than others, creating another key support need. For example, Alyce observes that:

> *…with [an English proficiency test] in particular, they say like a minimum 6 or a minimum 6.5, but not really what that represents. Often that's an average. They've done better in reading possibly for the test, not reading in general, and for example, their speaking is lower, their vocabulary isn't really that great.*

In this regard, students might be able to transition through parts of programs where they are required to demonstrate learning via one mode (for example, written assignments), but may struggle in other modes (such as feeling confident to ask questions in class or participate in oral assessments). This can be compounded if their language education and testing occurred outside of Australia, without prior exposure to standard Australian English in situ. The type of language tested by proficiency exams also differs to the kind of language that academic study requires. For instance, Helen laments how universities "…treat [CALM] students the same as Australian students" despite "their needs [being] totally different". While all students have to learn academic literacies, CALMMR students have the additional burden of learning these new modes and conventions of meaning-making in another language. Additionally, CALMMR students may come to programs proficient in a disciplinary language, but then struggle in other disciplines, as Brenda observes:

> *Many of our students come in with technical backgrounds. Even if they've been educated here, they've done math degrees or tech degrees … and there's a big difference in the amount of essays they have to write and things. So, they may not have had the chance to develop the language required for this particular level.*

While indicators like language tests and prior study may help with transition into higher education, they do not guarantee student's ability to flourish independently transitioning through programs. For refugees in particular, the challenges created by disrupted education can have profound implications for success in their studies. Thus, while CALMMR students enter into programs with the appropriate testing completed, these admission requirements only account for part of the picture and not the complexities and hurdles that arise from learning to think and write in a second language, for a specialised field. Students are expected to manage this independently, including developing 'job ready' language, and then navigate and find help in institutions that do not speak their first language.

Perceived impacts of trauma for refugee students

For students who have experienced forced migration, transitioning through their studies can be especially complicated by the impacts of disruption, as well as past experiences of trauma and any psychological impacts that result from those experiences. As a result, this creates "stuck places" that makes a traditional, linear idea of transitioning through and out challenging. For example, Lisa described refugee students as feeling "out of place" and "lost", explaining that "they don't get that support they need because their family is not actually aware" of the reality of studying at university, or are simply "not here". Lisa argued that while common thinking in institutions is that once enrolled, refugee students are now "saved", in reality the impact of trauma creates hectic, rhizomatic transitions. For example, Brenda explained how trauma impacts learning in relation to triggers:

> *When you're making up for years of missed education or there are certain trauma triggers in your life, then there will be times when accessing education will become tricky… If people are still living with family in conflict zones still, there's the additional everyday stress of how people are, are they still okay?*

Another participant related having to counsel students, who felt they were "beginning from nothing" and in chasing the milestones set by university programming were asking themselves, "Can we get back to our footing? Can we get back to our normal life?" (Isaac). Participants observed the difficulty in forming social bonds in the classroom, suggesting that "Australian students…don't get it, and they don't understand how to include…students sometimes" (Carina). Lisa echoed these sentiments, reporting how students tell her, "I wish I could be like that group of students over there". Participants described transitioning for these student cohorts as profoundly lonely.

Supporting transition

Participants indicated that current support offered to CALMMR students was typically fractured, with academic learning, careers advice, and counselling offered by different units. This was seen as problematic, particularly in light off additional issues students may have (such as trauma for refugee background students). For the purposes of transitioning to employment, they identified career centres as a key site of support but also an area where key improvements were needed. For example, Lisa, outlining the "lack of understanding of transitioning out for people from a refugee background", articulated that university career centres:

> *…. take a very western approach to employment and networking. These young adults don't have the networking. They don't have the connections; they haven't joined the dots. In their countries finding work is traditionally through word of mouth…[T]he lack of support and the assumption by even the careers counsellors is still very, very western…*

Participants believed that time of transition and the liminal space of studies would be an ideal time to intervene and support before entering the workforce, when existing struggles may be compounded, and students will likely receive even less support than at university. For example, Connor believed that social supports and appropriate counselling was vital for the students he was able to help. In describing an exemplary student case, he explained that while she "missed an awful lot of class" that by staying "in contact and accessing counselling and academic support services" she was able to progress. He highlighted that not only his expertise as a trauma-

informed social worker but also close-knit community of students on campus as vital to this instance of success.

While participants gave examples of culturally responsive and trauma informed counselling services, these were rare, and supports were not readily accessed. For example, Lisa explained that CALMMR students "will typically not use our traditional western approaches to counselling because in their world counselling doesn't exist". Cuts to university counselling services were also cited as a difficulty, Brenda describing "lots of wait lists". Additionally, the majority of participants believed that when students do seek support for their studies, the responses received can worsen their trauma. For example, Lisa described how students had been asked intrusive questions such as "what was it like to come out in a boat?" and, "Have you been in detention, and are you a criminal?" This is described by the CALMMR students participant three supports as "trauma porn" where some supporters ask for graphic detail of their traumas, or only offer performative supports only to lose interest after a short period of time.

Challenges with self-disclosure and requesting help

Many of the participants noted a preference for not disclosing needs and asking for help, suggesting this is due to both cultural backgrounds as well as institutional expectations for student independence. Most participants described examples of where CALMMR students would not disclose their struggles or reveal their migrant or refugee status. Gina explained that "in some cultures, it's quite culturally inappropriate to ask for help, or to go to language support, or counselling services, because it's seen as admitting failure in some way, or losing faith". Helen supported this view and elaborated that CALMMR students tend to think that "my family's problem is my problem and that's not for public consumption, that's not to be shared". She also articulated the additional pressures to be the "good immigrant" as:

> *They think, "I don't know how to promote my group and myself in a way that is acceptable and pleasant for the locals". [They have] social anxiety coming from the fear of not being accepted because if you stand out people will hammer you down. They are very sensitive to that kind of penalty, or punishment. They might become very much tactful, strategic, and competent. They trained themselves to be good at all of those things but that's of course very difficult for anyone. So, they tend not to flourish even if they are thriving in their academic performance…*

In this regard, the expectation that students will ask for help underestimates the barriers and social dynamics at work in institutions. The framing of their transitional experiences as their burden then become something that they cannot "offload" on to others, out of guilt or fear of punishment. Participants also pointed to the power of social messaging in the broader Australian socio-political environment in shaping CALMMR student anxieties about asking for help. For example, Lisa explained that:

> *Students tend to be fairly tight-lipped, even to their lecturers and to their friends and colleagues, through a fear factor. … What they're hearing in the media and what they're hearing possibly outside, they bring that into the university, so many of them don't reveal who they are within the system… You've been told 'you don't belong, and you'll never belong in Australia, you'll never get protection', they have never felt settled enough to feel like they do belong, or they do have a right to access any of the services. They have a*

> *right to ask for anything, … for example, even to ask for an extension if things are getting really tough for them. But, they feel they don't even have the same rights as the students who are studying here.*

As a result of fear, and external pressures to succeed as the "good refugee or migrant" CALMMR students often withhold struggles that impact on their ability to transition through their studies and prepare for the workforce. This is reinforced by broader social messaging around what is expected of them and feeling unsupported or unwanted by institutions.

Suggestions from educators for improving students' transitions through and out of higher education

As well as describing perceived barriers, participants offered ideas for how institutions could better support CALMMR students. A key suggestion across all participants was the need for identified people inside the institution who could provide support and mentorship for CALMMR students across their degrees, including 'transitioning out'. Alyce, in reflecting on why students would come to them for assistance, pointed to the significance of continuity for these students:

> *Because you tend to see them for a couple of hours every day, there's that sense of, well, this is somebody I can trust, this is, there's a sense of continuity.*

This could be further supported through greater representation of CALMMR identities in teaching spaces, one participant highlighting that "at university we're not allowed to speak in our second language. It's always that denial of identity and who we are", arguing that students would be "less shy about making appointments" if they felt they had someone with lived experience to mentor them (Valerie).

Specialised support would also address what Lisa described as "trauma and cultural barriers" that might inhibit CALMMR students' ability to seek help otherwise. This suggests a need for educational and training support for people who work directly with CALMMR students, which might enable support services — including in relation to transitions and careers — to better equip CALMMR students to transition out of their program. Brenda suggested that they would like to see mentorship programs developed to scaffold the development of social networks and cultural knowledge.

Participants also believed that better mental health counselling services are also needed to support CALMMR students as they explore their learning needs and process the potential trauma students may be experiencing. For example, one participant explained that CALMMR students at their institution had been "advised not to seek counselling," as the services available on campus do not have the appropriate training "but they've been given no backup…" (Lisa). In the case that support for this group is too specialised, they argued that "if the university can't provide that support, they should know where to refer them to. You have a duty of care to that student to support them in this" (Lisa). Relatedly, and as noted above, participants felt that there needed to be an overall approach to working with students that was trauma-informed.

Educators also believed that raising awareness of challenges that CALMMR students experience because of implicit bias and monolingual/cultural assumptions could be achieved through

developing support and training for educators. This would not only focus on creating inclusive classrooms but could also help students develop new networks and soft skills they can take to the job market. For example, as an Education educator, Brenda emphasised the importance of highlighting CALMMR issues to her pre-service teacher students, as well as explicitly structuring intercultural awareness activities to teach students how to support each other:

> *I always start off speaking quite specifically to that — of the experience that international students are reported to have. How often they feel uncomfortable and aren't invited in, and I explicitly teach the importance of social bridges as well as social bonds right up front. Then I have quite explicit sort of group work guidelines that I'll always make sure are on the table and I refer to them when I go around and see people being left out of conversations and stuff.* (Brenda)

Most participants also voiced the view that universities need to move beyond evaluating employment outcomes and work also with communities and sectors in increasing support for CALMMR graduates in the workforce. In-community racism, underpinned by inadequate understanding of visas and work rights, was highlighted by participants as a key barrier for transitioning into employment, particularly for people seeking asylum. Isaac observed that the community sentiment was "Migrants and refugees are taking our jobs" when in reality CALMMR graduates were "doing mostly the odd jobs or the jobs that are low paying jobs".

Discussion

In Australian higher education, "outcomes are not equal for all students and … disadvantage persists, to varying degrees, for many groups of students after they have completed their studies" (Pitman et al., 2019, p. 53). CALMMR students experience markedly disadvantageous graduate outcomes, and our exploration of university educators' perceptions of preparedness to 'transition out' offers 'insider' insights into why. Many challenges relate to the normative assumptions that guide how universities support students, based on an 'ideal' student: someone who is prepared, engaged, and proactive, with developed metacognition about their study practices, and who is confident to ask for help (Wong & Chiu, 2020). While our participants clearly illustrate that these ideas are not followed by all educators, this article substantiates other transitions research (Baker & Irwin, 2021; Gale & Parker, 2014; Gravett, 2021) that argues that these prevailing assumptions about students' language proficiency, familiarity with systems, mental health, and linear journeys create 'stuck places' for students.

What conditions keep CALMMR students stuck?

The individualisation of responsibility for graduate outcomes and employability not only hinders universities' abilities to achieve employment outcomes, but also places an impossible burden on students. If universities market themselves as institutions that prepare students for employment, and as an equitable space that provides students with the same care and opportunity, then it is not unreasonable for CALMMR students to enter the program with the trust and hope that this support would be provided to them. In what follows, we argue three key factors that hinder this cohort's ability to transition out of Higher Education: support for language barriers, mental health, and careers guidance.

Language barriers: monolingualism and 'language-as-problem' norms

Firstly, challenges are created by monolingual norms that focus on English language deficits rather than acknowledging the many linguistic resources that CALMMR students bring (Ollerhead & Baker, 2019). CALMMR students carry an additional linguistic load as students who are continuing to learn the medium of instruction language while they study (Ollerhead & Baker, 2019). While this is common to other CALM cohorts such as international students, recognition of and support for academic language learning is scarce and not always available to domestic student cohorts. As Kanno and Varghese (2010) noted in the Canadian context, this poses additional challenges:

> *Being an ESL learner significantly constrains immigrants' and refugees' access to higher education and, once they are in college, brings a set of challenges that few native-speaking students encounter.* (p. 323)

The limited progress with academic language policy and practice made since the publication of this article in 2010 is arguably in part because of the dominance of monolingual English speakers in decision-making positions, partly due to the stranglehold of remedial views of language ('language-as-problem'), and partly a response to increased cost-efficiency drivers that have seen significant cuts to support roles in universities over the last two decades (Croucher & Woelert, 2021). Without adequate supports, the responsibility passes to educators, such as our participants, who do not necessarily have the knowledge, expertise, or confidence to provide CALMMR students with the assistance needed.

We follow Kanno and Varghese's argument for shifts in higher education policy and practice with regard to both increasing the input with regard to academic language and literacy support, as well as seeking to valorise the plurality of linguistic resources circulating in a classroom by promoting plurilingual strategies. Universities are "sites of linguistic diversity in which the institutions' medium(s) of communication and instruction come into contact with the diverse linguistic repertoires of their students" (Preece & Marshall, 2020, p.117), which prompts questioning of why such persistent monolingual, 'language-as-problem' discourses and practices prevail. It is not the case that we do not know what to do; plenty of scholarly work focuses on the plurilingual turn in higher education (for example, Preece and Marshall's [2020] special issue on plurilingualism in Anglophone universities), including suggestions of auditing students' multilingual repertoires (Odeniyi & Lazar, 2020), adopting translanguaging teaching strategies (Mazak & Carroll, 2016), and training to develop translingual mindsets amongst educators (Alfaro & Martínez, 2017). However, without a will to shift the prevailing monolingual norms in Anglophone countries like Australia, such ideas will remain on the periphery. Ultimately, this will mean that linguistic inequity with continue to create stuck places for CALMMR students.

Mental health: towards trauma-informed supports

A second challenge that creates the conditions for getting 'stuck' relates to trauma and mental health issues. CALMMR students are likely to experience higher rates of mental ill-health, including psychological trauma (Baak et al., 2019; Bajwa et al., 2018). As such, clear issues with cuts to counselling services and general lack of accessibility to mental health supports within universities are concerning, although this situation reflects both the broader mental health service crisis in Australia and other research in this area in relation to mental health supports for CALMMR students (see, e.g., Baak et al., 2019). Ensuring adequately funded, trauma-informed, and

culturally safe counselling services is a clear step that universities can take to support CALMMR students in their studies — both in terms of supporting their mental health at a basic level while also assisting with the impact that mental health may have on their study. For example, this may include working through ways to cope with trauma effects such as memory impacts that have direct effects on learning, including language acquisition (Kaplan et al., 2015). Supporting educators to also understand these impacts and assist students through extensions or other coursework modifications is also an important way to ensure equity for CALMMR students experiencing trauma or psychological distress more generally, and again would benefit other groups of students facing similar issues, including First Nations students (Oliver et al., 2013).

Relatedly, it was clear from this study that trauma-informed practices in higher education are necessary to ensure that this group of students are supported both through their studies and in the career guidance and support to transition out that they are provided with. In this context, trauma-informed advice and support may involve key tenets of trauma-informed care (Im, Rodriguez & Grumbine, 2021), including creating safe and trusting spaces between university services and students, ensuring students are listened to, respected, and valued, and empowering CALMMR cohorts to engage with their studies and their transition out of university. Trauma-informed support for students would go a long way to dealing with many of the issues identified in this study, including challenges around mental health, assisting students who are shy and unlikely to actively seek support, and helping with language acquisition. Again, promoting student empowerment and building trusting spaces in available services, including careers services, will likely benefit all students.

In terms of mental health, and as noted above, a clear recommendation stemming from this study is to ensure adequate funding for counselling services — a recommendation which will support both CALMMR and the general student body. Additionally, training around trauma-informed practice specifically for CALMMR students for at least counselling and other student facing service staff, would also benefit CALMMR students' transition out of university and likely career prospects most notably through empowerment. Again, trauma-informed training would also benefit the general student body and is thus a likely benefit that is particularly cost-effective.

Careers guidance

The stuck places that language and mental health cause CALMMR students are further impeded by generic transition-out supports that often fail to recognise these bespoke challenges. As other work has noted, there is a critical need for 'diversity training' for people working in student-focused roles, such as careers guidance, that can help staff understand the employment barriers that implicit bias, such as accentism, create (Lee et al., 2020; Ramjattan, 2022). As Rice (2017) asserts:

> *Career guidance plays one part in the quest to address maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation… A radical rethink is essential: one that values different forms of social contribution, supports people to form broader goals encompassing both paid and unpaid work, and helps them understand and challenge the forces that shape their experiences with little restraint or accountability.* (p. 138)

This requires universities to recognise their own implicit biases to aid the designing of supports for the diverse student body, especially students like CALMMR who experience poorer graduate outcomes rather than for an 'ideal' imagined student.

Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that the radical rethinks in supporting students to successfully transition out of study described by Rice here are acutely needed for CALMMR students. Our contribution in this article is to exemplify how these assumptions are perceived to create particularly acute stuck places for CALMMR students. The 'stuck places' that educators observe arise from trying to navigate their way through the system, like the barriers that responsibility-deflection of language/literacy and cultural familiarity cause (Baker & Irwin, 2021). For CALMMR students, this is a particularly onerous burden given their likely unfamiliarity with the cultural practices, resources, and networks needed as 'new Australians'. As a community we need to work together to move beyond the 'stuck places' in our own conceptualisation of student pathways and implement supports that recognise the crucial language and mental health needs of this cohort.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) disclose that they have no actual or perceived conflicts of interest. The authors disclose that they have not received any funding for this manuscript beyond resourcing for academic time at their respective university.

The authors confirm this research complies with the Journal of University Learning and Teaching Practice's policy on Artificial Intelligence.

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