

Assessing the impact of the withdrawal of Refugee Study Grants on refugee background students at tertiary institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand

Report for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Aotearoa New Zealand (TESOLANZ)

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Introduction

This report details the way in which the withdrawal of Refugee Study Grants (RSGs) has impacted upon the ability of Refugee Background Students (RBS) to access tertiary education. Many studies have pointed out shortcomings in ESOL provision for new refugees to New Zealand (e.g. Altinkaya & Omundsen, 1999; Chile, 2002; Gray & Elliott, 2001; Humpage, 2001; Pahud, 2008). However, this study has been undertaken to examine the funding obstacles for students who have the skills and motivation to engage with tertiary education. For these students the main barrier to gaining tertiary qualifications, and thus a more highly-paid job, is their proficiency in English. As such, it is necessary for RBS to enrol in ESOL classes prior to entering degree level courses. This represents an additional expense above and beyond the tuition fees required for their further study and their day to day expenses. Bearing in mind that the vast majority of RBS have little or no savings (Altinkaya & Omundsen, 1999; Sidhu & Taylor, 2007), and encounter many of the same difficulties that other refugees have in finding employment (Altinkaya & Omundsen, 1999; Chile, 2002; Humpage, 2001; Pahud, 2008), finding the money to pay for these courses is often not possible.

From 2005 until 2011, the Refugee Study Grant filled this financial gap, paying for RBS to take ESOL courses that would allow them to access tertiary education. While it may be argued that these students could simply take out student loans to cover the cost of their ESOL courses, many are culturally inhibited from doing so (Horner, Khan, Paton, Hagos, & Kindon, 2006; O'Rourke, in press). Those that are willing to borrow money are for the most part already planning to do so for their degree course and this additional incursion of debt represents a disincentive to

undertake tertiary study. As has been addressed in previous research on the right to ESOL education of refugees to New Zealand (Altinkaya, 1995; Humpage, 2001), refugees do not have a choice about coming to New Zealand, and thus have often had little or no experience of English. They may also be unused to the inclusive style of teaching found in New Zealand. Those that go on to further education are often those that have adapted best to this but it is rare for them to have attained the required proficiency in academic English to meet tertiary education institution (TEI) requirements. What effectively happens is that they are channelled into the same system as international students who require further ESOL study to reach the required level of proficiency. However, international students not only have a choice about studying in New Zealand, they also have the means to pay for the required ESOL courses.

This study focuses on the experiences of RBS enrolled in these courses; examining how they have thus far paid for their ESOL classes, how they will continue to do so without the RSG, and how they think this will impact upon their access to tertiary study. The research carried out to answer these questions has been split into two phases, a questionnaire administered to 128 RBS enrolled in ESOL courses in TEIs across the North Island before the grant was withdrawn, and a series of interviews with a subset of these students after the withdrawal of the grants. The second phase addressed additional issues, such as what RBS thought TEIs could do to meet the educational needs of RBS in a better way, and their motivations for seeking tertiary study. Phase Two functioned partly as a follow-up to Phase One; to check whether plans stated in Phase One had changed once the impact of the grant withdrawal had been felt, but also as a means of expanding upon points raised in the analysis of the Phase One data. As such, the Phase One questionnaire provided a quantitative measure of the expected effects of the withdrawal of the grant across several North Island TEIs, while Phase Two provided qualitative data on the reasons for these answers, from a subset of the Phase One participants. Phase Two of the study also forms part of a nation-wide research project that examines the study experiences of refugee-background students in TEIs (Kendon, Joe, Baldwin, Clayton, Harris, James, Kerr, LeLivre, Moon, Plant, Smith and Stevens, 2011, forthcoming).

In addition to the two phases of research which focused on RBS experiences, a further phase was undertaken that consisted of interviews with staff from TEIs who worked with RBS. This allowed a more holistic view of the situation as these staff members were aware of institutional policies (or lack of) regarding RBS and of changes in RBS participation rates since the withdrawal of study grants (Kendon, et al., 2011, Executive Summary of Preliminary Findings.) As the data collection of Phase Two was informed by the analysis of the Phase One data, each phase will be described in terms of method and results separately, before discussing the overall findings of this research.

Phase One

Data Collection

For Phase One, questionnaires were sent to 12 TEIs who had received funding for refugee study grants in 2010. Of these, six North Island TEIs responded. The questionnaires themselves were modified to a greater or lesser degree by each institution according to the courses they offered and the ethics requirements of their institution. This limited the comparability of certain institutions to others as of the six, only four were able to collect demographic information pertaining to age, sex, country of origin, and time in New Zealand. Consequently, these variables were not incorporated into the analysis. The remaining questions included in the questionnaire are listed below.

2.1 What are you studying or what have you just finished studying?

2.2 What do you plan to do next year?

2.3 If you study in 2011, what will you do?

2.4 If you study in 2011, where will you study?

2.5 If you study in 2011, how will you pay the fees?

2.6 If you could get a study grant in 2011, what would you like to study?

2.7 Now there are no study grants in 2011, have your plans changed?

2.8 What hopes do you have for your future study?

Each of these questions (except 2.4) had multiple choice answers and two (2.2 & 2.6) allowed for *other*, while two (2.7 & 2.8) had additional space for *other comments*.

Analysis

The TEI that collected the greatest proportion (41%) of completed questionnaires collated the data from these independently of the rest of the TEIs, who fed their raw data directly to the authors of this report for collation. The same TEI also tailored the questions to their situation more than the other TEIs. This means that while general comparisons can be made within each question, correlations between the answers for one question and the answer of another can only be made for the Victoria University of Wellington collated data. Therefore, the analysis of the Phase One results will focus primarily on the general pattern of answers rather than any specific correlations.

As each institution tailored question 2.1 according to the course that they offered, the only way to compare the results is to categorise the ESOL courses in each institution into the following types of course: Foundation courses teaching beginner or intermediate level English, EAP courses teaching more advanced and specific academic English language skills, and TOPs courses aimed at English for employment. As this report is concerned with access to tertiary education, it is the first two of these categories that are focused on here. The results in Table 1

show that while there are a slightly greater number of students enrolled in Foundation courses across the TEIs surveyed, technical institutes had a greater number of RBS enrolled in Foundation courses while universities had a greater number of students enrolled in EAP courses.

Table 1

Type of TEI	Foundation	EAP	TOPs	Total
University	23	39	12	74
Technical Institute	43	11	2	56
Total	66	50	14	130

As this is only a snapshot of the enrolment of the students surveyed here, it would be premature to draw any real conclusions from this as many students enrolled in EAP courses at an institution may well have previously completed a Foundation course there and thus the enrolment statistics in a previous year may look vastly different. Furthermore, looking at the correlation between the answer to this question and the answer to question 2.4, which asked where students intended to study the following year, the EAP students gave a variety of destinations, including both universities and technical institutes, while Foundation students invariably answered with the TEI that they currently attended. This indicates that Foundation level students are likely to continue on to an EAP course at the same institution. This was confirmed by the responses to question 2.3 which asked what the students would study the following year; the majority of students who had said they wanted to continue to study at the same institution said they would study a higher level course. Of the 30 students surveyed, 18 said they would continue with the same course. Table 2 shows the immediate study plans of the students cross-tabulated with their current course and incorporates answers to question 2.2 detailing how many students did not intend to return to study¹.

¹ This table excludes the students who said they would study a higher level course but did not specify what type of course, hence the discrepancy in the total number of responses.

Table 2

Study Plans	Current Course			
	Foundation	EAP	TOPs	Total
English for employment	4	2	5	11
Foundation course	9	3	4	16
EAP	15	9	2	26
Trade certificate	0	4	0	4
Certificate of university preparation	0	1	0	1
University degree level subject	3	6	0	9
University degree level English	7	1	0	8
Not studying	5	12	2	19
Not sure	0	1	0	1
Total	43	39	13	95

Although a cursory look at the cross-tabulation of the current course with study plans might indicate that students enrolled on foundation courses mostly plan to continue on to EAP courses, there is no statistically significant relationship between the current course and future plans. What this data does show, however, is that less than a quarter of students enrolled in EAP courses planned to go on to a degree level course the following year while a third did not plan to continue their studies. It is important to bear in mind that this was with the knowledge that there would be no study grant available, but before it had actually been withdrawn. Phase Two of the study followed up this finding to investigate why these students enrolled in courses designed to prepare for tertiary education were no longer planning to continue with their education.

Question 2.5 asked how students intended to pay for their studies. Almost half said that they would get a student loan, while a quarter hoped to get a scholarship. This somewhat contradicts the suggestion put forward in existing studies on RBS that many RBS are reluctant to incur debt in order to achieve their educational goals. However, not one student responded that they would use their savings and only two answered that they would borrow from family, perhaps indicating the financial limitations that exist for them. Without the study grant and without work, RBS are left with no option but to take out a student loan. Unlike international students, RBS do not have the option of leaving New Zealand upon completion of their studies. They have

no choice but to seek employment within the New Zealand workforce, yet they face barriers that other New Zealanders do not (Humpage, 2001; Kindon et al., forthcoming). Thus, the incursion of student debt is a far more serious prospect for RBS than for other domestic students. There is the very real danger that they will find themselves in a position where they have a substantially higher amount of student debt than the average domestic student and no way of repaying it.

Question 2.6 was an exercise in blue-sky thinking for the students. It asked what they would like to study if they did have a study grant. This allows a comparison with their answer to question 2.3 on their actual plans. Table 3 illustrates the difference in answers where this comparison was possible. In Table 3, entries below the shaded cells represent a realignment of objectives towards tertiary study, while those above represent an alignment towards employment, or a lowering of expectations of academic study.

Table 3

		Column Labels - with RSG withdrawal							
Row Labels - Ideal	English for employment	CUP	Foundation course	Trade certificate	University degree level English	University degree level subject	n/a	Not sure	Grand Total
English for employment									1
Foundation	2	1	8	1	3			1	27
Trade certificate			1	1			1		7
Trade diploma	1								1
EAP	1		4		2			1	32
University degree English					1				5
University degree subject					1	6			9
n/a	1						1		2
Grand Total	5	1	17	2	9	7	3	2	117

As can be seen, without the withdrawal of the RSG, the students would mostly have taken courses geared towards further academic study or higher academic achievement. With the withdrawal, they were forced to choose the route that would lead them into employment soonest, rather than allow them to develop their full potential. The comparison of questions 2.6 and 2.3 shows that for many students their plans changed; question 2.7 supports this. It asked students whether their plans had changed as a result of the RSG withdrawal. Over half of the students surveyed responded that they had had to change their plans as a result of the RSG withdrawal. In some versions of the questionnaires they were given further choices of answer detailing how their plans had changed. These were: if they had had to reduce the number of courses they studied, if they could not afford to study and did not want to borrow money, or if they had changed their courses. The results show that half of the students answering this

version of the question, who had changed their plans, said that they could not afford to study and did not want to borrow money. This can be extrapolated to a quarter of the total number of refugee background students not being able to study as a direct result of the RSG withdrawal.

The final question asked students what hopes they had for their future study. While forty-four of the seventy-five students who completed this question chose the answer which read “I hope to continue my studies, but don’t think I can without a study grant”, it was perhaps the comments that the students wrote that really show the strength of feeling that many of them have about the RSG withdrawal. Some of these are reproduced, verbatim, below.

“If I will not get study grant then I will borrow money which will obviously make a difference in my social and family life after borrowing a huge amount of money for my study.”

“I hope to complete my studies with grant because that will make it easier to me.”

“This decision will make me change my career because I need to learn more English but I can’t pay for good study.”

“Our request is from Government is that they could help with refugee people to complete their own education and find a job. Example I was a teacher at my country but here because of language I can’t continued and I forgot everything. At the moment I was very happy to learn and finish my English diploma and after that I am going to be doing my teaching and going to back my job at high school and help children but when I got a letter Government not helping us. I don’t know what I can do. Thanks.”

“I have finished only one part of the diploma course (EAS). When I am about to follow the second part of the course my study grant is stopped. I feel very sad because I need this qualification to obtain a teaching job. I have got NZQA assessed level qualification in Education – Bachelors degree – post graduate Diploma in Education and more than 10 years’ teaching experience.”

Limitations

One of the greatest limitations facing this questionnaire-based survey was that some of the students clearly misunderstood either the questions, or the instructions that were given. For example, in questions that specified just one answer some students selected multiple answers. In the conditional questions (i.e. “If you are studying...”), many students answered regardless of whether their previous answer fulfilled the condition or not. Thus these results cannot provide much more than an indication of the future plans of RBS students, as it is impossible to interpret what a student might mean (or think they were being asked) when they answered “not work or study” in response to the question asking what will you do next year, but then went on to

answer “same course”, “higher level course” and “foundation course” when asked *if you study in 2011, what will you do?* More worrying is “Study grant. I will like to apply study grant.” in response to the question *what hopes do you have for your future study?* This might indicate that despite this being the final question in a questionnaire about the withdrawal of the study grant, which specifies that the grant will be withdrawn three times, the student was still not aware that the grant was to be withdrawn. This was not the only case of this which points to a lack of awareness of the financial support systems that are available to RBS, a topic taken up in Phase Two of the study. Furthermore, as Phase Two took the form of face to face interviews, there was the opportunity to check understanding and ask further information when gathering information about the effects of the RSG withdrawal.

Phase One Summary

Very importantly, Phase One of this study identifies a determination among RBS to continue with their education. The withdrawal of the RSG affected all of the students in some way: half opted to take on a student loan and continue with their planned study, a quarter terminated their study either to seek work or to look after family, and the rest either reduced the amount they studied or chose courses more likely to lead them to direct employment. What this shows is that by withdrawing the RSG, RBS are forced to seek employment before they have reached their educational goals. Thus the withdrawal of the RSG is a glass ceiling on RBS academic achievement.

Phase Two

Phase Two was designed to follow up on the questions posed in Phase One regarding future plans. It aimed to discover whether a subset of the RBS surveyed in Phase One were able to achieve their plans and what the effects of the RSG withdrawal were once it came into effect. Furthermore, as the comments from Phase One revealed, the RBS felt strongly about this issue and it was thus decided that their experiences would be best recorded in their own words. Therefore, Phase Two data collection took the form of face to face interviews, allowing for much greater detail in seeking answers to the question of how the RSG withdrawal had impacted the lives of RBS in New Zealand.

Data Collection and Analysis

Phase Two of the study took a far more qualitative approach than Phase One, using what is essentially a grounded theory approach to social research, incorporating a broadly discourse analytic perspective. It consisted of 16 interviews with refugee-background students who were recipients of refugee study grants in 2009 and 2010 in the Lower North Island and all of whom had taken part in Phase One. The interviews served several purposes. The first of these was to

check whether the RBS were able to follow the plans they had described in Phase One. The second goal was to identify the financial challenges that RBS faced. The third goal was to gather extended information on the students' experiences of education in New Zealand and their uptake of the support systems available to them. In order to do this, the interview transcripts were coded using a template which specified the topics of interest to this research. A further coding system was developed in collaboration with postgraduate students in Geography (GEOG 404: Young People in Participatory Development) carrying out the interviews. This system was used to mark out themes that occurred across the responses to the specific questions posed in the interviews.

Through the secondary, thematic coding system, it was found that there were five broad themes that emerged from the interviews. These were challenges, consequences, integration and cross-cultural adaptation, motivation, and support. Within each of these there were narrower codes used to categorise the responses given by the students. Of these, one of the coded themes of greatest importance for this report was *financial challenges*, which refers to those problems directly related to the shortfall in funding that RBS face, these include: problems meeting their weekly budget, difficulties in paying study fees, and inability to plan for the future.

This section will use excerpts from the interviews to highlight the issues that surround the withdrawal of the RBS study grant, but its main goal is to provide more detail on the issues that were raised by Phase One. Therefore, the next section examines the differences between Refugee Background Students' study plans prior to the RSG withdrawal, and the reality that was discussed in the Phase Two interviews.

Findings

Changes to study plans

Using the primary, question-based coding system, the differences were examined between information supplied in Phase One regarding the students' future study plans and the information gathered in interviews about their current occupations. It appears that of the sixteen students interviewed, only five did not have to lower the level at which they intended to study. Of these five, all had already achieved a high enough level of English proficiency to enrol in tertiary education and had done so during the tenure of the RSG. A further two students had also achieved the required English proficiency while in receipt of an RSG and were engaged in tertiary training or academic preparation but at a lower level than previously predicted.

However, the most striking effect of the RSG withdrawal was also shown in the interview data. Three of the interviewees, having previously indicated that they planned to continue study,

were now at a stage where their incomplete English studies prevented them from accessing either further study or employment. Without the means to pay for further ESOL classes or facing a block on domestic enrolment in such classes, these students were effectively shut out of the system. Notably, one of these interviewees was unable to directly participate in the interview process; her husband was needed to interpret for her.

The remaining six students had either continued with ESOL classes, paid for out of their unemployment benefits, or were working in order to save enough money to complete their ESOL classes, often at the same time as supporting family.

Overall the comparison of the students' study plans prior to the withdrawal of the RSG with the reality, post-withdrawal, show that those students who had attained a sufficient level of English proficiency while the grant was available maintained their existing pathway into tertiary study. However, for those students who were still midway through their ESOL studies when the grant was withdrawn, the likelihood of fulfilling their potential through tertiary education was much less certain. Indeed some were left stranded by the system, unable to access the education needed to work and unable to work to pay for the education they need.

In addition to the impact that the withdrawal of the RSG had on study plans however, many RBS faced further financial difficulties, as they related in the Phase Two interviews. A selection of these, with some commentary, forms the section that follows. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Financial Challenges

I'm really confused

I have no more time to study, to focus on my study because I have to focus on other things as well. I shouldn't get support from my parents but I have to ask them for help and they are also refugees and I shouldn't do that and I feel guilty. I want to find job and that makes me depressed because should I continue studying or should I find a job or something so I'm really confused. - Lwin

Lwin's response here indicated not only that the withdrawal of the RSG impacted negatively upon his studies through stress, but also the reluctance felt by some RBS to seek financial help from their family. Lwin mentioned the guilt he felt about asking his parents for help and the indecision over whether he should discontinue his studies in order to earn money. The withdrawal of the RSG put Lwin in a position where he might have to give up on tertiary education.

We have to save on the eating

Doug (interviewer): is it free transport?

Tashi: its free transport within Palmerston North.

Tashi: we got accommodation from student allowance.

Doug: oh good to pay for the rent

Tashi: but it was not enough as we were new to this country and we don't have any balance at the bank and the limited amount it was very hard for us.

Kirtey: sometimes they stop our benefit for one week so at the time we find a problem because we don't have a balance in our bank account in the pocket.

Doug: oh no so no money

Tashi: we don't have any balance and we get only \$30 as accommodation cost and we have to pay at least \$50 per person so \$20 is something we have to find out. Maybe we have to eat less amount...

Kirtey: yeah we have to save on the eating

In the above transcript extract two RBS participated, Tashi and Kirtey. They gave some detail about how they were managing without the RBS, using the student allowance to pay for their accommodation and day to day living costs. Although they received assistance to pay their rent, it did not cover the full amount. This highlighted a further problem with using the existing student financial support system for RBS. The student allowance does not appear to be designed to provide full support for students, instead it is expected that students work or rely on savings to make up the difference between the support allowance and their living costs. RBS, however, often have difficulty finding employment that can support their studies. Moreover, they rarely have had the opportunity to accrue any savings. For Tashi and Kirtey this meant that on occasions when there was a financial shortfall, as was caused when they did not receive their student allowance on a given week, they had no savings with which to plug the gap. In order to pay rent, they were forced to save in other areas, such as food. While it may be argued that this is no different a situation to any other low income family, it should be pointed out that unlike other groups who currently have equity status to compensate for societal and cultural barriers

in accessing tertiary education, refugee background students who face similar problems are channelled into the same systems as non-equity domestic students and economic migrants.

Financial Support

Of the sixteen interviewees, eight had paid their tuition fees by taking out a student loan, five had had to terminate their study and the remaining three had found part-time employment to pay for their education. While work may be considered a solution to the gap in funding, the reality is that many students who leave tertiary education in order to earn money for their studies never return, finding that all of the money they earn is needed to support family members. As noted in a summary about the affordability of tertiary education, Education Counts (2011) states: "...opportunities for tertiary education remain unevenly distributed. There is undoubtedly a range of reasons for this, including prior achievement at school and the *impact of family resources through the school years.*" This was certainly the case for one interviewee, summarised in the interviewer's notes:

INTERVIEWER'S NOTES: The information from this interview was quite 'jumbled' and 'confusing' as Vania seemed to have difficulty with both understanding and speaking English. This was compounded by the fact that Vania was working (minding someone's child) at the same time as being interviewed. Vania was already qualified. She called herself a 'Biologist' and had a science degree from Iraq. She used to teach biology in Secondary School in Iraq. Vania believed that the 'problem' of not being able to speak English was with herself, she called it her 'personality' but I felt what she meant was her responsibility (as a mother) to her family. She seemed torn between this and her desire to learn English. She had a 'pact' with her husband. They agreed that he would qualify first and she would continue her study. This had not happened as yet and seemed unlikely to happen as Vania's focus was now on working full-time to get the money to pay for her children's education.

What separated Vania from the other participants in Phase Two of this study was her age. She was considerably older than the other participants and thus considered her main duty to be to her family. However, she was also a qualified biology teacher. Because she had to work (as a babysitter) to provide for her family's education, she was unable to attend or pay for her own education, which would have enabled her to utilise her existing skills and qualifications.

Future Plans

Like Phase One, in the interviews the students were asked what their plans were for the future. These are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4

Future Plans	Respondents
Further ESOL tuition	1
Find a job (general)	3
Planned Career Path (e.g. medicine, law)	4
Degree Course	3
Not sure	1

Unsurprisingly, the students who had plans for a career such as law or accountancy, and the students who said they were going to study a specific degree, were the same students identified earlier as having succeeded in their English training under the RSG. For the others, the options were simple but unspecific: further ESOL training or find any job available. This reiterates the point made above that the withdrawal of the RSG has greatly affected the ability of many RBS to access tertiary education courses.

Phase Two Summary

Phase Two of this study shows both positive and negative impacts of the Refugee Study Grants on RBS' access to tertiary study. Five out of 16 students pursued their study plans outlined in Phase One and entered their predicted level of tertiary study. Another five continued to study ESOL or academic preparation classes, and six terminated study: three of whom worked in order to save money to pay for further English language training. On a positive note, approximately a third of RBS who attained the required English language level using a RSG could embark on degree studies or specified career paths without having accrued debt from ESOL training courses. Of concern, however, is that withdrawing the RSG resulted in over a third of the students not accessing tertiary study because of financial difficulty. For a number of those that did take out a student loan, feelings of stress, uncertainty and guilt overshadowed their studies.

Discussion

This study shows that withdrawing the Refugee Study Grant for ESOL courses adversely affected many RBS. It limited many RBS' tertiary study paths and choices by forcing them to seek employment at the expense of academic achievement and aspirations. For others, it resulted in anxiety and uncertainty over their future study pathways because of financial difficulty.

The position taken in this report is that some provision must be made to enable refugee background students to enter tertiary education on an equal footing with other New Zealanders. The main way in which this can be done is in meeting the requirement for English Language tuition, which seems to be the main barrier facing RBS students. Most RBS have a strong motivation to succeed in their chosen area of tertiary study and often state a desire to benefit their community. Furthermore, among RBS there are students who have existing qualifications from their country of origin and need to attain a good level of English proficiency in order to utilise their skill-set in the New Zealand labour market. By not investing in the education of RBS, New Zealand is not only failing in its humanitarian obligations to these people, but is also missing out on a potentially lucrative investment.

There are clear implications for government policy and institutional practice. As a signatory of the International Human Rights Treaty, New Zealand has an obligation towards refugees: “A state may be required to take special measures to address any particular disadvantages or barriers they face” (ChangeMakers Refugee Forum, et al., 2011. p.12). A key recommendation would be the reinstatement of government funding for English language and transition programmes, such as Level 4 Foundation Studies Programmes, to ensure that RBS are well prepared for tertiary study.

The other key area to address is the recognition of RBS as an equity group within tertiary institutions (Changemakers Refugee Forum et al., 2011; O'Rourke, in press; Postgraduate students in GEOG404, Kindon and Joe, 2011; Roberts, 2011). Having special measures in place to support RBS in their endeavours to pursue tertiary study or vocational training would greatly benefit individuals, their families, communities and wider society. From 2010-2015, the Tertiary Education Strategy gives priority to five target groups to increase participation in higher level study, particularly degrees. Of particular interest is the achievement of one target group, Pasifika students, who along with Maori and students with disabilities receive equity funding from the New Zealand government to improve access to tertiary education. The Strategy reports a greater proportion of Pasifika people studying at Bachelor level or above in the last five years. By designating RBS as an equity group, we would also hope to see greater participation rates for RBS in tertiary institutions.

A mandate from the government recognising RBS as an equity group would positively affect institutional practice. Equity funding within tertiary institutions would provide crucial financial support for RBS, which many students in this study have identified as critical if they are to progress with higher level studies. In the words of one respondent:

I hope that the government will change their mind because study grant is very useful for refugee. They came here and they wish they will have better life and education, and they deserve to study language for free (Upper North Island, November, 2010).

Conclusion

The blend of quantitative and qualitative analysis used in this study has shown not only the extent of the RSG withdrawal's impact, but also the impact upon students at an individual level. By showing that the 2009 policy of terminating refugee study grants has very real effects upon people's lives, as well as upon a demographic group, it is hoped that this evidence will contribute towards change for greater access to tertiary education.

Post-script

The 2011 Budget included dedicated ESOL funding for refugees at two different levels for four years: 700 places in the Intensive Literacy and Numeracy Targeted English for Speakers of Other Languages (ILN targeted ESOL) for pre-literate or very low level English language and literacy learners and 400 places in the Refugee English Fund for higher level (Level 3 and above) learners focused on vocational training, degree level education or employment. We are delighted that tuition free English language courses for refugee background learners will be provided from 2012 (For details about the funds you can visit the Tertiary Education Commission website: <www.tec.govt.nz>). The re-institution of English language funding for RBS is a crucial step in advancing more equitable access to tertiary education. Action is now needed to continue the momentum and push ahead with national policies and institutional practices which will increase the participation of RBS in tertiary institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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