

The Training of Interpreters from Newly Emerging Communities in Victoria, Australia: *Sustainable Training for Sustainable Employment and Sustainable Social Outcomes*

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ABSTRACT

The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University (RMIT University), in partnership with the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC), has, since 2002, been offering a Diploma of Interpreting program in rare and emerging languages which has been approved by the Australian National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). This paper, through a study of the graduates in the past six years, will look at the program in terms of economic and social sustainability outcomes. The findings of this study have implications for the provision of interpreter training programs in rare and emerging languages. There are also implications for government policies in respect to providing settlement services to refugees and funding agencies.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University) has been training translators and interpreters since 1976. The University currently conducts the Diploma of Interpreting and the Advanced Diploma of Interpreting in the technical and further education (polytechnic) sector and the Master of Social Science (Translating and Interpreting Studies) in the higher education sector. At the Diploma level, RMIT, in conjunction with the Victorian Multicultural Commission, has offered training in Interpreting for students from newly emerging languages and communities in Victoria since 2002.

All RMIT translating and interpreting courses are approved by the Australian National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). NAATI employs the following hierarchy of accreditations.

Table 1

HIERARCHY OF NAATI ACCREDITATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conference Interpreter (Senior)• Advanced Translator (Senior)• Conference Interpreter• Advanced Translator• Interpreter• Translator• Paraprofessional Interpreter• Paraprofessional Translator

1 INTRODUCTION - *continued*

Graduates from the Diploma of Interpreting are accredited at the NAATI Paraprofessional Level, while graduates from the Advanced Diploma and Master programs may gain accreditation at the NAATI Professional level. NAATI approval is subject to rigorous training and assessment guidelines and closely monitored by NAATI by way of annual returns and random moderation of test results.

For the past six years, RMIT has been training interpreters from refugee-based newly emerging communities in languages such as Amharic, Burmese, Dari, Dinka, Oromo, Nuer and Swahili. The programs in newly emerging languages are offered within the Diploma of Interpreting and lead to NAATI Paraprofessional level. RMIT has pioneered in training interpreters in rare and emerging languages in NAATI approved courses in Australia and remains the country's largest provider.

In 2002, the State Government's Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs (VOMA) approached RMIT to deliver programs in rare and emerging languages in response to address a critical shortage of interpreters in diverse range of community and settlement services in their new environment in Victoria. In recent years, VOMA has been disbanded and its role in providing the training taken over by the Victorian Multicultural Commission, which provides independent advice to the Victorian Government on legislation and policy and is the main link between Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities and the Government. Thus, social sustainability, as well as economic sustainability, is an important aspect of this training initiative.

The paper will also outline the results of RMIT research into whether the training has enabled graduates to gain financially sustainable employment in interpreting and whether the RMIT training has been valuable in other than financial ways. However, unlike in longer established communities which can provide full-time employment to interpreters in the social welfare, medical and legal fields, students from these newly emerging communities have been trained to serve relatively small populations which might not be topped up with substantial numbers of new migrants in the future.

This paper will also focus on the sustainability of this training for RMIT as the training provider and its value and relevance for its graduates. In examining the sustainability of the training from RMIT's perspective, the paper will describe some financial and resource problems in running these courses and particular problems in delivering the training, such as the recruitment of sufficiently experienced teachers and the particular characteristics of these student cohorts.

RMIT graduates in these languages were surveyed in late 2008 and early 2009 to ascertain if they were working as interpreters or in a related field and whether the income they gained from interpreting or related activities is sufficient to sustain themselves and their families. They were also asked if they were motivated other than gaining full-time or near full-time employment as interpreters, and whether their aims were fulfilled. The survey also asked how they saw their prospects for future employment in the interpreting profession in Victoria, given changing patterns of migration and the gradual integration of their communities into the mainstream of Australian life.

1 INTRODUCTION - *continued*

Responses to the survey suggest that most students have not gone on to full-time employment as interpreters, because community numbers in most newly emerging language groups are such that few full-time careers are available.

Despite this, students have expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the training they have received as it has permitted them to better service their communities and has assisted them in employment in other fields.

This paper will show that the introduction by RMIT (in partnership with the Victorian Multicultural Commission) of a Diploma of Interpreting course in emerging languages has met with a number of challenges deriving from the small population bases, and the refugee status of these language groups. These have included: ascertaining the standard form of the language, the spasmodic nature of the future needs for interpreters in specific languages (determined by government immigration policies and refugee intakes), finding and training staff, difficulties in verifying qualifications and the production of teaching materials.

RMIT has met the challenges presented with considerable success, but has had to find ways to fund the training of teachers and the production of teaching materials in these emerging languages.

Based on a recent survey and interviews with past students, it is clear that there are limited opportunities for full time work in interpreting in these less common languages (e.g. Khmer, Nuer, Oromo, Dinka, Dari and Amharic). However, it is also clear that the social sustainability outcomes of the course have been rewarding.

The research conducted for this paper indicates that the course has contributed significantly to social sustainability (as defined in WACOSS: 2002, cited in Partridge, 2005) by helping to provide equitable opportunities, maintain diversity, build community and interconnectedness, and to help bring these communities to a better understanding of their new environment and to narrow the gap between them and the wider Australian community.

On a personal level, graduates have gained confidence in their ability to serve both their communities and families as a result of an improvement in their English skills, a greater knowledge of the Australian culture, and, significantly, a sense of achievement in having gained professional qualifications that give them credibility and respect in their communities. Furthermore, in offering training RMIT has given value to these newly emerging languages within the Australian culture. This should assist in developing a better quality of life for the graduates, and the communities they serve.

The programs have also led to a unique partnership between RMIT and NAATI where RMIT have developed tests and conducted assessment on behalf of NAATI to enable the Authority to conduct testing throughout Australia in newly emerging languages.

2 RMIT PROGRAMS IN NEWLY EMERGING LANGUAGES

Since 1945, Australia has received a number of waves of refugee migrants. In recent years, the country has received refugees escaping conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea), the Middle East (Sudan and Iraq), Afghanistan and Myanmar.

2 RMIT PROGRAMS IN NEWLY EMERGING LANGUAGES – *continued*

According to Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) data, over 13,000 settlers (the second largest intake of refugees for resettlement in the world) arrived in Australia under the Humanitarian Program in 2007-08 (DIAC 2008, cited in Lai and Mulayim 2008). Of the offshore visas granted in 2007-8 by Australia, the Middle East and Southwest Asia accounted for the greatest proportion (35%), closely followed by Asia (34%) and Africa (30%) (DIAC 2008, cited in Lai and Mulayim 2008).

The Government of the State of Victoria has been the most active in promoting interpreter training for migrants from newly emerging communities. The Victorian Government has recognised that language diversity provides both economic opportunities and challenges in delivering services. In its 2009 Multicultural Policy, the Government noted that “translation and interpreting services may need to manage new and emerging languages as well as maintain language service support for our more established and ageing migrant communities.” (Victorian Multicultural Commission: 2009, 13).

Since 2002, the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs and then the Victorian Multicultural Commission have worked in cooperation with RMIT to provide NAATI approved interpreter training in 11 newly emerging languages (see Table 2 below) in its NAATI approved Diploma of Interpreting program. To encourage students to undertake the training, VMC provides them with scholarships of AU\$1,200 (approximately GB£531) and pays the fees required to apply for NAATI accreditation on completion of their studies.

The program is part-time, comprising 240 contact hours over 12 months.

VMC has provided scholarships to the participants to help them with University fees, transport costs, books and materials, and NAATI accreditation fees.

Table 2

Languages Delivered in RMIT Diploma of Interpreting Program Since 2002	
Year	Languages
2008	Burmese, Swahili
2007	Amharic, Nuer
2006	Dari, Sudanese Arabic (not NAATI accredited), Tigrinya
2005	Dari, Dinka, Oromo
2004	Amharic, Timorese Hakka
2003	Dari, Khmer
2002	Khmer

2 RMIT PROGRAMS IN NEWLY EMERGING LANGUAGES – *continued*

The program comprises five competencies (or subjects), the titles of which are outlined in Table 3 below. Students have to pass (50% plus) every competency and achieve at least a Distinction (70% plus) in the 'Interpret Dialogues' competency in order for RMIT to recommend them to NAATI for Paraprofessional Interpreter Accreditation. Students who fail to achieve NAATI Paraprofessional Accreditation are not eligible for the RMIT Diploma of Interpreting award.

Table 3

Diploma of Interpreting Program Structure			
Competency	Hours / week	No of Weeks	Total Hours
Interpret Dialogues (*)	4 hrs	30	120
Integrate Bi-cultural Aspects in the Behaviour and Communication (LOTE)	2 hrs	15	30
Maintain Effective Management Practices and Maintain On-going Professional Development and Personal Development	2 hrs	15	30
Communicate Effectively with Professionals, Clients, Colleagues and Others	2 hrs	15	30
Integrate Bi-cultural Aspects in the Behaviour and Communication (English)	2 hrs	15	30
	Total No of Hours		240

(*) *Team teaching with an experienced English-for-Interpreters teacher*

3 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROGRAM DELIVERY

RMIT's experience has been that all the students in these programs have been very keen and focused on their studies. Because many of the students are middle aged or older and they have experience in negotiating channels for refugee settlement in Australia and overseas, many have been conversant with a range of social, legal and medical contexts and this has assisted them in developing a deeper appreciation of contextual issues in their interpreting training materials. All the teachers who have been involved with these students have found the experience to be most rewarding. Nevertheless, in common with other organisations providing services to newly emerging communities, the University has had to deal with a number of challenges in providing the training.

That there are questions about the sustainability of this training is indicated by the very limited number of NAATI approved programs that offer interpreting programs in rare and emerging languages in Australia. Apart from RMIT, colleges of Technical and Further Education in South Australia and Western Australia have recently become involved in this area, but with considerably fewer languages (Lai and Mulayim, 2007). Interestingly, there have been no such courses provided in Sydney, Australia's biggest city and home to large refugee communities.

3 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROGRAM DELIVERY – *continued*

Some of the challenges that RMIT has faced have been financial in nature as the costs of running these courses have been covered by normal funding, as with other languages, but there has been no extra funding provided to cover extra expenses incurred in providing these languages. Other challenges have arisen from the particular characteristics of staff and students from these newly emerging communities.

3.1 RECRUITMENT OF TEACHING STAFF

RMIT has found that while recruitment of qualified teaching staff can be problematic in languages it has run relatively frequently, or all the time, such as Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Italian and Greek, educationally qualified and NAATI accredited teachers are usually able to be found.

At the international level, these languages have been used by translating and interpreting professionals and universities have conducted professional training in them, while in Australia, NAATI has been active for many years in providing testing in these longer established languages and NAATI approved training providers have conducted training in both theoretical bases and practical skills.

On the other hand, newly emerging refugee communities have come to Australia from less economically developed regions where there has been little or no formal training in translating or interpreting. This raises an obvious question about the sustainability of providing training in these languages: how can teachers who lack any formal training or accreditation in interpreting be called upon to teach interpreting skills in a lengthy and intensive program that leads to NAATI accreditation?

Sometimes it is difficult even to identify what is the standard or official language of a region and some of our students have expressed concern that teachers we have recruited do not speak the standard variety or do not have sufficient command of their language at an educated level. At times, we have felt that such concerns have been partly motivated by ethnic and / or religious differences. In large languages, such as Swahili, which is spoken in a number of countries, differences in geographical dialects have presented particular problems for our interpreting skills teachers.

Only two of these languages are accredited by NAATI and the Authority has given special approval to RMIT to run them in the absence of NAATI language panels that could act as reference points for us to ascertain the standard varieties of the languages we have taught and the suitability of instructors. Again, the question of sustainability arises. There are obvious difficulties and even risks in providing a NAATI approved program in cases where we cannot fully ascertain whether our teachers have full command of the main or standard variety of the language.

Although NAATI usually requires approved training providers to employ accredited practitioners to teach translating and interpreting skills, NAATI has waived this requirement where newly emerging languages are involved and in a few cases graduates of our programs have gone on to form NAATI language panels and set in train public examinations in their languages (Lai and Mulayim, 2007).

3.1 RECRUITMENT OF TEACHING STAFF – *continued*

To recruit the best possible teachers in the circumstances, RMIT has sought applications from prospective teachers and followed this up with interviews. Preference has been given to applicants with higher education qualifications who have had experience interpreting in Australia, and references have been sought from leading interpreting agencies (Lai and Mulayim, 2007).

3.2 INEXPERIENCED TEACHERS - FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Newly employed teachers have been given as much assistance as possible and provided with on-the-job training in teaching and assessment in NAATI approved programs.

Assessment materials and dialogues have been developed centrally by core staff and adapted for these languages.

A large amount of training materials, such as digitally recorded interpreting dialogues, has to be developed every time a new language is offered. Often, because refugee flows are spasmodic, these languages are only run once or twice (as shown in Table 2 above). Sessional staff members have to be paid to develop these materials and core staff members assigned to manage this process. It is much less financially onerous for translating and interpreting training institutions to run the same languages every year or every year or two and augment or adapt existing materials. But this would be to ignore the many areas of need in our migrant communities and to walk away from RMIT's commitment to helping to develop social sustainability in these communities.

Rather than expecting newly employed interpreting teachers to cope by themselves, team teaching arrangements have been put into place where new instructors teach together with an experienced sessional member of staff. This experienced staff member, in most cases, has been an experienced English teacher teaching in our programs and is aware of the differences between teaching language and interpreting skills. Where teachers have lacked sufficient exposure to Australian contexts, coaching and guiding them has been very time consuming for staff allocated to team-teaching duties (Lai and Mulayim, 2007). Although a costly form of teaching, team-teaching has nevertheless provided hands-on coaching and guidance to newly employed teachers within a classroom setting and has proven to be effective in managing the challenge of developing competent teachers in these languages.

These are expensive options for a publicly funded university to adopt, particularly as new languages have been introduced each year (Table 2).

No additional funding is provided from within the University and the VMC scholarship assistance is given to the students, rather than to RMIT. Of course, these financial issues raise additional questions about the sustainability of these programs.

3.3 STUDENT BACKGROUNDS

The scholarships offered by the VMC have been vitally important in recruiting sufficient numbers of students to form viable class sizes (normally about 15 students) and VMC has saved the University a great deal of time, effort and money by recruiting the students through their extensive contacts in newly emerging communities.

3.3 STUDENT BACKGROUNDS – *continued*

Without such assistance it is most unlikely that it would have been possible for RMIT to develop these programs for newly emerging communities.

The English language skills of the students have varied greatly and many have had a disrupted education leading to literacy problems in both languages.

Indeed, many students have enrolled in languages that are not their mother tongues and this has impacted on their performance. Very often there has been a marked difference between their oral and written language skills (Lai and Mulayim, 2007).

There has been a wide spread of ages in each group which has resulted in great diversity in skill levels, aptitude for interpreter training, and attitudes to social issues that emerge in simulated interpreting situations and contextual studies, such as women's issues and domestic violence (Lai and Mulayim, 2007).

On the other hand, all staff members agree that teaching these students has been enjoyable and rewarding. They report that the students have greatly valued the educational opportunity and tried to gain as much as possible from it. This is evident in their attrition rates, which are generally lower than other language groups, despite having to juggle work and family commitments and attend classes four hours a night on two days each week for two semesters. Unlike most of our other translating and interpreting students, a significant proportion of them speak at least three languages which has facilitated their development of transfer skills from one language into another (Lai and Mulayim, 2007).

3.4 QUALITY CONTROL

NAATI regularly audits graduation examinations from approved training programs to ensure quality of assessment is maintained. This entails the Authority selecting students from different language groups and requesting recordings and / or examination booklets from their final accreditation examinations. They forward these to members of their own language panels to ascertain whether training providers are assessing appropriately. Although training providers sometimes complain about this mechanism it is an important means of maintaining standardization of assessment. Because there is a very limited number of NAATI panels in all the new languages we adopt this quality control mechanism is not available to us. In cases such as these, NAATI allows training providers of long standing and with a proven track record, such as RMIT, to run the programs using the team-teaching approach mentioned earlier (3.2 Inexperienced Teachers). RMIT has also taken particular care to ensure that students recommended for accreditation are at the required level by ensuring their examinations are double checked by the Program Coordinators.

4 SUSTAINABILITY OF OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS

In late 2008 and early 2009, students from the language groups trained between 2002 and 2008 (Table 2) were surveyed by post (Appendix 1). We followed up the postal survey by telephone interviews.

All of the questions we asked related to the sustainability of the training we had provided in terms of employment and other outcomes.

4 SUSTAINABILITY OF OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS - *continued*

We sought to ascertain if they were working as interpreters or in a related field and whether the income they gained from interpreting or related activities was sufficient to sustain themselves and their families. We were also interested to find out if they had motivations, other than gaining full-time or near full-time employment as interpreters, and whether their aims were fulfilled. We also asked how they saw their prospects for future employment in the interpreting profession in Victoria, given changing patterns of migration and the gradual integration of their communities into the mainstream of Australian life.

The total number of students who had graduated from these language groups was 71. We received 38 responses to the survey.

To gain a sense of perspective about the possibility of our training programs providing a living from interpreting, we asked a large interpreting agency in Melbourne to provide us with the number of interpreting assignments completed in some high-demand languages and some of our newly emerging languages as well as some established community languages in Melbourne in 2008 (Table 4 below).

Table 4

Number of Interpreting Assignments in Five Newly Emerging Languages and Three High-Demand Languages in Melbourne in 2008	
Emerging Languages	Number of Assignments Completed
Nuer	299
Oromo	309
Dinka	2,734
Amharic	774
Swahili	271
Established Languages	Number of Assignments Completed
Greek	5,198
Italian	5,372
Vietnamese	12,115
TOTAL	27,072

Discussions with practising interpreters indicated that the average number of assignments completed by full-time interpreters each year was about 500. Freelance interpreters in Melbourne work for a number of agencies, three of which are particularly large and provide language services nationally. If the figures shown in Table 4 above are multiplied by three or four it can be seen that very few full-time interpreting careers are available in the newly emerging languages, with the exception of Dinka, which is in significantly more demand than the other emerging languages.

4.1 SURVEY OUTCOMES – EXPECTATIONS OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

continued

Almost two thirds of the graduates (28 respondents) indicated that they wished to work full-time (more than 30 hours a week) when they were studying at RMIT. Only ten said they had not intended to do so. In view of the number of assignments in these languages (Table 4) it is not surprising that the outcomes did not accord with these expectations (Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5

Time Spent Working in Interpreting Assignments by RMIT Graduates in 2008 (*)			
Language	Hours per Week	Number	Total
Amharic	Not working	2	8
	2 – 6	2	
	6 – 10	1	
	10 – 14	1	
	14 – 18	1	
	18 – 22	1	
Dari	2 - 6	1	3
	10 - 14	2	
Dinka	2 – 6	2	3
	10 – 14	1	
Hakka / Timorese	Not working	1	2
	10 – 14	1	
Khmer	Not working	1	5
	2 – 6	1	
	10 – 14	2	
	26 – 30	1	
Nuer	Not working	1	6
	2 – 6	2	
	6 – 10	2	
	18 – 22	1	
Oromo	Not working	1	3
	10 - 14	2	
Tigrinya / Sudanese Arabic (**)	Not working	2	5
	2 - 6	1	
	6 – 10	1	
	18 - 22	1	
Total			35

(*) *Three respondents indicated that they were working but did not state the hours they worked.*

(**) *These respondents cited both Tigrinya and Sudanese Arabic when completing the “hours worked” part of the questionnaire.*

4.1 SURVEY OUTCOMES – EXPECTATIONS OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT - *continued*

Table 6

Hours Worked by RMIT Graduates in Interpreting Assignments in All Languages in 2008	
Hours per Week	Number
Not working	5
2 – 6	9
6 – 10	4
10 – 14	7
14 – 18	1
18 – 22	2
22 – 26	1
26 – 30	2
Working but no hours stated	3

The preponderance of graduates working between two and 14 hours a week accords with the relatively low availability of interpreting assignments in these languages (Table 4) and it is clear that the training has not been sustainable in providing full-time or near full-time employment, especially if compared to high-demand languages such as Greek, Italian and Vietnamese.

Nevertheless, when interviews were conducted by phone, graduates expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the training they had received. A number of them indicated that a lack of full-time work in their languages was not an overriding consideration when they took into account the employment they had gained within and outside the interpreting profession, the worth of the training experience, and the benefits to themselves and their communities. Many took pride in the fact that by doing the training they were able to service their very needy communities in a professional manner, albeit not as full-time interpreters.

Responses to questions at follow-up interviews about whether the course had met expectations in acquiring interpreting skills and employment indicated a high degree of satisfaction:

- *I took the course to acquire professional qualifications that would give me access to interpreting agencies.*
- *It gave me the opportunity to practise my profession officially as I have been accredited by the NAATI. Because if I didn't have this diploma I wouldn't be able to work as an interpreter.*
- *It gives me a piece of paper that recognises proper, professional qualifications.*

4.1 SURVEY OUTCOMES – EXPECTATIONS OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT - *continued*

- *It gave a better understanding of the ethical and legal aspects of interpreting.*
- *It allows a better ability to bridge the gap between the service provider and the client.*
- *Increased credibility and professional recognition enormously.*
- *It has led to access to interpreting and translating work.*
- *I learned a great deal about interpreting and the diversity of the job.*
- *The course has given me both competence and confidence in my role as an interpreter and with service providers.*
- *It gave me greater knowledge.*
- *I was interpreting without professional knowledge and this course has opened up so many avenues of knowledge and understanding for me.*
- *People feel safer when I interpret for them and they know I have professional qualifications.*
- *It has made me more aware of all of the implications in areas such as legal and medical that I didn't fully understand before.*
- *In the Oromo community the services of RMIT graduates are in demand in places as far away as New Zealand, and on more than one occasion.*

Interestingly, some respondents commented that while they had ticked the survey box indicating that they had wanted to obtain full-time work as an interpreter, they had in fact already been in satisfactory full-time employment or they had undertaken the training to progress from relatively menial work to full-time work in more professional areas and that the training had been successful in this regard. Comments on better employment outcomes, including work other than interpreting, included:

- *I enrolled in the course to gain access to other jobs.*
- *Having skills means having a job so that I can participate in the development of my new country Australia.*
- *A job also means improving someone's social and economic condition rather than relying only on government social support payment (Centrelink [social welfare] payment).*
- *Having skills needed Australia wide was so crucial for me.*

4.2 SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OUTCOMES

The RMIT Translating and Interpreting Program has an approach to the social sustainability of this project which can be summed up by a set of principles that has been well defined within the Western Australian Council Of Social Services (WACOSS) model of social sustainability (WACOSS: 2002, cited in Partridge,2005). Principles 1-4 inform the social sustainability focus of this program.

The principles of social sustainability are designed to capture the goals of socially sustainable communities and to this end are aspirational and visionary statements

4.2 SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OUTCOMES - *continued*

that describe what makes a community healthy and liveable, both now and in the future (WACOSS 2002: 7).

Partridge summarises these principles as “quality of life, equity, inclusion, access, a future focus and participatory process” (Partridge, 2005).

While many respondents to the survey indicated that they had not obtained full-time/sustainable employment, follow-up interviews that asked how the course had helped with employment outside the interpreting field, and how it had assisted graduates to help their communities indicated that the course had satisfied many of the above definitions of social sustainability.

Looking beyond employment outcomes, a number of respondents expressed satisfaction that the training had benefited them personally and / or helped them to assist their communities:

- *I wanted to improve my English skills;*
- *I enrolled in the RMIT course to help my community by gaining a professional qualification in Interpreting.*
- *The course has opened opportunities for me to work in the field of training other people from my language group.*
- *I have learned how to adjust language depending on my audience.*
- *Working with Centrelink. The course has permitted me as a professional to become a more competent professional customer adviser.*
- *I realise that I can use my qualifications in my job without having to work through an Interpreting Agency.*
- *As a welfare worker, the English language training and the Ethics course have been invaluable in my work.*

When asked what the most valuable outcome of the training had been, while several said that it was gaining professional qualifications, other remarks included:

- *I also like working with people as I myself am an Overseas Qualified Nurse, it came to my mind that if I'm not able to practice my Nursing Career here in Australia gaining this profession would be alternative to help people who are in need because of the language barrier.*
- *A really enjoyable course.*
- *It has improved my understanding of the Australian culture, allowing me to better convey that to my community/clients.*
- *This course has given me strong qualifications and the capacity to give my community the help it needs.*
- *It has improved my English skills.*

4.2 SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OUTCOMES – *continued*

- *Maintaining and strengthening my native Dinka language which is spoken by more than nine million people in Sudan and abroad is one of the best things to do in my life. Because this language was banned by the Islamic Governments which come to power in Sudan (this was one of the bad policies that led Sudan to be in civil war).*
- *Giving information to the community in their own language by interpreting is a key in community capacity building.*
- *Within the community I have been invited by the Church and community elders to interpret when speakers come to talk to our people about legal issues, things such as domestic violence, immunisation, etc. The course has helped me enormously with terminology, language and interpreting speed.*
- *It has given me more credibility in my community.*
- *It helps me a lot as many people now are save in receiving their information with confidence and has made me to be well known and trusted.*
- *It has helped my passion to become a ‘good soldier’ in my community. I am prepared to help and qualified to do so.*
- *Gaining the confidence and competency to do my job well.*
- *More than the personal benefits is the opportunity this course has given me to help my community.*
- *Knowing that people trust me to do a good job.*
- *Maintaining my language which becomes one of the languages of Australia is the main thing to me.*

These responses indicate that from the perspectives of the graduates the training has been socially sustainable. They and their communities have been enhanced by the training in ways that were not necessarily foreseen at the outset of the initiative in 2002.

5 COOPERATION WITH NAATI – TESTING IN NEWLY EMERGING LANGUAGES

A final outcome from RMIT's venture into training in newly emerging languages has been its partnership with NAATI in providing testing throughout Australia in some of the newly emerging languages the University has introduced into its interpreting programs since 2002.

In 2008, NAATI requested RMIT to develop Paraprofessional Interpreter tests in the Dinka, Nuer, Oromo and Swahili languages. This was a unique arrangement as it was the first time that NAATI had requested such an arrangement with a training institution. It arose because of problems the Authority had experienced in using its current model to develop panels in these languages.

5 COOPERATION WITH NAATI – TESTING IN NEWLY EMERGING LANGUAGES – *continued*

Under the agreement, RMIT has prepared dialogues and some other aspects of the Paraprofessional tests using staff and graduates from its programs to work from templates provided by NAATI. Testing was carried out in NAATI offices around the country. In 2009, RMIT is using the same former staff and graduates to assess these tests under the guidance of core University staff.

This cooperative approach between NAATI and RMIT is both an indication of the difficulties of providing services to newly emerging communities and an example of service providers working together to seek new ways to service their needs.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The introduction of RMIT's NAATI approved Diploma of Interpreting course to students from emerging communities has met with a number of challenges deriving from the small population bases and the refugee status of these groups. These have included: ascertaining the standard form of the language, the spasmodic nature of the future needs for interpreters in specific languages (determined by government immigration policies and refugee intakes), finding and training staff, difficulties in verifying qualifications and the production of teaching materials.

RMIT has met the challenges presented with considerable success, but the sustainability issues it has encountered indicate some of the challenges that service providers need to take into account when servicing the needs of newly emerging communities.

Based on a recent survey and interviews with past students, it is clear that, with the exception of Dinka, there are limited opportunities for full time work in interpreting in these emerging languages. However, it is also clear that the social sustainability outcomes of the course have been rewarding.

The research conducted for this paper indicates that the course has contributed significantly to social sustainability (as defined in WACOSS: 2002, cited in Partridge, 2005) by helping to provide equitable opportunities, maintain diversity, build community and interconnectedness, and to help bring these communities to a better understanding of their new environment and to narrow the gap between them and the wider Australian community.

Thanks to the partnership between RMIT and the Victorian Government, vulnerable and needy communities have been serviced by accredited interpreters who have graduated from rigorous and intensive training programs, a situation that in Australia is unique to Victoria and is perhaps unique to Australia (Lai and Mulayim, 2007).

RMIT's venture into training in these newly emerging languages has also led to a unique partnership with NAATI where these two institutions have cooperated in developing NAATI Paraprofessional tests in a number of these languages. This cooperation is indicative of the difficulties sometimes encountered in providing services to these communities and the willingness of service providers to cooperate in order to do so.

6 CONCLUSIONS – *continued*

Students of the programs at RMIT have not only benefited from the interpreting techniques imparted in the programs, but have gained much better contextual knowledge about Australian society and institutions and have improved their English proficiency.

On a personal level, graduates have gained confidence in their ability to serve both their communities and families as a result of an improvement in their English skills, a greater knowledge of the Australian culture, and, significantly, a sense of achievement in having gained professional qualifications that give them credibility and respect in their communities. Furthermore, in offering training RMIT has given value to these newly emerging languages within the Australian cultural landscape.

This should assist in developing a better quality of life for the graduates, and the communities they serve.

References:

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APPENDIX ONE

Survey form

**THE SUSTAINABILITY OF EMPLOYMENT IN LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY EMERGING
COMMUNITIES IN VICTORIA**

Thank you for participating in this survey. Please draw a circle around each correct response in the '**Answer**' column.

	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What year did you graduate from RMIT?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 2004 b. 2005 c. 2006 d. 2007
2	In which language did you achieve NAATI Paraprofessional accreditation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Amharic b. Dari c. Dinka d. Nuer e. Oromo
3	When you studied at RMIT did you wish to work full-time (30 hours or more per week) as an interpreter in your language after graduation from the program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Yes b. No c.
4	After graduating from RMIT, did you find full-time work as an interpreter in your language?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Yes b. No
5	If you answered Yes to Question 4 (above), are you still in full-time work as an interpreter in your language? (If you did not answer Yes to question 3 please ignore this question.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Yes b. No
6	After graduating from RMIT, did you find part-time work as an interpreter in your language?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Yes b. No
7	If you answered Yes to Question 6 (above) on average how many hours are you working each week as an interpreter in your language?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 2 to 6 hours b. 6 to 10 hours c. 10 to 14 hours d. 14 to 18 hours e. 18 to 22 hours f. 22 to 26 hours g. 26 to 30 hours

	QUESTION	ANSWER
8	Over the next five years, do you believe the need for interpreters in your language will increase or decrease?	a. Increase b. Decrease
9	Over the next ten years, do you believe the need for interpreters in your language will increase or decrease?	a. Increase b. Decrease

If you would like to provide further information or ask any questions about this survey please contact: **Barry Turner** or **Sedat Mulayim** by email (barry.turner@rmit.edu.au or sedat.mulayim@rmit.edu.au) or phone us on **9925 3771** (Barry Turner) or **9925 9920** (Sedat Mulayim).
