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Asylum Seekers and Human Rights report

The Australian Human Rights Commission has released its Asylum seekers, refugees and human rights: Snapshot report 2013 (<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/asylum-seekers-refugees-and-human-rights-snapshot-report>). It highlights the significant gap between Australia's human rights obligations and our treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.

Commission President, Professor Gillian Triggs, has urged the Australian Government to "ensure that all asylum seekers and refugees are treated humanely, regardless of their mode of arrival, and to continue to uphold our proud history of providing protection to some of the world's most persecuted, vulnerable people".

The report focuses on immigration detention and third country processing and includes observations about some of the policy changes proposed by the Coalition Government.

<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/e-bulletin>

Human Rights information in 24 languages

Updated information about human rights, anti-discrimination law and the Commission's complain process is now available in 24 languages including Farsi, Hindi, Sinhalese, Swahili and Turkish.

The Commission's updated brochure and poster are available at <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/translated-information>.

Information about the law and the complaint process is also provided by the Commission's national Information Service on 1300 656 419.

People can call the free Telephone Interpreter Service on 131 450 and ask for the Commission on 1300 656 419. People who are deaf or hearing impaired can contact the Commission by TTY on 1800 620 241 or through the National Relay Service on 133 677.

<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/e-bulletin>

Australia's 457 'king of visas' is a road to serfdom for many migrants

Nguyen's Story

They are called the "king of visas" by some migration agents, but Nguyen Dung's 457 visa made him more pauper than prince.

"The [migration] agent told me that I could earn \$50,000 per year, but actually it's just \$15 per hour," he said.

Furthermore, Mr Nguyen was supposed to be employed full time, but instead was taken on as a casual.

Mr Nguyen's pay was clearly below the minimum wage of more than \$20 per hour for casuals, and it also breached a key 457 visa requirement that employees earn at least \$53,000 a year - a requirement designed to prevent the visa being abused to bring in cheap labour for low skill jobs.

However, not only was Mr Nguyen underpaid, he was placed in a job that did not utilise the skills which made him eligible for a 457 visa in the first place.

"I have a certificate of chef, he [the migration agent] gave me a job in a restaurant, and so I thought I can work as a chef, but actually I was a kind of cleaner," Mr Nguyen said.

After about five months of part-time cleaning, Mr Nguyen was finally got some time in the kitchen.

However, when he asked for his pay to go up, he was shown the door. For all this, Mr Nguyen paid a premium to his migration agent.

"When I get visa, I pay \$10,000 and then when I get the job I have to pay more \$10,000. Finally, the agent said to me after I work two years in Australia I can get permanent [residency], then I have to pay more \$10,000 again" he said.

Mr Nguyen found his agent through ads on Vietnamese radio and in community newspapers in Sydney.

Dr Velayutham's Story

Research just published in The Economic and Labour Relations Review and examined by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has found that foreign workers employed by other members of the same ethnic community are the most vulnerable to exploitation.

The research by Dr Selvaraj Velayutham involved interviews of around 40 457 visa holders from India over a three-year period.

The report is not a statistical study of 457 visa satisfaction, and noted that previous such studies had found more than 98 per cent of respondents were broadly satisfied with their experiences.

However, it also observed that many of these surveys were distributed through employers or the post, and may miss some of the vulnerable workers with poor English skills that were most at risk of exploitation.

Indeed, Dr Velayutham found that while white collar Indian 457 visa holders, often in IT and working in large companies, enjoyed employment conditions broadly comparable with their Australian counterparts, workers in manufacturing, construction and hospitality were more vulnerable.

In particular, the research found that hospitality employees were in danger of exploitation because they often worked long hours with small groups of co-workers, and had little time off work to spend in the broader community to establish support networks.

"All restaurant workers we spoke to worked long hours - typically 15 or more hours a day, seven days a week. Few had time off, other than short periods between the lunch and dinner meal shifts," Dr Velayutham's report finds.

"All we spoke to had the experience of 'two contracts' - one they signed in India prior to departure and an amended one presented to them upon arrival with far less favourable conditions," noted Dr Velayutham in the article.

Mr Lal's Story

A 457 visa holder named Mr Lal was lured to Australia in 2006 with the promise of reimbursement for his travel expenses and a job that would pay \$3,000 a month for a six-day week of eight-hour days.

However, when he arrived he told the researchers he worked an average of 17-18 hours per day, seven days a week and was not paid for the duration of his employment. Mr Lal was forced to sleep on a dirty carpet in a closed shop nearby that did not have a toilet.

He was sent on two trips to India to buy equipment for the restaurant, and was not paid or compensated for the cost of that equipment. Upon demanding compensation after the first trip, Mr Lal says his employer threatened to kill him and harm his family in India.

While on the second trip, his employer informed the Department of Immigration that it had sacked Mr Lal, and his visa was cancelled.

He was left destitute in India, with no realistic avenue of redress to recover his unpaid wages and costs and a debt to repay with no source of income.

Anti-Slavery Australia Story

The director of Anti-Slavery Australia at UTS, Jennifer Burn, says the Australian Institute of Criminology has identified hospitality as a problem area for worker exploitation.

"The vulnerable sectors include the hospitality industry, workers in construction and in some of the regional, seasonal work," she said. Ms Burn says new federal laws were passed in March to outlaw some of the worst practices.

"This amendment will criminalise forced labour in Australia, deceptive recruitment and also debt bondage," she said. Hospitality is an area that is already being targeted in an audit by the Fair Work Ombudsman for suspected abuses of both foreign and local workers.

However, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Jenny Lambert says the Immigration Department also needs to increase its enforcement activities, because dodgy employers are undermining support for the whole 457 visa scheme.

"In the small number of cases where employers are doing the wrong thing, the employer groups such as the ACCI would very much support increased enforcement, particularly in relation to these more serious 457 visa abuses," she said.

Transport Workers Union

The Transport Workers Union has been helping Nguyen Dung, and its national secretary Tony Sheldon says he is disturbed by the surge in 457 visas for hospitality jobs.

"The Bureau of Statistics tells us that spending in hotels and restaurants has actually fallen in the last year by 1.1 per cent, but we've seen a substantive increase of hundreds of additional visas, supposedly as chefs, coming into the country every month," he said.

"That doesn't equate unless you're actually exploiting more people, doing it to get cheaper labour and disadvantage Australian chef professionals."

Mr Sheldon says he believes exploitation of foreign workers is far more common than statistics show, because many are afraid to speak up, lose their job and have their visa revoked.

"What happens to Dung, he takes it up, and then the Department [of Immigration] holds him to account, his visa's broken, while the employer who's receiving the cash benefit of exploited labour continues to operate," he argued.

Dr Velayutham found most Indian workers he interviewed were not even aware of their workplace rights in the first place, and did not realise that they were entitled to the same conditions as local staff.

Ms Burn says workplace rights factsheets in their native language should be given to all foreign workers when they apply for their visas or as soon as they arrive in the country.

"A factsheet itself isn't going to provide a cure for labour exploitation, but increasing the amount of information in the community about legal rights and responsibilities is critical," she suggested. The ACCI's Jenny Lambert concurs.

People intending to apply for a Subclass 457 visa should be aware of schemes and scams and should take proper legal advice to be fully aware of the various risk associated with such visas which are not always the pathway to permanent residency promised by many promoters.

For more information contact Diana Tong or Tina Nematian in our office.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-06/27king-of-visas27-a-road-to-serfdom-for-many/4941980>

Visas, Immigration and Refugees

My Health Declarations Planned System Maintenance and Technical Issues:

Most applicants for visas to Australia need to meet Australia's very strict health requirement in order to be granted a visa. You will be required to complete immigration health examinations in order to show that you meet Australia's health requirements.

The health examination and following immigration health assessment process can take several weeks to be completed. To avoid delays, you can complete your health examinations before lodging your visa application by using *My Health Declarations*.

For detailed information about planned system maintenance or technical issues including known system errors.

See: Planned System Maintenance and Technical Issues

Only a few visa contain a health waiver provision and usually if one family fails the health test the application is refused for all visa applicants.

For more information on the health criteria contact David Bitel in our office.

<http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/health-requirements/my-health-declarations.htm>

Teen refugees excluded until adulthood

Teenage refugees joining the so-called "queue" in Indonesia to apply officially for protection visas, instead of jumping on a boat, say they are allegedly being told Australia will not take them until they are 18 years old.

The boys, who are stuck in limbo in Jakarta, said that even though they have been determined to be refugees and did the right thing by applying through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), they were told they would not be considered or their applications would be delayed until they are considered adults. Alternatively, they could apply to go to another country, including the US.

A 14-year-old Hazara boy, who already survived a boat sinking in April, said he was living in a shelter for unaccompanied minors in a suburb in Jakarta. He said the advice was one of the reasons why there is such a high number of unaccompanied children arriving on boats. He said the alternative was to live for years in a shelter with little support, no money and no chance of going to school or working.

Another boy said he had been in Indonesia for seven months already and he had been told he would have to wait for another five months before he will even be interviewed by the UNHCR to determine if he is a refugee. He said he was told that there are not enough resources in Indonesia to cope and it is not unusual for a first interview to take a year or more.

Others who were teenagers at the time they applied, and have since arrived in Australia, said their applications were delayed until they were old enough.

An Immigration Department spokesman said Australia tries to discourage parents from sending their children on a dangerous journey to Australia "to act as an anchor" for families' subsequent migration to Australia.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/teen-refugees-excluded-until-adulthood-20130810-2r0re.html>

Countries rebuff efforts to resettle refugees

Ten countries have knocked back Australian government attempts to offload a group of almost 50 refugees ASIO has deemed threats to national security.

The High Court has begun hearing a challenge into the case of Tamil refugee Ranjini - a mother of three and the most conspicuous of the group given an adverse security assessment by the intelligence agency.

The group is being held in indefinite detention in Australia after the government refused to issue visas despite its members' well-founded fear of persecution.

Ranjini's lawyers argued that her detention was unlawful because there is no practical prospect of deportation.

The court was told in submissions that 12 nations have been approached to resettle Ranjini and other members of the group with adverse assessments and 10 countries had "expressly declined these requests".

Processing caused by ASIO are now affecting large numbers of visa applicants from many countries.

If you are affected please contact David Bitel in our office.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/countries-rebuff-efforts-to-resettle-refugees-20130904-2t5j6.html>

Nauru demands tent city changes

The Nauruan government ruled out accepting women and children asylum seekers until "further modifications" are made to the tent city that has sprung up on their tiny island nation over the last six weeks, echoing criticisms by the Salvation Army.

While Kieren Keke, noted the camp was still in its infancy, he backed up comments by the Salvation Army - which is providing support services for asylum seekers there - in saying more work was needed.

"I think we would be getting comfortable [about accepting women and children] when some further modifications are made that would enable segregation between different populations," he said.

Dr Keke's comments came hours after a spokesman for the Salvation Army, Major Paul Moulds, questioned whether the Topside processing centre on Nauru was ready for women and children.

"We certainly would be keen to see more development happen with facilities," he said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/nauru-demands-tent-city-changes-before-taking-women-children-20120918-264sw.html>

More Iranians return home from Manus Island

A group of 28 unauthorised maritime arrivals affected by the regional settlement arrangement and who chose to voluntarily return home, has arrived in Tehran.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship confirmed the Iranian nationals chose to return home rather than remain in Papua New Guinea (PNG).

"Iranian nationals who have arrived by boat since July 19 are continuing to understand that they will not be settled in Australia," the spokesman said.

"The department continues to transfer unauthorised maritime arrivals to either Manus Island or Nauru regional processing centres, and more will be transferred in the coming days and weeks."

Individuals in a regional processing centre or immigration detention facility can request a voluntary return home at any time.

Those who choose to depart voluntarily can be provided with support to assist with their sustainable return, through the International Organization for Migration.

<http://www.newsroom.immi.gov.au/releases/more-iranians-return-home-from-manus-island>

Registration of former Sydney based migration agent cancelled

A former Sydney based migration agent, Jingyi Wang, has been formally de-registered following claims of facilitating the production of fraudulent documentation associated with his clients' visa applications.

Investigations of two complaints affecting 12 clients by the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (Office of the MARA) lead to the cancellation of Mr Wang's agent's registration.

The Office of the MARA found he had failed to act in accordance with his clients' instructions by lodging applications to a skills assessing body without their knowledge, consent or authority.

Investigators were satisfied the agent's conduct was designed to enable international students to obtain positive skills assessments based on fraudulent information, to then apply for permanent residency visas under the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's skilled visa program.

"In Australia, only people who are registered as migration agents with the Office of the MARA can give immigration assistance and charge a fee or reward for doing so," a DIAC spokesman said today.

"Registered migration agents are bound by a code of conduct and are required to provide immigration assistance services in accordance with the professional standards as set out in the code."

Consumers wishing to find out whether an individual is registered as a migration agent can do so by visiting the Office of the MARA's website at www.mara.gov.au.

Clients affected by misconduct of unscrupulous agents you may wish to contact special counsel to Parish Patience Immigration, Michael Jones for profession advice.

<http://www.newsroom.immi.gov.au/releases/registration-of-former-sydney-based-migration-agent-cancelled>

Australian Federal Police

Australia's largest people smuggling strike

A targeted Australian Federal Police (AFP) operation, known as Operation Delphinium has resulted in the arrest of five men across Australia today in relation to seven people smuggling investigations.

In a strategic strike, the AFP executed a number of search warrants in Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and New South Wales.

It will be alleged that the men arrested were responsible for a range of people smuggling activities and were key members of people smuggling syndicates involved in the planning or facilitation of up to 132 Suspected Illegal Entry Vessels (SIEVs) bound for Australia.

A 21-year-old Iranian national, a 36-year-old Pakistani national and three Afghan nationals aged 40, 34 and 33 have been charged with people smuggling offences.

The arrests are the culmination of 12 months of high-tempo operational activity targeting people smuggling organisers with domestic and international links.

The maximum penalty for these offences is 10 years imprisonment and/or \$110,000 fine.

Enquiries are continuing in Australia and internationally, and further arrests are expected.

<http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2013/august/five-arrested-in-australias-largest-people-smuggling-strike.aspx>

Fake credit cards and IDs

A joint Identity Security Strike Team operation in Sydney has led to the arrest of two men for producing fake identity material and committing credit card fraud.

The operation began in January when intelligence gathered in previous operations identified a 52-year-old Beverly Hills man suspected of manufacturing fake identification and credit cards.

Following investigative activities over the past eight months, search warrants were executed at a number of locations, including a Riverwood premises where police will allege that the 52 year old man manufactured false documents, including driver licences, Medicare cards and credit cards. A 47-year-old Burwood man was identified as sourcing the identification information and supplying the completed false identification documents to others. A substantial amount of cash was also seized during the search warrants.

The Sydney-based Identity Security Strike Team (ISST) is a multi-agency taskforce comprising members of the Australian Federal Police, NSW Police, Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and NSW Roads and Maritime Services.

AFP Manager Sydney Office Ray Johnson said the arrests highlight the value of intelligence and co-operation in disrupting identity fraud in Australia.

<http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2013/september/joint-operation-results-in-two-men-charged-for-producing-fake-credit-cards-and-ids.aspx>

Key to fighting online child abuse

This media release has been distributed by the AFP on behalf of the VGT. It reports the release of the latest assessment by the Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT), a group of law enforcement agencies from around the globe dedicated to fighting online child sexual abuse.

The VGT Environmental Scan combines cutting edge scientific research with unprecedented access to the operational experiences of specialist law enforcement officers.

The assessment focused on the methods used by online child abusers to victimise children and young people, and the ways in which young people may be making themselves more vulnerable to unwanted approaches by adults.

The report finds that offenders' compulsive Internet usage and online networks of abusers may fuel hands-on offending against children and young people.

Also highlighted is an increase in the distribution of sexually explicit images and videos by young people themselves – sometimes known as “sexting” – and the need to make young people aware of how this material may be circulated without their consent, and even used as a tool to blackmail them into sexual activity with an adult.

The VGT aims to make the Internet a safer place, identify, locate and help children at risk and hold perpetrators appropriately to account.

<http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2013/may/vgt-study-finds-that-increased-law-enforcement-cooperation-is-key-to-fighting-online-child-abuse.aspx>

Three arrested for labour trafficking

Australian Federal Police (AFP) members have arrested three Sydney people in relation to alleged labour trafficking and exploitation offences.

A 59-year-old and 33-year-old man from Green Valley, NSW and a 34-year-old Green Valley woman were arrested for allegedly facilitating the arrival of four men from the Philippines into Australia on sporting visas, forcing them into a debt-bondage situation and exploiting their labour.

The investigation began when the AFP received a referral from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) regarding four Filipino nationals allegedly trafficked into Australia.

The men, who were involved in the boxing industry, were taken to a premises in Sydney after being told they owed a debt for their travel to Australia. They were housed in poor-quality accommodation, provided with sub-standard meals, forced into unpaid domestic labour and had their movements restricted.

Search warrants were conducted in relation to these allegations, resulting in the seizure of numerous items of evidence.

Following a protracted investigation and ongoing liaison with the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions, the AFP Human Trafficking team today executed a search warrant in Green Valley, arresting the three people.

The offence carries a maximum penalty of 12 years' imprisonment.

"These four victims thought they were travelling to Australia for a professional boxing career. Instead, they were exploited and forced to live in a situation that was completely unacceptable."

<http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2013/october/three-arrested-for-labour-trafficking-charges.aspx>

Education

Jobs for overseas graduates

New Coalition Education Minister Christopher Pyne has promised to open the jobs market to more overseas students who have graduated from Australian universities.

In his first speech on the industry since he was sworn in as Minister, Mr Pyne said the Abbott government would move quickly to extend the streamlined visa process beyond universities to training colleges, and maximise career opportunities in Australia for the best foreign graduates of our universities.

Monash University researcher Bob Birell said "We know from past experience there are literally hundreds of operators who are skilled in packaging courses that provide the cheapest possible entry".

Under the Howard government, which linked gaining an Australian tertiary qualification with permanent residency, thousands of students swarmed into low-level vocational diplomas and dozens of dodgy private colleges exploited the lax policy.

The Minister acknowledged past abuses and said preventing any repeat would be "very much part of our planning to get that right".

Mr Pyne told the Australian International Education Conference in Canberra he would work with the new Immigration Minister Scott Morrison to maximise the international student market while maintaining visa integrity and educational quality.

Universities Australia welcomed Mr Pyne's speech as showing the government's intention "to turbo-charge international education policy against a backdrop of declining enrolments and export revenue".

At the conference, he cited forecasts that the Asia-Pacific middle class would rise from 500 million to 3.2 billion by 2030, and that the number of young people in the world looking to study abroad would double to more than seven million by 2020.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/pyne-vows-action-on-visas-work-rights/story-e6frgcjx-1226735647370>

Universities donation

Minister for Education Christopher Pyne today hailed the \$65 million donation to five Western Australian universities by Andrew and Nicola Forrest as a landmark moment for higher education.

"The Forrests' generosity is something the Coalition Government both welcomes and wants to encourage".

"This new foundation will attract talented scholarship recipients to Australia who will contribute to our research capacity".

Mr and Mrs Forrest will set up a \$50 million foundation to fund scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships at five Western Australian universities.

A further \$15 million will be put towards the construction of a centre to allow world-leading research to be performed in Western Australia.

<http://ministers.education.gov.au/pyne/coalition-government-welcomes-forrests-universities-donation>

The Education Century

In his book *The Lucky Country*, first published nearly half a century ago, Donald Horne provocatively declared: "We're all Asians now." Four words. In 2013 they don't sound like such a big deal, but back then they were astonishing. Remember, this was 1964. It was the Cold War. White Australia.

To benefit fully from Asia's rise, we need to truly understand the diverse "Near North", as opposed to colonial notions of a "Far East".

That Australia no longer exists – we're more prosperous, multicultural, cosmopolitan and connected. But I am forensically interested in what our world will look like in another 50 years. What future are we building for our children? Are we ready for the Asian Century?

We're also an attractive destination for students from Asia. For instance, nine of the top 10 countries that send international students to Australia are from Asia.

According to a survey, only 10 per cent of Chinese students currently study abroad, but that number is expected to jump to 68 per cent over the next five to 10 years. This will create enormous opportunities for the higher education sector – and strengthen Australia's links with the region.

Australia's migration program is increasingly drawn from Asia: seven of the top 10 source countries are Asian. Almost one in four migrants now come from India. Out of a population of 23 million people, 2 million of us speak an Asian language.

It could be better. More of us need to learn to speak the languages of our neighbours.

Asia is a place with different histories, cultures, religions, languages and expectations. In the positive, we have an open, market-based economy, a robust multicultural society, an advanced services sector, abundant natural resources, a transparent regulatory regime, good governance, and a healthy, skilled and educated population.

If Australians are to fully benefit from the so-called Asian Century we will need to truly understand the diverse and dynamic near north, as opposed to colonial notions of a "Far East". Indeed, we need to create an Education Century here at home.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/comment/the-education-century-that-must-go-with-the-asian-century-20130808-2rjnw.html>

Tertiary options open up a new world

At Fairfield High School the teachers' great expectations for their students are paying off. The number of students from the school who go straight to university has gone from 28 to 42 in two years.

The teachers attribute this rise to a concerted effort to assist students to make that transition. The school used money it received under National Partnerships to create a team of leading teachers dedicated to a few key goals, including opening their students' eyes to possibilities once they complete school, educating them and their parents about how to achieve employment goals and doing simple activities such as taking students of all ages, and parents who may have never been to a university or TAFE, on to campuses.

"What the kids walk away with is not just exposure by going [to universities] and seeing what it's like. They start to get an early understanding of the kind of things they can learn about at uni and they see the connection between visual arts here and the Sydney College of the Arts ... between science here and microbiology at uni," deputy principal Ekbal Sayed-Rich said.

Highlighting the importance of building aspirations among students, especially those from disadvantaged areas, giving them a taste of university or TAFE and showing them how subjects they study at school can shape their career prospects, is the goal of a new report from the NSW Department of Education and Communities.

Exposing students to university or TAFE is also key, with the report showing more than 40 per cent of students from very low socio-economic backgrounds who attended an information session went on to university, compared with less than 20 per cent who did not. Among students from higher socio-economic backgrounds, a similar correlation was found.

The report also advises teachers to encourage students to make subject choices that will give them plenty of opportunities, for example helping them to see by not choosing a subject such as maths, they may be limiting their tertiary options.

Taking up these challenges has been particularly important at Fairfield High, where more than 90 per cent of the students are from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and about 40 per cent are refugees, with parents who may be unfamiliar with institutions and career pathways in Australia.

"This is to help them see all the cards that have got to be played, how they've got to bid, what they've got to pick up and what they've got to drop," Pam Dunn, the school's careers adviser, said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/tertiary-options-open-up-a-new-world-20130818-2s4uu.html>

Foundation for Young Australians

Mr Smith joined FYA's CEO Jan Owen AM at Victoria's Parliament House for the launch of the national not-for-profit organisation's new program *Unlimited Potential: A commitment to young Australians*.

"This program will allow young people to develop the skills needed to navigate the corporate world and learn to create opportunities for themselves and their communities."

Speaking to an audience that included representatives from business, industry and welfare agencies, he said *Unlimited Potential* outlined how FYA will work across a number of sectors to support generations of future focused learners, enterprising change makers and confident global citizens.

The Government's 2013-14 Budget has delivered \$450,000 a year for four years to support young people aged 18 to 25 in enterprise ventures.

The funding will go towards:

- a business mentoring program – to connect experienced business mentors to young people who wish to establish or improve their business;
- a small business training and development program – to focus on business development, management and leadership skills;
- social enterprise – integrated package of training, support and investment for new social enterprise ideas; and
- sponsorship of a Victorian Young Achiever Award – to promote excellence in youth mentoring, volunteering and enterprise.

For more information about Unlimited Potential go to www.fya.org.au

<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/7188-youth-affairs-minister-praises-work-of-foundation-for-young-australians.html>

Online study seminars help create a level playing field

Every weekend a small group of students meets a teacher in a swanky Sydney apartment for a marathon study seminar.

The scenario would be unremarkable except that they are seated under harsh studio lights, being watched by three cameras and streamed live to up to 1000 students, who tune in from places as far away as Singapore.

The web seminars, or webinars, are run by hscLIVE, one of a number of new online companies that say they are "democratising" the Higher School Certificate.

The company, launched in March, says about 10,000 of the state's high school students have signed up to watch the free live workshops, which are broadcast between 9am and 5pm every Saturday and Sunday.

"We are trying to break down every geographic and socioeconomic boundary to education," co-founder Paul Bennetts said.

Scott Hekking, from Gosford High School, caught the train to Sydney to be in the "live audience" and plans to watch future seminars from his home. "The good thing about it is you can watch it in your own home where you're comfortable and take notes and be a part of it," he said.

Students watching remotely on their laptop, tablet or mobile phone can submit questions to the teachers, who are all experienced exam markers.

Danielle Vandenberg, the head teacher of English at a public school in south-west Sydney, said teaching in the studio was quite challenging at first.

"You've only got five students, it's quite an artificial environment, and you're a bit nervous because the camera's looking at you," she said. "But two minutes in, it's just like you're back in the classroom, answering questions and interacting."

hscLIVE claims to reach students from more than 395 metropolitan and regional high schools, the furthest being the Australian International School in Singapore.

<http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/digital-life-news/online-study-seminars-help-create-a-level-playing-field-20130712-2pvjh.html#ixzz2iOYeKS5b>

Virtual excursions bringing Australia to the classroom

A new web portal will take students and teachers directly to a number of iconic Australian institutions through a partnership developed between Virtual Excursions Australia and arts, cultural, science and education organisations.

Minister Assisting for Innovation and Industry and the Digital Economy Senator Kate Lundy launched Virtual Excursions Australia (VEA) at the Interactive Technology in Education Conference (ITEC 2013) at the Sydney Opera House.

"The Virtual Excursions web portal is an initiative that will help transform education in Australia and ensure it is an experience that goes far beyond the traditional classroom walls,"

"Not all locations are accessible to all students, all of the time and virtual excursions allow classrooms to be transported to some of Australia's most important arts, cultural, science, and education institutions.

"There are some fantastic institutions across Australia that have joined the program to open their virtual doors to classrooms, including the Australian Museum, Sydney Opera House, and Questacon.

As the National Broadband Network continues to be rolled-out across Australia access and availability of these types of programs will continue to grow.

"Teachers will have access to tools to book and plan virtual excursions through the Virtual Excursions Australia website which acts as a portal for teachers wanting information about video conferencing events and content providers.

<http://www.digitalpeel.com.au/virtual-excursions-bringing-australia-classroom/>

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