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## Citizenship Test to stay but will be fairer - Ferguson

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The controversial Australian Citizenship Test is here to stay – but it will be restructured to make it fairer and easier for applicants to pass, the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, Laurie Ferguson, told the recent annual meeting of the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum.

The current first-time pass rate was 90 per cent, but this dropped to 86 per cent among applicants from a refugee background. “We intend to work through the migrant resource centres to lift the pass rate,” he said.

Mr Ferguson highlighted a different attitude to the centres than had existed under the previous Federal Government “when multiculturalism was off the agenda”.

“We are funding a secretariat to strengthen the centres and from now on they can be political advocates,” he said. “The only thing we ask is that they must be active in the areas of their governance and transparency.

“The Labor Government sees these lobby groups as allies rather than enemies.”

An inquiry was underway into the future of the Living In Harmony program. “There are concerns that in the past the grants for the program were not hitting the areas of greatest challenges, such as combating racism,” he said.

He agreed that a lack of adequate English was a fundamental drawback for migrants trying to enter the Australian workforce, but was not hopeful of more funding to increase the current levels of tuition.

CMCF Chair Sam Wong said after the meeting he was disappointed that the Citizenship Test, introduced by the Howard Government, was being retained under Labor.

“It has been, and remains, the position of CMCF that the test is discriminatory and unfair,” he said. “The test places considerable stress on applicants, especially on refugees who often equate failure with the threat of being sent back to the countries which persecuted them.

“However, if it is to stay, I welcome Mr Ferguson’s commitment to making it more understandable and easier to negotiate.”

Mr Wong paid tribute to the ACT Minister for Multicultural Affairs, John Hargreaves, MLA and the ACT Office of Multicultural Affairs for their support for CMCF in the first two years of its existence. “I believe we have formed an excellent partnership and I look forward to continuing it in the future. In addition, we would like to welcome all the newly elected Members of the 7<sup>th</sup> ACT Legislative Assembly, which we will work well with every one of them,” he said.

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