



Migrants 'resource for multilingual skills' - CMCF

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Programs assisting new migrants to Australia to learn English should run alongside the development of their skills in other languages, the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) believes.

In a submission to the federal government's review of the Adult Migrant English Program CMCF is critical of the review's apparent position that a lack of English is a barrier and disadvantage rather than an opportunity for the development of second language skills and beyond.

CMCF chair Sam Wong says migrants who come to this country fluent in their native tongue and who then learn English are automatically bilingual. "As such they are a resource to be treasured and nurtured," he said.

"Research clearly demonstrates that once one new language is mastered, skills in third languages and beyond are acquired much more easily. This is particularly so in the case of young migrants.

"People with multiple language skills are highly valued in the globalised world – in diplomacy, business, sciences, the arts, academia and so on. It is something Australia desperately needs if, as Prime Minister Kevin Rudd suggests, it is to take its place on the world stage as a middle-ranking power punching above its weight."

Mr Wong said CMCF welcomes the review's emphasis on youth. "If the Adult Migrant English Program is to be successful in this area, further consultation is needed with high schools, tertiary and vocational institutions," he said.

"There will be a need to facilitate the training of an increased numbers of bilingual and multilingual teachers and teachers' aids. Teachers' aids with multiple language skills in particular, can play a crucial role in tailoring programs and developing plans to meet each client's specific needs.

"CMCF hopes it is not too late for the review to consider these wider issues rather than simply concentrating on turning out migrants with passable skills in English."

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