

The AMEP Review Team
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Dear Review Team

Review of the Adult Migrant English Program 2008

The Canberra Multicultural Community Forum's (CMCF) main role is to represent the needs and aspirations of Canberra's multicultural community, while celebrating its achievements and fostering a spirit of cooperation and harmony. In this role, the CMCF has a key responsibility to support ethnic communities and people who have experienced the refugee and migration processes. The CMCF welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Review (the Review) and the proposed amendments to the AMEP.

CMCF notes that the Review appears to consider that lack of English language skills is merely a barrier and disadvantage, rather than considering skills in multiple languages as an advantage. CMCF is a keen advocate for language education and promotion. While CMCF agrees that participating in the AMEP is one of the most important steps that newly arrived non-English speaking migrants can take towards independence and participation, we also support the view that bilingual and multi-lingual skills are an advantage and should be nurtured.

We note that the Review has been prompted by the changing demographic profile of Australia's humanitarian entrants and migrants and that it is therefore an opportune time to reconsider the goals, eligibility and accountability for the AMEP. We also note that the changing labour market has been identified as another factor prompting the need for review. We would suggest that changes to other Government services and programs, development in the education sector, and changes to vocational training should also be taken into account by the Review Team and addressed in the final report.

On a more general note, while there is some limited information about the features of the current program, there is a gap in both qualitative and quantitative information about AMEP, its clients, its service providers, and the results of the program. Given that one of the aims of the review is to consider the strategic objectives of the program, further research and analysis is required. It is difficult to consider the appropriateness of the strategic objectives and the best way to meet English language needs in the absence of high-quality data about how the AMEP has been performing against its current goals. CMCF would suggest that the AMEP Review Team consider further research and analysis of current program data to inform the Review. Some key questions or further research might focus on:

- What percentage of AMEP clients find full-time paid employment? What percentage of AMEP clients find part time employment? How does this compare to other immigrants? What is the average timeframe taken to find employment? What is the demographic profile? How does the employment rates of different migration scheme entrants compare? What other services are accessed by these clients? How does this change as their English skills improve?
- What percentage of AMEP clients go on to further study? How does this compare to other immigrants? What is the average timeframe? What is the demographic profile?
- What activities of daily living are appropriate to measure social integration? How do AMEP clients compare to other immigrants in this area? What is the demographic profile? How do different migration scheme entrants compare? What other services are accessed by these clients? How does this change as their English skills improve?

We understand that the AMEP issues identified through community consultation predominately focused on the practicality of the skills taught, the lack of flexibility in the training, a lack of awareness about AMEP options and related services; and the challenges of balancing work commitments, Centrelink requirements, and access to AMEP services. It was disappointing that there was limited opportunity for CMCF and other local stakeholder groups to input into the initial phase of consultation. Consultation with a more diverse group of stakeholders may have contributed to the review having both a practical and a strategic focus. For example, there is limited discussion about the current goals of the program and how these goals might be achieved in new, more integrated or innovative ways.

I note that the Discussion paper focuses on a number of specific operational questions based on a two-pathway model. Given the lack of discussion about the program goals, it is difficult to fully comment on this model. That said, CMCF questions the appropriateness of a model based on only two pathways, rather than the development of a more flexible approach with multiple pathways linked to client goals. Given the range of employment, education and social participation outcomes that would be appropriate objectives for the AMEP, we would suggest that this is the only viable approach. We would also suggest that this narrow two streaming approach does not take account of the current service delivery methods of the AMEP and build on those strengths, nor does it address the identified need for more flexible delivery modes.

CMCF agrees that there is a need for the development of more integrated client data, but suggest that the development of an individual “AMEP Learner’s Passport” may not be the best solution. The idea of a passport appears to be more of a gimmick, rather than a practical solution to ensuring data is available and shared between the relevant service providers, teachers and Commonwealth agencies. If the aim is, in fact, to assist clients to develop and work towards specific individual goals, a passport is not the best option. Instead, the development of an integrated plan – based on individual pathways - drafted with the input of relevant stakeholders, and truly owned and updated by clients, might be a solution. This will address a number of the specific issues that you have raised in the Discussion Paper, such as how additional hours could be made available to particular high-need clients. CMCF would welcome a greater investment in AMEP counsellors to support this process.

With regards to the various practical questions about service delivery, CMCF provides specific comments on selected key issues below.

- Further development of infrastructure to support the training and use of bilingual/multilingual teachers and teachers' aids would be a significant improvement on current arrangements. Bilingual/ multilingual aids can play a vital role in supporting teachers and clients. In particular, they could play a key role in tailoring programs and developing plans to meet individual client needs.
- The strategies to assist AMEP and employment service providers to work better together also need to include teachers, vocational institutions, employers and other stakeholders. These strategies should be based on the suggestion of developing an integrated plan tailored to meet individual goals. This would suggest that there is a need for a co-ordinator or facilitator to navigate clients through a maze of education, employment and support service options, while ensuring that the AMEP provides the appropriate learning opportunities to meet the individuals' goals.
- CMCF welcomes the suggested new focus on youth. If the AMEP is to be successful in providing these services, further consultation and negotiation is required with the education sector at high school, tertiary and vocational levels.
- With regards to training resources, CMCF strongly supports the need for the development and sharing of further evidence-based training resources, evaluation tools and other guidance. There is also a need to develop better program data, which can be used by services providers and teachers to benchmark their service delivery and plan into the future.
- With regards to the suggestion about more training of teachers and the overall professional development of teachers, CMCF supports the ongoing role of the AMEP Research Centre in providing professional development. In addition to the AMEP Research Centre, there is a need for additional ongoing funding to support broader access to professional development, possibly through an allocation to AMEP service providers.

Once again, CMCF thanks you for the opportunity to input into the Review and eagerly awaits further opportunities to comment on the results of the Review. For further information, please contact Sam Wong on 0411 417 666 or chair@cmcf.org.au

Yours sincerely



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