



## **Settlement Council of Australia Submission to the Adult Migrant English Program Evaluation:**

Settlement Council of Australia's (SCOA) submission to the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Evaluation is informed by direct consultation with our members - the over 80 settlement agencies working directly in providing practical support to recently arrived refugees across Australia. SCOA conducted specific consultations with settlement agencies focussed on both humanitarian entrants and migrant engagement with AMEP.

The scope of the evaluation is very broad, with considerable constraints on responding given the short time-frame. SCOA welcomes the opportunity presented by the evaluation and is also conscious of the need to provide a considered response. There are a range of important evaluations occurring concurrently or in close succession in the settlement area, including one on the HSS and CCS programs, the humanitarian and migration programs, visa fees review and the 400 series visa review.

SCOA's response will focus on the key questions as outlined in the discussion paper and the information online.

SCOA's consultation found that overall the settlement sector had a positive perspective on the AMEP and AMEP providers.

- AMEP services are generally well linked to settlement agencies and settlement programs. Such links are essential to support coordinated information provision to humanitarian entrants and migrants, and are an important component to consider in any future program development.
- Given the strong links to settlement it would be worth considering moving the AMEP program from Department of Industry to Department of Social Services to strengthen program alignment and coordination.
- AMEP courses make effective use of a wide range of agencies and speakers to provide additional information while providing language education.
- Provision of 510 hours is insufficient to achieve the English language proficiency that is the goal of the AMEP, particularly for learners at the lower end of proficiency.
- Agencies stressed the importance of English language in supporting successful settlement, for employment and community participation and engagement.

### AMEP well designed:

SCOA's consultations found that in general the AMEP is well designed. The curriculum used is robust and flexible, allowing a good range of settlement topics to be incorporated into courses in the majority of cases. A few reports indicated greater flexibility was needed in some geographic areas. Member feedback also stressed the ongoing need for flexible

delivery and learning options. While acknowledging that this is in part addressed by home schooling and distance education options, the AMEP is providing services to a very diverse range of students, necessitating tailored approaches in venue, timing and delivery of training.

Consistent feedback has been provided over many years surrounding the insufficiency of the allocated hours within the AMEP program. Members report the core 510 hours are insufficient for people with low levels of literacy to become functionally proficient in English, let alone proficient in English to a vocational level necessary for employment. Hours allocated are not currently aligned to progression through the certificate levels within the curriculum.

Pre-literate clients such as humanitarian entrants are particularly impacted. The provision of additional hours under the specific programs assists, but it is still not enough, and it is important to ensure the additional programs are well aligned to the core AMEP. Providing learners with certificate levels of attainment will assist transition to further study. Currently some may not meet the requirements after completing their allocated hours of study.

The settlement areas covered within the AMEP curriculum are effective. AMEP providers reported a wide range of variety in the client cohorts, which translates in practical terms to a wide range of topics and sub-courses being necessary to meet client's needs and interests.

Some level of streaming based on entry level and interest may be effective. Streams could be oriented around topics of most interest to learners such as general community information, further education or employment links.

#### New business model impact:

Feedback from the settlement sector was largely positive about the business model for the AMEP. As SCOA members are a mix of settlement agencies with a few that are AMEP providers also the majority of comments related to the client aspects of the business model.

The AMEP counsellors have been a positive change, however for clients accessing additional programs such as the SEE or the SLPET additional allocation of counselling hours is recommended. The job title term of counsellor can be confusing as their primary role is to assist with pathway and learning planning not traditional counselling. Some comments also indicated that the pathway guide is a useful concept but the actual document itself is cumbersome.

Counsellors should also be able to focus on following up if clients are in danger of dropping out or not accessing their learning programs. Reengaging learners who are having difficulty is important but difficult within the limited allocation of time.

Home tutoring has been an effective program providing strong community links and additional support to English language learners.

Clients are highly motivated to link to employment, and where providers have made links to employers programs have been very successful. Providers mentioned that working with employers involved a high level of awareness raising and education around the capacities and strengths of migrants and humanitarian entrants. Awareness raising has proven effective with employers.

#### Indicators of settlement success incorporated:

Discussions with providers indicated that the AMEP consider the different domains of settlement success in the development of curriculum and additional activities (such as expos). Strong networking at an agency level, working closely with HSS providers and community groups facilitates the inclusion of English learning as a key element in settlement. As mentioned above the information content in many classes is usefully oriented around settlement and orientation information which migrants and humanitarian entrants need. Given that it is helpful to have key information repeated the settlement focus of AMEP classes provides a useful reinforcement of settlement information and orientation.

Settlement agencies are often called on to provide additional support for English language learning once the 510 hours of training have been accessed.

#### Effective Contribution to settlement outcomes:

AMEP programs are a helpful adjunct to settlement programs, and do contribute to settlement and employment outcomes.

The SLPET program is helpful but would also benefit from an increase given the challenges with the core 510 hours. Preparation for work and providing time and links for work experience is crucial for newly arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants.

Focussing on specific areas such as English for Driving has created positive synergies for learners, particularly in rural areas.

#### Barriers and facilitators of good performance:

Consistency across programs and providers and a clear settlement framework within which language services were mentioned as important facilitators of good performance.

Discussion identified clients wanting to move into employment very quickly as a barrier to long term good English language acquisition. Clients may find ready low skilled employment and then be locked into positions which do not use their skills or allow them to develop. Providing a strong framework for engagement in employment which is matched to skills and allows for long term growth was seen as very important. On a related point links to JSA agencies and programs worked in some areas but not all.

For some clients their own health issues are a barrier to learning – with emerging health and mental health issues identified as clients progressed through the initial settlement period.

Facilitators of learning included provision of childcare and the home tutor scheme, which was identified as particularly important for women with young families who may have challenges in attending classes. Women are inequitably impacted by carer responsibilities for children and family members so childcare and home based education remain important program components.

Many AMEP providers have employed bi-cultural workers, which has proven to be an effective strategy to support access and engagement, particularly for new learners.

Providing good information on education and employment pathways facilitate client's progression through AMEP and on to other programs such as education or work placements (where available).

#### Changes to facilitate job and training pathways:

Although employment pathways are important it is vital to maintain settlement as the focus of AMEP. Job and training pathways would be facilitated if the links between AMEP and JSA program eligibility were rationalised and clarified. Currently some clients must wait until the full completion of their AMEP program or until two years have elapsed to access JSA services. Early intervention and support would facilitate migrants gain meaningful sustainable employment. Flexibility issues can also arise within and between program boundaries.

The consultations with members also stressed the need to retain the separate focus of the two programs – SEE and AMEP as distinct. Proficiency should be the motivator to transition between the two programs, not timing or length of residency in Australia.

#### Links between AMEP and SEE:

The links between AMEP and SEE need to be strengthened, while retaining the distinct focus of each program. There are gaps and differences in eligibility between the programs which can make a coordinated approach difficult. As with comments raised above, flexibility of access and delivery would facilitate improved learner outcomes.

It is obvious but people need strong English language skills to be competitive in relation to employment. Ensuring clients are referred to SEE when they need assistance before they waste time looking for work while their English is improving will bring stronger results.

It is also important that young people are supported with youth specific classes which address the disrupted education experience which may have been experienced by humanitarian entrants. A contextualised learning experience which includes relevant and appropriate recreational activities to keep youth engaged and connected have proven effective.

Conclusion:

Broadly the AMEP and SEE programs provide effective English language support, with the added focus of 'making the unfamiliar familiar' and supporting links to employment. English language training is an essential component of supporting settlement in Australia. Provision of sufficient hours to attain proficiency in social and vocational English is necessary for the program. The AMEP providers are well linked to the settlement sector, which facilitates sharing of information and building of networks for learners.

Increasing the number of hours and strengthening community engagement in the AMEP would enable the program to achieve stronger outcomes and facilitate migrants and humanitarian entrants become active participating members of their new communities more quickly.