



Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)

On Wednesday 11 November 2020, the Commonwealth Coordinator-General for Migrant Services, Alison Larkins, presented at the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) teacher's forum on *English for Adult Migrants – Future Directions*. Attendees raised a number of questions related to topics in the below table.

Please note that for probity reasons, the Department of Home Affairs (the Department) cannot comment on the future state of the AMEP, future contracts or any future tender. Therefore the Department is unable to respond to some of the questions asked by forum attendees.

#	Question	Department of Home Affairs Response
1. AMEP Reform		
1.1	When will the reforms come into effect? How can AMEP providers access extra hours for students whose hours are finishing soon?	<p><i>The Immigration (Education) Amendment (Expanding Access to English Tuition) Bill 2020</i> was passed by parliament on 10 December 2020 and is proposed to commence by proclamation in the first half of 2021. This date is yet to be determined and is subject to required IT system and other changes.</p> <p>Once this legislation is in effect the capped hours for AMEP will be removed. Until then, additional funding has been provided for AMEP Extend, so that more people can access additional hours of tuition.</p>
1.2	Why have these changes come about?	<p>The purpose of the AMEP reforms is to enable more migrants to access free English tuition, for longer, and until they reach a higher level of proficiency. Research shows 510 hours is insufficient to reach functional English, and that for many people around 2000 hours may be required. Uncapping the number of hours of tuition available recognises that learning a new language is complex and takes time, based on many factors including age, prior education and linguistic distance from English. Not all migrants will learn English at the same rate.</p> <p>The changes also recognise the shift in the employment landscape, with vastly fewer lower skilled jobs now available than in the post-war period when the AMEP was first introduced. While functional English may have been sufficient in years past, even lower-skilled jobs now</p>

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		require higher levels of English to manage the health and safety requirements of Australian workplaces.
1.3	What consultations were undertaken to inform the reforms?	<p>Reform of the AMEP has been recommended in multiple reviews, evaluations and public consultations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2019 Shergold Review <i>Investing in Refugees, Investing in Australia: The finding of a Review into Integration, Employment and Settlement Outcomes of Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants in Australia</i>. The report found that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ not enough participants attain a functional level of English on completion of the AMEP; and ○ adult English tuition does not have a strong enough focus on vocational English. • 2019 Social Compass <i>Evaluation of the AMEP New Business Model</i>. The evaluation received 40 submissions from AMEP service providers, community organisations, government agencies and peak bodies. Of note, the Refugee Council of Australia submission recommended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ removal of the 510 hour time limit; and ○ greater flexibility for people to leave the program and return. • 2019 Settlement Council of Australia <i>Maximising AMEP and English Language Learning Consultation Report</i>. The report found: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the allocation of 510 hours per learner is arbitrary and not evidence-based; ○ time limits fail to recognise the competing priorities that new arrivals face; and ○ the AMEP lacks flexibility for people who are working, studying or have caring responsibilities. • 2019 Scanlon Foundations <i>Australia's English Problem: How to renew our once celebrated AMEP</i>. The report noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ for many migrants, 510 hours is not enough to attain functional English; ○ functional level English is regarded as well below the level required in most workplaces and TAFE courses; and

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ time limits in which migrants can enrol and complete the AMEP should be extended, while continuing to encourage migrants to start the program as soon as possible after arrival. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2017 Parliamentary Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes. The Committee commented that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the focus on a specific amount of hours in English language training should be shifted to include a focus on English outcomes; and ○ migrants have many competing priorities when arriving in Australia such as finding accommodation, employment or caring for family members. The requirement to enrol and undertake lessons within the first year of arrival can be particularly challenging. ● The 2015 ACIL Allen <i>AMEP Evaluation</i>. The report noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ functional English is generally insufficient for employment, VET or higher education; and ○ 510 hours is insufficient for most AMEP clients to reach functional English. <p>In late 2019, the Department sought public feedback and received input from 43 stakeholders – encompassing service providers, teachers, settlement services and not-for-profit organisations – on the current state of AMEP and suggestions for improvement. The feedback received reinforced the recommendations of the reviews listed above and included that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● for students who have low or no levels of literacy in their own language, limited experience of formal education, and/or experience of torture and trauma, the hours currently available in the AMEP (including through the various sub-programs) are inadequate to enable clients to reach a level of functional English; ● the allocation of 510 hours per learner is not evidence-based; ● the lack of focus on vocational English impacts the ability of the AMEP in getting clients ‘job ready’; and ● current time limits for accessing AMEP fail to recognise the competing priorities that new arrivals face.

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		In May 2020, the Commonwealth Coordinator-General for Migrant Services commissioned a review of English language acquisition in Australia, which also fed into these reforms.
1.4	Why are the time limits for registration, commencement and completion of the AMEP being removed for migrants arriving in Australia on or before 1 October 2020? What about those who arrive after this date?	<p>This change is in recognition that there are a large number of people already in Australia with low English proficiency, who are currently ineligible for the program as they did not commence or complete English studies within the prescribed time limits. Removing the time limits for this cohort aims to encourage them to re-engage with English language learning, particularly given the unique set of challenges posed by COVID-19.</p> <p>Those people who arrive after 1 October 2020 will still have access to the AMEP until they reach a vocational level of English, but within the current time limits (extension requests will be available where required). This is to incentivise English language learning early in the migration journey. Early engagement in English tuition is encouraged because English proficiency plays a central role in determining the successful integration of migrants into Australian society and is a key factor associated with education and employment outcomes.</p>
1.5	Will the reforms apply to migrants who have been here several years or are already engaged in the AMEP?	Yes, the reforms will apply to all migrants who are eligible for the AMEP regardless of when they arrived in Australia. Please refer to 1.4 for how the changes to time limits will be applied for those who arrived before or after 1 October 2020.
1.6	Will entitlements be unlimited as long as students remain below vocational English?	<p>AMEP access will be unlimited for eligible people who arrived in Australia before 1 October 2020.</p> <p>Eligible people who arrive after 1 October 2020 will still have unlimited access to tuition hours until they reach a vocational level of English, but within the current time limits (with extensions up to ten years available where required). This is to incentivise English language learning early in the migration journey.</p>
1.7	How will changes be promoted to migrants?	<p>The Department will be promoting the AMEP in the lead up to the implementation of the reforms and will continue to work with providers to promote these changes and the AMEP program more broadly. Promotional activities may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • media engagement;

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community outreach through the Department’s community liaison network, and in collaboration with AMEP service providers; • social media; and • paid advertising in multicultural media. <p>The Department is also working with the Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to undertake a number of behavioural incentives trials focussing on enrolment and retention in the AMEP.</p>
1.8	What are the implications of the reforms for childcare?	The Department recognises the importance of childcare to enable access to the AMEP for people caring for young children. There is no intention to remove the provision of free childcare for eligible AMEP clients.
1.9	Why are changes being made to allow for the provision of English tuition to migrants outside Australia, and which migrants will benefit from the amendments?	<p>The <i>Immigration (Education) Act 1971</i> currently provides for the discretion for English courses to be provided for those outside Australia, but only for those who have applied for a permanent visa (although it should be noted that the AMEP is not currently delivered to any students outside Australia).</p> <p>The proposed changes in the Bill will provide the ability to decide whether English courses may be provided to those who have applied for, or have been granted, a permanent visa or a temporary visa of a type that would be eligible for the AMEP onshore. This change will mean that should an appropriate English tuition option be developed for those outside Australia in the future (for example, a pre-arrival online English training course), it would be able to be offered to those outside the country who are preparing to migrate to Australia.</p> <p>Should an appropriate tuition option be developed in future for those outside Australia, it could be accessed by those who have applied for, or have been granted, a permanent visa or a temporary visa of a type that would be eligible for the AMEP onshore.</p>
1.10	What is the governance structure for AMEP reform?	The Department of Home Affairs has responsibility for the AMEP, including implementation of the present reforms. The Settlement and AMEP Branch, within the Refugee, Humanitarian and Settlement Services Division of the Department, is the area responsible for administering the AMEP. Within the Department, reforms to the AMEP are being led by the Commonwealth Coordinator General for Migrant Services as part of her work to drive better settlement

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		outcomes for refugees and migrants with a focus on employment, English language acquisition and community integration.
1.11	What are the implications for students in the SEE program?	The Department continues to work closely with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, and in particular our Skills for Education and Employment colleagues, to ensure the continued alignment of the two programs.
1.12	Will the AMEP have more funding to implement the reforms?	<p>There is no anticipated impact to budget estimates in the short term arising from these reforms due to a reduction in student numbers as a result of border closures.</p> <p>The Department is exploring a range of further reforms for AMEP delivery, including efficiencies that can be gained through the use of online learning and linking funding directly to outcomes. The cost implications of these reforms will be considered in the 2021-22 Budget context.</p>
2. Assessment and Curriculum		
2.1	What is Vocational English, and how does it relate to the ACSF and IELTS?	<p>The legislative instrument which currently reflects functional English (Immigration (Education) (Functional English) Specification 2017) for AMEP access will be repealed and a new one will be drafted to reflect vocational English. It is expected that the new legislative instrument will define vocational English as IELTS 5.5 (being the higher end of the vocational band) and equivalents.</p> <p>The main curricula used in the AMEP currently determine that Cert III is equivalent to IELTS 5 to 5.5 and ACSF 3.</p> <p>Therefore, ACSF 3, IELTS 5.5 or equivalents will be used as the threshold or exit point for the AMEP.</p> <p>The redrafting of the legislative instrument will align the IELTS and ACSF levels and enact the Government's intention to raise the threshold of the AMEP to vocational English.</p>
2.2	How does the AMEP meet the needs of different cohorts?	AMEP providers have responsibility for managing the different needs of individual students through the below options, as well as through the development of individual pathway guides

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		<p>(IPGs) for each student. The IPGs are updated as the learning objectives and needs of students change.</p> <p>The AMEP provides a range of flexible learning options, including full time, part time, evening and weekend classes. It offers face-to-face classes, online and virtual classes, a volunteer tutor scheme, distance learning and free childcare while participating in an AMEP class.</p> <p>The program is flexible and has a range of learning options including two tuition streams: pre-employment – for those seeking to gain functional English in order to participate in the workforce, and social – for clients seeking greater competence to participate socially. Clients are able to move between tuition streams throughout their enrolment in AMEP. Where numbers do not permit separate classes for each stream, blended classes can be offered, subject to conditions.</p> <p>AMEP students can also access sub-programs to cater for particular cohorts and flexible delivery options. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training (SLPET) combines work experience opportunities with industry-specific language tuition leading to pathways to employment or further education. • The Volunteer Tutor Scheme (VTS) provides informal tuition from a trained volunteer on a one-on-one basis. • Distance Learning (DL) provides learning materials supported by regular contact with a qualified teacher for clients unable to attend face-to-face tuition or living at least 50km from an AMEP site. <p>In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, AMEP service providers transitioned temporarily to alternative delivery models outside of the classroom, including online options. In response to the success of this innovation, the Department has extended availability of Standard Virtual Participation, where clients participate in real time in an online capacity, in specific circumstances.</p>

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2.3	What is the Department doing to support remote and digital learning, especially for disadvantaged students and those with minimal/no previous education and low English proficiency?	<p>AMEP service providers continue to offer a range of flexible learning options, including attending full time, part-time, evening or weekend classes. There are also a range of delivery types, such as face-to-face classes (where safe to do so), online and virtual classes, a volunteer tutor scheme and distance learning. Free childcare is available to AMEP clients with children under school age to assist with attendance.</p> <p>During COVID-19 the Department has provided a range of services to support AMEP providers' transition to online and remote learning and ensure continuation of services in the AMEP. This included professional development training for teachers via ZOOM on best practice delivery of AMEP curriculum and assessment outside the classroom; streamlining the Initial Assessment Kit for remote and online learning, and establishing an AMEP Providers Hub (the Hub) on GovTEAMS to share innovative teaching practices and teaching resources.</p> <p>LWA has also commenced rolling out curriculum specific Community of Practices targeting different levels. These sessions aim to support teachers when addressing the challenges associated with, for example, low level learners.</p> <p>Those providers who have started returning to face-to-face tuition are prioritising low literacy humanitarian entrant students, who have found it difficult to transition to the online environment. Where face-to-face tuition is not possible due to COVID health restrictions, additional support is offered to students who find the online environment difficult, such as regular phone calls and use of an interpreter if required.</p>
2.4	How has the Department addressed the administrative burden of ACSF assessments?	<p>The Department has paused the requirement to conduct Progressive Assessments against the ACSF at 200 hours. This allowed teachers to concentrate more on student engagement and retention at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020.</p> <p>Based on stakeholder feedback and consultation, the Department will continue to pause Progressive Assessments and is working with providers to collect curriculum assessment data that is available on provider student management systems and mapping it to ACSF outcomes.</p> <p>The Department will analyse the dataset to ascertain its usefulness, trends and possible future application.</p>

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3. Teaching resources and support		
3.1	What resources are available to AMEP teachers to ensure quality teaching and assessment?	<p>The Department recognises the importance of resources and information sharing. During COVID-19 the Department has provided a range of services to support AMEP providers' transition to online and remote learning and ensure continuation of services in the AMEP. This included professional development training for teachers via ZOOM on best practice delivery of AMEP curriculum and assessment outside the classroom; streamlining the Initial Assessment Kit for remote and online learning, and establishing an AMEP Providers Hub (the Hub) on GovTEAMS to share innovative teaching practices and teaching resources.</p> <p>We will soon be launching the AMEP Virtual Hub on the AMEP Assessment Task Bank secure website to enable wider teacher access. Resources will include: Delivered Workshops, ATB Assessment Tasks, AMEP Virtual Participation and Mixed Mode Assessment Guide, Innovative Teaching Practices, Good News Stories and links to International Teaching Resources. The Department will be making the AMEP Virtual Hub available to Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) and Foundation Skills for Your Future (FSfYF) Program Service Providers as an opportunity for enhanced information sharing across Commonwealth funded programs.</p> <p>LWA will continue to provide professional development workshops to support the development needs of AMEP provider staff including teachers, managers and assessors. Please contact your main coordinator if you would like to pass on any suggestions for future training.</p>
3.2	How does the Department enable sharing of best practice and resources between providers?	<p>The Department recognises the importance of collaboration and the expertise service providers bring to the AMEP, and has established additional Communities of Practice (CoPs), building on recent experience with the establishment of the CoP for the Volunteer Tutor Scheme. CoPs aim to foster the sharing of experience and know-how in the field, and generate suggestions and information to improve and enhance the AMEP.</p> <p>The first CoP meetings were held in November 2020 for the four nominated themes of AMEP delivery, which are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to better assist very low English speaking clients;

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to better support young people; • torture and trauma specific tuition; • national recovery e.g. skillsets, micro-credentials. <p>A CoP to support curriculum delivery in the AMEP has also been established and is being led by LWA. Curriculum CoP workshops provide an opportunity for teachers to share their online strategies and ideas for delivering curriculum unit material.</p>
3.3	What is being done to ensure job security and appropriate career paths for AMEP teachers?	The Department of Home Affairs has worked closely with AMEP providers during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure continuity of English language tuition to students. AMEP providers are responsible for management of teachers and other staff delivering AMEP services. Teachers should speak with their employer about career and employment matters.
4. VET-Related Requirements		
4.1	What can be done to address the issues around the TAE requirement and assessment of teacher qualifications?	<p>The Department has asked LWA to undertake the AMEP Teacher Qualification Review Project to assist AMEP Service Providers in determining the appropriateness of a teacher or assessor's qualifications in meeting the RTO Standards 2015 and curriculum requirements, including relating to specific TAE requirements.</p> <p>LWA, in liaison with the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), are developing a self-assurance document to assist providers with understanding and applying the RTO Standards 2015, including the TAE requirement where teachers want their provider to assess them in demonstrating equivalence of a diploma or higher-level qualification in adult education. The self-assurance document will provide a range of case studies which simulate real-life queries on the appropriateness of a teacher's or assessor's qualifications for meeting the RTO Standards 2015.</p> <p>Providers can refer to the self-assurance document to determine if the qualifications in question meet requirements of the RTO Standards 2015; this includes examples of equivalence of a diploma or higher-level qualification in adult education.</p> <p>For any teacher or assessor who is currently employed, or is seeking employment, with an AMEP Service Provider and holds qualifications which present as ambiguous in meeting the</p>

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		RTO Standards 2015 and curriculum requirements, the AMEP Service Provider may present the qualifications to LWA, the AMEP quality Assurance Provider, for review. LWA will provide a written response on whether the candidate has suitable qualifications to meet RTO requirements.
5. AMEP Teacher Qualifications		
5.1	What qualifications will be needed to teach in the AMEP?	AMEP teachers are currently required to meet Registered Training Organisation (RTO) standards and curriculum requirements. A waiver is currently in place for the additional contractual qualifications of a post-graduate TESOL qualification in adult education or equivalent. The Department is not currently considering removing this waiver. For probity reasons, the Department is unable to speculate on future AMEP contracts.
6. External Factors		
6.1	What is the Department doing to strengthen employment outcomes for AMEP students?	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an unprecedented number of challenges to the Australian community, many of which are exacerbated for those with poor English skills.</p> <p>COVID-19 has caused a significant increase in the rate of unemployment, and as Australia moves towards the post COVID-19 recovery phase, the employment market will become more competitive. English skills are key to successful employment and broader settlement outcomes in Australia, and the AMEP reforms will allow many people who are currently ineligible for English tuition the opportunity to improve their English.</p> <p>Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training (SLPET) is a sub-program of the AMEP that combines work experience opportunities with industry-specific language tuition leading to pathways to employment or further education to assist with the transition to work in Australia.</p> <p>During the COVID-19 contingency period, virtual or simulated SLPET work experience placements are being considered on a case-by-case basis. This recognises that in the current environment it may not be possible to conduct on-site work placements, and some students may have capacity to, and benefit from, undertaking virtual or simulated placements.</p>

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		<p>The Department is also supportive of AMEP providers offering short courses or micro-credentials that provide pathways for students to undertake employment-focussed accredited courses available externally, such as certificate levels for industries like hospitality. As an example, North Metropolitan TAFE in WA previously delivered additional holiday period training where students learned about responsible service of alcohol, barista skills, customer service communication, infection control and prevention procedures and food safety.</p>
6.2	<p>How will the partner visa English requirements impact the AMEP?</p>	<p>The Government is introducing English language requirements for sponsors and partner visa applicants, which will be implemented in late 2021 and will apply to new applications lodged on or after the day the new framework comes into effect.</p> <p>The English language requirement will apply to primary and secondary partner visa applicants aged 18 to retirement age, and sponsors who are not yet Australian citizens. To meet the requirement, permanent resident sponsors and partner visa applicants will need to demonstrate a level of English, expected to be 'functional English', or demonstrate that they have made a reasonable effort to learn English.</p> <p>A 'reasonable effort to learn English' may include participating in a set number of hours in the AMEP. The number of hours has not yet been determined. Detailed policy settings will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders and the public. Request for feedback on this topic will be released on the Department's website in the near future.</p>
<h2>7. Policy Development</h2>		
7.1	<p>How can stakeholders give feedback to inform the future of the AMEP?</p>	<p>The Department will be undertaking targeted consultations with stakeholders throughout the implementation of the reform to ensure the program effectively achieves English language outcomes for eligible migrants.</p>
7.2	<p>What is the AMEP Advisory Committee and who is on it?</p>	<p>The Department has established an AMEP Advisory Committee of experts in language teaching and foundation skills, to provide advice and guidance on a range of topics, including curriculum and assessment, teacher qualifications, online learning, and incentivising outcomes to ensure that the program achieves the best possible results for migrants and the broader Australian community.</p>

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		<p>The Committee is chaired by Alison Larkins, the Commonwealth Coordinator General for Migrant Services.</p> <p>The Committee consists of 7 formal members representing English as Additional Language and foundation skills expertise, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Helen Moore, Vice President of the Australian Council of TESOL Associations • Dr. Lynda Yates, Professor of Linguistics at Macquarie University • Dr. Chris Corbel, Lecturer at the University of Melbourne • Dr. Susan Creagh, Research Fellow, Lecturer in TESOL Education at the University of Queensland • Dr. Jennifer Afford, Associate Professor in TESOL at Queensland University of Technology • Dr. Chris Davison, Professor of Language and Literacy Education at the University of New South Wales • Jason Coutts, Assistant Secretary, Foundation Skills Branch, Department of Education, Skills and Employment. <p>The Committee has been established for an initial period of six months.</p>
7.3	What incentives are being considered to encourage student retention and engagement in the AMEP?	<p>The Department is working closely with AMEP providers to promote the program to eligible migrants with the aim of ensuring that they are aware they are entitled to free English language tuition. Messaging focusses on the benefits of the program, including that improving their English will assist them to secure employment and to participate in the Australian community.</p> <p>The Department is also collaborating with the Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government (BETA) in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to establish some trials to encourage greater uptake and retention in the AMEP. BETA use behavioural economics, science and psychology to improve policy outcomes. The Department, with BETA, will test behavioural incentives for language learning to identify effective strategies to improve AMEP student participation and retention.</p>

Alison Larkins will take part in another ACTA organised webinar in March 2021 and is interested in your feedback on the following questions:

1. What resources do teachers need to ensure quality teaching? How should they be shared?
2. How can the AMEP support the different needs of the diverse student cohorts, particularly those who have low literacy or limited formal education?
3. How can the AMEP benefit from advances in educational technology? What resources do teachers and students need in terms of digital and remote learning?
4. What is the ideal teaching environment (e.g. mode of delivery, class size, mixed levels)?
5. What role should AMEP providers play in seeking employment outcomes for students?