



**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

**ECCV Submission
Review of the
Adult Migrant English Program**

Statewide Resources Centre
150 Palmerston Street
CARLTON VIC 3053
T 9349 4122 F 9349 4967

ECCV Submission August 2008



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Federal Government review of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). ECCV is the statewide peak advocacy body representing ethnic and multicultural communities in Victoria. For over 30 years, ECCV has remained the principal liaison point between ethnic communities, government and the wider community in Victoria, working to build Victoria as a successful, harmonious and multicultural society.

ECCV appreciates that entry into today's labour force often requires higher levels of English than in previous decades, and that programs like the AMEP are vital in assisting new migrants to meet these demands.

Due to the rapidly evolving nature of Victoria's migrant population, however, it is appropriate that certain aspects of the AMEP model, structure and processes are reviewed to ensure the program's objectives are being met to the satisfaction of all stakeholders.

For instance, ECCV has found that the longstanding formula for determining the number of hours required to gain functional language proficiency is often not applicable to clients who either arrive in Australia as elderly migrants under the family reunion program, or enter as refugees, humanitarian entrants, or survivors of torture from countries where the modes of communication are more oral than written. Limited opportunities to attend AMEP classes in close proximity to clients' homes and places of employment at a time that fits in with other life commitments also remain an ongoing concern for many clients.

Much greater flexibility needs to be built into the AMEP structure to accommodate the unique circumstances and learning capacities of today's English language clients, where the usual challenges of learning a new language are exacerbated by a variety of other factors.

This submission outlines a number of key issues for consideration and proposes a number of recommendations so that the AMEP can better serve the interests of all relevant stakeholders and match aspirations and expectations with capacity and outcomes. These include:

- A Pilot Program be implemented to test the feasibility of the multiple pathways proposal in real life scenarios, taking into account factors such as client literacy, age, previous life experience, previous educational experience, and family commitments.
- Strict safeguards and employer buy-in be incorporated into the development of the Learner's Passport to ensure its credibility as more than simply a record of passage through AMEP classes, but rather as a ticket to employment at the end.
- A Register of Achievements be considered as an alternative to a standard Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) to show that real life situations have been encountered and managed to a level that the client can confidently complete them unaided.
- An extensive AMEP promotional campaign be established featuring AMEP Ambassadors from within the client base's ethnic communities who have excelled in the program and undertaken further study or employment to help build confidence and maintain motivation.
- Interim classes be initiated to alleviate the frustration of newly-arrived migrants, refugees, and humanitarian entrants who are having to wait until the beginning of a new school semester to learn English – one of the most important aspects of successful settlement.



- Development of a variety of audio and graphic resources that incorporate the experiences of the current generation of newly-arrived migrants, which can be utilised, not only by the client, but by the whole household.
- Stronger links be made with community organisations such as ECCV whose networks can be utilised to promote the location, times and availability of AMEP classes to potential clients.



FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ECCV offers the following feedback and recommendations based on specific questions outlined in the AMEP Review Discussion Paper released in July 2008.

1. Are the two proposed pathways suitable for meeting client needs and avoiding a one size fits all approach ?

- **Settlement for Employment Participation Pathway**
(may include Vocational Employment strand and Professional Employment strand)
- **Settlement for Social Participation Pathway**

1.1 ECCV considers more clearly defined client pathways as a good starting point to better meet differing AMEP client expectations and needs and address concerns over relevance. Client uncertainty about the immediate and long-term relevance of some English class material has frequently been nominated as a key factor affecting initial engagement in the program, motivation and attendance throughout, and completion.

1.2 While refining the scope of the program's intended usage into smaller subgroups, such as employment and social participation, each pathway will still need to take into account the different individual learning capabilities of the clients. Many, if not most, AMEP clients take English tuition to better their chances of employment, but not all engage with the learning experience in the same manner or progress at the same rate. Similarly, there is no generic learner of English for social participation. Factors such as literacy, age, previous life experience, previous educational experience, and family commitments all affect learning ability and opportunity.

Recommendation :

The multiple pathways proposal consider factors such as literacy, age, previous life experience, previous educational experience, and family commitments, which all affect learning ability and opportunity.

2. How can we best implement this proposal ?

2.1 Challenges to the AMEP in its current form include limited availability of venues at times suitable to clients, limited number of qualified teachers, and competing demands on clients such as family and employment commitments. The impact of these considerations might increase with the implementation of the multiple pathways proposal.

2.2 Currently, some venues for AMEP classes face competing demands for space at peak times, affecting the times when AMEP classes can be held. For example, restricted availability at some venues has dictated that some classes are held in the morning when some clients are taking their children to school, and are thus unable to attend or arrive late. The splintering of AMEP classes into different streams may exacerbate the competition for suitable class times.



- 2.3 Different streams of English classes may also double the time demands on families as one parent follows the Employment Pathway while the other follows the Social Participation Pathway, rather than both attending the same classes.
- 2.4 Even within the narrower, more specified language streams, disparities can exist between the *aspiration* of the client and the *capacity* of the client. While client and teacher may be clear about what they wish to achieve in terms of language outcomes, they are not always aware of how quickly or capably the client can progress through the various stages of English language competency from:
- Survival English; to
 - Conversation English; to
 - Workplace Functional English; to
 - Professional Advancement English.
- Enthusiasm can quickly turn to frustration, disillusionment and resentment if progress is not as rapid, broad and beneficial as expected or desired. Within the more specific pathway streams, allowances must be made for different learning paces among clients.
- 2.5 A pilot program utilising the suggested pathways may be a feasible option to ensure the proposal succeeds in improving impressions of direct relevance, encompassing further tailoring and flexibility within the proposed subgroups according to faith, age, and gender.

Recommendation :

A Pilot Program be implemented to test the feasibility of the multiple pathways proposal in real life scenarios.

3. **Is the development of an individual AMEP Learner's Passport a helpful way to assist clients understand the steps towards their goals, starting with AMEP ?**
- 3.1 The employment of a clear, regular monitoring process of the client's progress is a worthwhile initiative, provided it does not put an undue, additional administrative burden upon teachers.
- 3.2 For the Learner's Passport to gain and maintain credibility, however, it is important that the process does not become a cursory or cosmetic exercise, but rather genuinely reflect the progress of the client. ECCV fears that recent highly publicised instances of phoney certifications being offered to migrants and international students as a means to gain access to employment have tarnished the worth of such documents in the eyes of potential employers. With this in mind, employers and further educational institutions must also regard the Learner's Passport as a legitimate record or its purpose will be defeated. This in turn means new AMEP clients will be more likely to maintain enthusiasm for the Passport initiative if they can see that employers regard it highly.



Recommendation :

Strict safeguards and employer buy-in be incorporated into the implementation of the Learner's Passport so that it is seen as more than a record of passage through the classes, but rather as a ticket to employment.

4. Do you consider the use of AMEP counsellors within the AMEP to be important in assisting clients not eligible for Australian Government Employment Services with vocational / employment guidance ?

4.1 ECCV believes that access to vocational and employment guidance counsellors is worthwhile whether clients are eligible for Australian Government employment services or not. For those who are eligible, provision of such counsellors with the AMEP would help alleviate the need for clients to travel to different locations, and book multiple appointments to access information from different sources. Clients may not be aware of their eligibility or have some confusion or concerns about their dealings with employment services; issues they might prefer to discuss in a familiar environment. For those who are not eligible, there is still the benefit of guidance and assistance coming from a familiar source, which can help counter the potential stresses involved in constantly having to deal with strangers.

How can we best do this ?

4.2 Clients may find their vocation and employment aspirations and expectations change throughout their time in the AMEP. Counsellors may have to be accessible for the duration of tuition, rather than comprising a single visit at the beginning or end of the program, and have to counsel clients on loss of employment when this occurs.

4.3 Counsellors themselves should possess some sensitivity toward the social dynamic in some migrant communities regarding which member of a family is the traditional breadwinner. The perception (or even fear of the perception) that the traditional breadwinner is failing in their duty can cause depression, frustration and bitterness within the individual and place added stress on the stability and wellbeing of the family unit. Under such circumstances, gainful employment is as much about restoring personal dignity and family cohesion, as securing a regular income.

Recommendation :

With many migrants employed in precarious or short-term employment, provision of knowledgeable, culturally sensitive employment counsellors within the AMEP would be a vital resource.

5. What strategies would help the AMEP and Australian Government employment service providers to work together to ensure appropriate and timely vocational / employment guidance to eligible clients ?

5.1 In the eyes of many members of migrant and multicultural communities, government employment service agencies require an image overhaul. There is considerable dissatisfaction and suspicion about the motives of some employment service providers which needs to be addressed. For instance, ECCV has received many expressions of concern about the current reward system for employment service providers, whereby the performance of the providers is measured only according to job placement.



- According to some clients, this system – which dictates that the higher the turnover, the higher the rewards – has effectively created a disincentive for clients to be placed into meaningful, long-term employment and has resulted in clients placed in roles inappropriate, impractical or undesirable to their particular needs.
- 5.2 Similarly, AMEP needs to address the concerns expressed by some clients in migrant and refugee communities that the program is more concerned with meeting quotas than ensuring clients gain a functional level of English proficiency. Misplaced or not, this is a perception that needs to be remedied so confidence can be instilled and maintained. Both AMEP and employment service providers need to collaborate on a concerted campaign that reassures current and potential clients that achieving satisfactory client outcomes is the key objective and performance measure. It is a campaign that may have to extend beyond direct marketing channels to encompass more mainstream media platforms.
 - 5.3 New and potential clients for both AMEP and government employment service agencies need to be reassured that the programs achieve results. A campaign that showcases real-life examples of success stories from similar ethnic, linguistic and faith backgrounds may help rebuild confidence in the respective programs' merits.
 - 5.4 Where feasible, employers may consider providing 'English on the Job' programs to supplement the AMEP curriculum, or treat employee time taken off work to attend AMEP classes in the same manner as apprenticeship training.
 - 5.5 Greater use of interpreters and translators would also assist AMEP and employment service providers to ensure that clients with low English proficiency are aware of their options and obligations regarding English language tuition and employment pathways.
 - 5.6 In terms of client-specific material, AMEP currently employs a variety of educational methods to reach its clients, including distance classes where material is provided in book form with teacher guidance on the telephone. When working with AMEP in such instances, employment service providers should be mindful of the client's level of English proficiency in both written and verbal forms. Collaboration with AMEP may help ensure the type of material produced and the manner in which it is delivered is consistent with the level of English of the client.

Recommendation :

A campaign be developed which showcases real-life examples of success stories from similar ethnic, linguistic and faith backgrounds to help rebuild confidence in the respective programs' merits.

6. Should interim classes for those arriving mid term be considered ?

- 6.1 A common complaint among newly-arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants concerns frustrating delays in accessing important aspects of settlement such as housing, employment and education. Provision of interim classes would go some way to alleviating the stress of having to wait until a new school semester begins to learn English.
- 6.2 Flexibility needs to be built into the system to not only accommodate clients who may start mid-term, but whose attendance may be irregular, disrupted or slow for one reason or another. Due to limited or disrupted education, some clients may struggle with the usual pace of tuition and may also benefit from the opportunity to augment their classes by attending additional ones held for interim students.



If yes, would the Settlement and Social Participation Pathway provide an appropriate initial pathway ?

- 6.3 The Social Participation Pathway may provide a suitable tuition option for those yet to begin any tuition. For those clients in the Employment Pathway seeking some additional tutoring and practice, however, restricting the scope of subject matter may prove frustrating. If possible, interim classes in both pathway streams would be preferable.

Would trained bilingual aides be suitable for teaching the interim classes ?

- 6.4 Engagement of fully qualified AMEP teachers would be preferable. However, with limited numbers of qualified staff available, trained bilingual aides may be a practical alternative, as long as the clients do not feel that the standard of their education is in any way lessened or compromised, otherwise their motivation and attendance may suffer.

Recommendation :

Provision of interim classes would go some way to alleviating the frustration commonly expressed by newly-arrived migrants, refugees, and humanitarian entrants of having to wait until a new school semester begins to learn English – one of the most important aspects of successful settlement.

7. How can we best meet client needs for more structured, personal and progressive class tuition, with participants of differing educational levels ?

- 7.1 Currently, the Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) is divided into four levels:

- Pre-literate learners
- Beginners
- Post-Beginners
- Intermediate

Despite this, there can still be considerable difference between clients at the pre-literate stage. It is not unheard of for clients from refugee backgrounds to have barely held a pen before attending AMEP tuition. There may also be a necessity to further distinguish between students from predominantly oral backgrounds and those from oral and written backgrounds due to their vastly different understandings of communication and learning.

- 7.2 Clients less familiar with classroom environments also respond more readily to teaching methods such as music, songs, performance, and outdoor activities.

How would you envisage bilingual support being used in AMEP classes ?

- 7.3 It is difficult to suggest a single definitive template for the manner and amount of bilingual support offered in AMEP classes because the needs of students can vary markedly. In some instances, it may be a one-to-one arrangement, while other providers of bilingual support may be able to work with a number of clients. Where possible, there may also be advantages in providing support that is skilled in more than two languages.



What would be the maximum number of bilingual aides per mixed (first language) class ?

- 7.4 The number of bilingual aides is best determined by the needs of the class itself, taking into account the limits on human resources and practicalities of the teaching process.

Should bilingual aides work alongside teachers or independently ?

- 7.5 Some indication of the most effective manner for bilingual support to interact with teachers may be found in the way English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers currently interact with teachers in everyday classrooms. ESL teachers assist their designated students through the usual class curriculum by co-ordinating with the teacher on the topics to be discussed, then designing support materials according to the topic, and assisting the student as the need arises.

Recommendation :

AMEP bilingual aides consult with ESL teachers in the mainstream education system about the most effective ways to interact with the teacher and curriculum.

8. How can 15 to 18 year-olds, with low levels of literacy, best be provided with the English language and assistance they need to transition successfully into further education, training and employment ?

- 8.1 Keeping 15 to 18 year-olds engaged in schooling is a challenge whatever their background or circumstances. While there are additional challenges for those coming from a disrupted or traumatised background with low levels of literacy, and little experience with a Western schooling environment, it is not always helpful to keep portraying this group as especially problematic. This portrayal can impact negatively on self-esteem, motivation, and attendance.
- 8.2 Teenagers are also more likely to engage and continue in the learning process if there are visible outcomes as evidenced by their real life contemporaries. Currently, participation in AMEP suffers from the perception that migrants who complete tuition, and even graduate with qualifications from Australian institutions, still cannot secure meaningful employment.

Recommendation :

Consideration be given to the use of AMEP Ambassadors from within the clients' ethnic communities who have excelled in the program and gained further study or employment as a result.



9. What is the best option for making more hours available to clients, particularly those with greater need ?

- 9.1 Under the current system, all AMEP clients are eligible for up to 510 hours of free English tuition or until the client reaches 'functional English, whichever comes first.' However, this current quota presumes a familiarity with a classroom setting from the first hour. For clients with little or no experience of a classroom environment, it can take considerably more time to become comfortable with the setting before meaningful learning can be achieved. There may be merit in exploring the possibility of these clients being allocated a number of classroom simulator hours in their own language to become accustomed to the classroom environment.

Recommendation :

The possibility of classroom simulator hours be explored, for those clients who deem it necessary and worthwhile, so the clients is better ready to begin learning from the first hour of the current 510 hour allocation.

10. How can clients in employment be best supported to continue learning English through the AMEP ?

- 10.1 Two of the major barriers to clients in employment who are completing their AMEP tuition are timing and transport. Classes often clash with work hours or the distance to travel to and from work to classes is prohibitive (when the client has a viable means of transport). In the current highly competitive job market, it is an unfortunate reality that some AMEP clients are forced to choose between fulfilling their employment commitments and attending AMEP tuition. Either way, the client ends up being penalised – by sacrificing salary and job security to attend classes during work hours, or by disrupting progress in English proficiency by missing classes to stay at work.
- 10.2 Where feasible, the use of AMEP mobile classrooms that travel to workplaces to hold lunch-time sessions onsite would not only assist clients to continue their AMEP tuition, but help forge more relevant links between the classes and their employment. This would help overcome the barriers of timing and transport.

Recommendation :

Incentives be explored for employers to not only employ migrants involved in the AMEP, but support their progress through the provision of AMEP mobile classrooms.

11. What resources need to be developed or made more accessible to students wishing to learn at home ?

- 11.1 Currently, much of the AMEP resources for students wishing to study at home comprises written material, which is not always suitable to clients whose experience with the written word has been limited or virtually non-existent. The opportunity for clients to utilise a variety of graphic and bilingual audio resources in the client's original language would be helpful in assisting the learning process.



Greater inclusion of alternative learning techniques such as music, songs and poems, or sound effects that echo real life situations may also heighten interest and sense of relevance.

- 11.2 Some clients would also benefit from resources which include elements that closely reflect their own personal experiences. For instance, African refugees are more likely to associate with the material if situational examples reflect an African element. Material may also be designed to be shared in a family or communal setting, rather than restricted to the client alone.

Recommendation :

A variety of audio and graphic resources be developed that incorporate the experiences of the current generation of newly-arrived migrants, which can be utilised, not only by the client, but by the whole household.

12. Is there value in having a central repository of resources, including Distance Learning materials that all AMEP service providers can use ?

- 12.1 Due to AMEP students coming from a myriad of backgrounds, having different expectations, capacities and priorities, and responding to different points of interest, there are advantages in expanding the pool of resources as widely as possible. For instance, some clients may respond well to the primary course material, but others may find that additional material available in a central repository better reflects their personal experience and can therefore better aid their learning progress.
- 12.2 However, ECCV would caution that, like all repositories of learning material, there needs to be appropriate warnings for content that some clients may find offensive, and due safeguards to ensure the resources are not altered, corrupted or misused for cheating purposes.

Recommendation :

A central repository be considered with appropriate warnings, protocols and safeguards in place regarding inappropriate usage and culturally sensitive material.

13. How can the AMEP better market the program to reach as many eligible clients as possible ?

- 13.1 Migrants who have come from a background of abuse by authority figures may harbour lingering mistrust and suspicion about the motives behind government contact, especially if it seems unsolicited. In terms of direct contact, newly-arrived migrants often receive information through a limited number of trusted sources, including family, friends, community leaders, and places of worship. AMEP may find that utilising these sources as AMEP Ambassadors helps create a more positive impression.
- 13.2 Greater use could also be made of the networks of community organisations such as ECCV to promote the location, times and availability of AMEP classes to potential clients.



Recommendation :

Stronger links be made with community organisations such as ECCV whose networks can be utilised to promote the location, times and availability of AMEP classes to potential clients.

14. How can work preparation modules be best incorporated into the Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) ?

14.1 With the fields of employment differing across the AMEP client-base, work preparation modules that are tailored to suit the trades, professions, and other vocation pathways relevant to the clients' current or expected forms of employment are most welcome and useful.

What alternatives to the CSWE could be used in the Settlement for Social Participation pathway ?

14.2 The purpose of the Social Participation pathway is for the client to learn and perform relatively basic but essential life functions such as opening a bank account, paying a bill, making a purchase, asking for directions, and so on. Perhaps a standard certificate could be replaced by a Register of Achievements to show that these real life situations had been faced and navigated to a level that the client can confidently complete such day-to-day unaided.

Recommendation :"

A Register of Achievements be considered as an alternative to a standard CSWE certificate to show that these real life situations have been encountered and handled to a level that the client can confidently complete them unaided.

15. Is there a need for more training of teachers in the development of programs that cater to the interests and needs of the client group ?

15.1 With some of the most recently-arrived migrant, refugee and humanitarian entrant communities featuring unique histories, circumstances, and sensitivities unlike those of previous migrant generations, additional cultural awareness training about ethnic and religious considerations, and assistance for traditionally non-literate clients would help in developing programs that are more appealing and relevant.

Recommendation :

Training be considered that enables teachers to handle emerging ethnic and religious considerations, and to assist traditionally non-literate clients who are unused to classroom schooling environments.



16. Do you have any further comments ?

- 16.1 The current model of 510 tuition hours to gain a 'functional' level of English proficiency may have been previously applicable and appropriate for certain clientele. However, ECCV believes that the extreme diversity of the modern client-base for English language training, in terms of age, language literacy and fluency, life experience, and cultural familiarity, means that flexibility must now be the primary component rather than fulfilment of a set number of hours.
- 16.2 As well as narrowing the scope of AMEP classes to be more specific and relevant to employment needs and expectations or social needs and expectations, consideration should be given to specific class models developed to suit migrants who arrive in Australia at an elderly age under the family reunion program, and survivors of torture and trauma, for whom the stresses of the learning process can be even more pronounced.
- 16.3 Co-operation between the AMEP, Employment Agencies and Employers to ensure clients fully utilise their English tuition through initiatives such as mobile classes should not only be encouraged, but rewarded with work time 'lost' to the employer partly subsidised by government, and the costs of leave without pay by the client absorbed by employments agency's job placement allowances.
- 16.4 Younger mothers and child carers enrolled in the AMEP report an urgent need for childcare facilities. For a number of women from refugee backgrounds, attendance at AMEP classes provides a welcome opportunity to socialise, counter feelings of social isolation and depression, and gain the confidence to join other community activities such as library groups. This opportunity is curtailed when suitable childcare is not available.
- 16.5 Greater use could be made of the tremendous resource of SBS and ABC television for programming to augment AMEP models, particularly for clients who are unable to attend classes on a regular basis or who reside in rural and regional centres.

Recommendation :

AMEP assessment models be explored that are focused more on client profiles and progress rather than the fulfilment of a designated number of hours in class.