



Australian Government
Department of Education and Training



Department of Education and Training input to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), founded in 1948, is the Australian Government's largest English language program, providing English tuition to around 60 000 students annually. AMEP is legislated under the Immigration (Education) Act 1971 (the Act) and is demand driven. It entitles eligible newly-arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants to up to 510 hours of free English language tuition within their first five years in Australia. Some AMEP clients are eligible to access additional tuition and support through the Special Preparatory Program (SPP), the Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training (SLPET). From 1 July 2017, an additional 490 hours of tuition through AMEP Extend where a client has used their 520 hour entitlement and not yet achieved functional English. SPP, SLPET and AMEP Extend are not a legislated entitlement.

AMEP tuition is currently delivered across Australia through 26 contracts for classroom tuition by geographic region and one distance learning contract. The department is currently running a tender process for new AMEP contracts. New contracts will commence on 1 July 2017.

English language is a key part of settlement success and a strong contributory factor in social participation and economic independence in Australia. Many migrants and humanitarian entrants require extensive support to enter the workforce in Australia and more specifically to access jobs that recognise their skills and education i.e. sustainable employment. Settlement service provider studies show that the language barrier is the biggest hurdle to gaining employment. Without free access to English tuition through AMEP, the Australian Government is likely to face increased long-term costs associated with this cohort's needs in areas such as health, welfare, housing, employment services and translation services.

In September 2014 the department commissioned ACIL Allen Consulting (ACIL Allen) to conduct an evaluation of the AMEP program. The review found AMEP was an effective program delivering positive outcomes and noted the program would benefit from some improvements, focusing on strengthening client outcomes and participation. A new business model was announced by the Government in May 2016, to come into effect on 1 July 2017 incorporating improvements.

Importance of English language for migrants

From 2011 to 2014, Macquarie University undertook a longitudinal study of AMEP. The longitudinal study followed 145 AMEP clients through the course of their participation in AMEP, conducting interviews at certain intervals. The study determined that proficiency in English is a crucial factor influencing clients' progress to achieving their goals for economic and social participation in Australian society.

The study determined that clients with higher English language capabilities were more likely to be in paid employment; 63% of clients undertaking CSWE III were in employment whilst 21% of clients undertaking CSWE II were in employment. This indicates that migrants with a higher English language proficiency are more likely to achieve better employment outcomes.

Further, the study found that most migrants worked in short-term jobs which were below their pre-migration occupation skill levels and unrelated to their long-term employment goals, because of limited levels of English. Participants reported that their limited English proficiency left them no choice but to look for employment in these lower-skilled fields.

The study also analysed AMEP clients' success in settlement against five indicators:

1. social participation
2. economic wellbeing
3. personal wellbeing
4. independence
5. life satisfaction and being connected to the community.

It found that clients believed that over the course of the study, their increased English proficiency was a relevant factor in feeling they had improved across the five settlement indicators. One of the study's central recommendations included; "Given the crucial impact of English proficiency on the indicators of settlement success for migrants, the provision of English language for migrants without functional English should continue to be supported".

The AMEP longitudinal study reinforced the importance of English language attainment for migrants in achieving better settlement outcomes and contributing economically and socially to the Australian community.

New business model

The Australian Government announced in the 2016-17 Budget that it will implement a new business model from 1 July 2017 for AMEP aimed at improving client participation, English language proficiency and readiness for employment. The reforms to the program will tailor AMEP tuition to client needs and goals and allow service providers greater flexibility in delivering the program. Features of the new business model have been specifically designed with the objective of improving educational and settlement outcomes for clients.

The key features of the new AMEP business model are outlined below.

Targeted tuition streams

The new business model will enhance flexibility and support for clients by introducing streamed tuition to better target and tailor services. Clients will be able to choose from two streams of tuition during their entry assessment – the Pre-Employment English stream and Social English stream. The 510 hour entitlement may be used in the Pre-Employment English stream, the Social English stream, or a combination of both. Clients will be able to move between streams as their circumstances change. Clients receiving income support payments with mutual obligation requirements will not be eligible for the Social English stream and must enrol in the Pre-employment English stream, to develop job readiness.

AMEP Extend

AMEP Extend is a new, capped program that will offer up to 490 hours of additional tuition to eligible clients who will complete their 510 hour entitlement without achieving their English language proficiency goals. The intent of this initiative is to improve outcomes for clients who have demonstrated dedication to English language proficiency and to assist them to close the gap between the completion of AMEP and achieving functional English.

AMEP Extend will allow approximately 1000 clients per year to access the additional hours.

Multi-provider model trial

A multi-provider model will be trialled in one contract region, which will be serviced by two service providers. The trial will determine if improved service delivery and client outcomes are achieved in a multi-provider market.

Innovative projects funding

The department will invite service providers, through a competitive process, to develop, trial and report on innovative service delivery. The department will own any Intellectual Property on its creation, and the department will reserve the right to incorporate any project deliverables into existing or future program models.

Enhanced assessment

Changes to the assessment of clients' English language proficiency will provide greater context to review client tuition needs and goals and increase alignment with SEE and other vocational programs. These changes will also facilitate further improvements in the delivery of AMEP by increasing service provider accountability for client outcomes.

The department will strengthen linkages between AMEP and SEE through the use of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) as a common client assessment model with an emphasis on further education and employment outcomes. The department will introduce mandatory assessments by service providers of progress of clients toward English language proficiency. Providers will be obliged to assess every active client on entry and then periodically throughout the program. An exit assessment will also be mandatory.