



# **Australian Education Union**

## **Submission**

**to the**

**Department of Immigration and Citizenship  
on the**

## **Review of the Adult Migrant English Program**

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The Australian Education Union represents 175,000 teachers and educators in public schools, TAFE and Early Childhood Centres, including English language teachers working in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). The AEU welcomes the opportunity to submit views to the Review of the Adult Migrant English Program. We would also like to draw your attention to the submission from the NSWTF for a more detailed response to some of the issues raised.

## **Overarching principles**

The AEU believes all adult migrants and refugees should have the right to high-quality, publicly-funded English language programs upon arrival in Australia, especially to assist with settlement. Such programs should be well resourced, accessible, and appropriate to the cultural and linguistic needs of the migrants and refugees. Funding should be recurrent, and delivery should be by public sector providers. Programs should be of sufficient duration and integrity to allow students to participate fully in society and their workplace on conclusion.

Educational programs should provide links with the education and vocational education and training system in each state and territory, so that on completion of their initial course of study students can continue with their education and training. Teachers working in English language programs should be both teacher and ESL qualified, with their professional status recognised and linked to teachers teaching in other education and training sectors.

## **Employment Conditions**

Teachers in AMEP programs within AMES and TAFE have the right to be protected by industrial awards and agreements which ensure their conditions of work. They also have rights to secure employment, to a safe and healthy working environment, to be represented by a union, to access approved courses of teacher training and to well resourced on-going professional development.

## **Competitive tendering**

The AEU believes that the introduction of competitive tendering in 1998 has had an adverse effect upon the quality of educational provision within the AMEP program. These include a number of negative impacts on public providers, teachers and students, including:

- emphasising cost cutting over quality of educational programs;
- emphasising monitoring, rather than meeting the many and varied needs of students;
- jeopardising the collective expertise of providers, including materials, teaching and management skills and experience and intangible assets like morale and loyalty when tenders are lost;
- preventing long term planning because of the uncertain nature of funding;

- forcing providers to divert resources into administrative demands of tendering and increased bureaucratic requirements;
- creating an un-level playing field as private providers do not pay award rates of pay or provide award conditions of work;
- hindering collegial teaching practice by discouraging or forbidding the sharing of expertise and resources between current providers.

Competitive tendering has impacted adversely on students because it:

- threatens the quality of learning arrangements in respect of equipment, materials and class sizes;
- reduces student support services;
- threatens the creation of pathways with other agencies and educational providers;
- causes confusion as students are forced to choose between providers
- creates instability for students as they are often forced to move to another provider at the end of the AMEP provision as Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program contracts have often gone to private Providers.

Competitive tendering also impacts adversely on teachers. It:

- threatens security of employment and other employment conditions such as sick and annual leave;
- undermines physical resources such as teaching materials, which are jeopardised by uncertain and insufficient funding;
- undermines morale and loyalty.

Accordingly the AEU believes the interests of students and the public would be best served by returning the provision of Adult Migrant English provision to public providers.

## **Eligibility**

The AEU strongly believes that eligibility for the AMEP should be extended to all immigrants settling in Australia, including refugees who are granted protection after their arrival in Australia.

## **Increased Allocation of Hours**

The AEU supports the recommendations within the discussion paper to extend the number of hours of tuition provided to immigrants. As the document points out, academic research indicates that 1,800 hours provision is normally required to achieve proficiency in English. Accordingly the AEU supports the initial goal of a minimum of 800 hours advocated in the discussion paper as a first step to greater provision in the future.

## **Options for youth**

AEU supports the proposal to extend eligibility to young people in the 15 - 18 age group who have dropped out of school and are not presently eligible for assistance. Such provision should be aimed at furthering the long term educational and employment needs of the young people concerned, and should be integrated with schools, TAFEs and universities. Such provision should include appropriate counselling and career guidance to ensure young people are provided with adequate knowledge concerning the career and educational options available to them.

## **Counselling and career pathways**

The AEU believes that adequate counselling services are vital to providing immigrants with knowledge concerning career and educational options available to them. Accordingly the AEU supports the proposal in the discussion paper to increase counselling services as part of the AMEP program to assist immigrants in understanding the options available to them in the employment, training and education sectors.

## **Links with government employment services**

The AEU shares the concerns articulated in the discussion paper concerning the sometimes disruptive requirements of the Centrelink Activity Requirements on immigrants involved in AMEP programs. Such requirements are counter-productive to the long term employment and career prospects of participants if they detract from their ability to acquire proficiency in English. Accordingly, the AEU supports the proposals in the discussion paper to strengthen links between AMEP services and Australian Government employment services, with the aim of working together in the long term employment and career interests of immigrants.

## **Childcare**

The AEU believes that the provision of adequate and culturally appropriate child care is vital to ensuring the ability of immigrants to access AMEP services. The AEU notes the shortage of child care facilities outlined in the discussion document and supports proposals to improve childcare access, including the provision of greater resources in this area.

## **Resourcing issues**

The AEU is aware that the provision of effective English language provision to immigrants requires qualified teachers, appropriate facilities and class sizes, as well as a range of classes appropriate to the varying needs and English language abilities of different students. Accordingly, the AEU notes that many of the issues discussed in the discussion paper concerning mixed ability classes and adequate provision of services relate to resourcing issues. The AEU accordingly believes that the review of Adult

Migrant English Services should include an audit to ensure that present resource allocation to the program is sufficient to provide high quality delivery to all migrants eligible to access the program.