



Submission to Victorian Government
Review of VET Funding
April 2015

Submitted to:

VET Funding Review Secretariat

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Introduction

AMES is a Victorian Government Statutory Authority, an Adult Education Institution, located in the Department of Education and Training (DET) and reporting to the Minister for Skills and Training.

AMES directly assists refugees settle through state-wide delivery of Humanitarian Settlement Services and provides English language and settlement training to over 11,000 refugees and other migrants annually through the Adult Migrant English Program¹. AMES also provides foundation skills and entry level vocational training to job seekers through the federally funded Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program, the Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG) and pre accredited programs funded through ACFE.

This direct relationship with refugee and migrant communities provides AMES with unique insights into the training needs of new arrivals and how to maximise training and employment outcomes for this specific population.

AMES sees its role as filling a gap at entry level that will provide structured transitions to further vocational training with students better prepared to complete this training. As much as possible, AMES does this by integrating vocational content with language learning and communication skills training.

Victoria receives approximately a quarter of all new settlers to Australia, both migrants and humanitarian entrants,² and actively attracts migrants as a strategy to increase its workforce. AMES experience is that this particular cohort are enthusiastic participants in further training and keen to join the workforce as quickly as possible. It is also a culturally, linguistically and educationally diverse group presenting particular challenges in provision of effective vocational training. It is critical to engage new arrivals, particularly young people, in vocational training linked to jobs at a time when they are still highly motivated and before they leave the AMEP.

AMES welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the VET Funding Review. Our submission addresses a number of areas under the Terms of Reference specifically:

- b. high quality government subsidised training;
- c. rural and regional access;
- d. community service obligations;
- e. build a strong and responsive public TAFE sector
- g. fees and student costs; and
- h. eligibility

¹ The AMEP is a federally funded program providing up to 510 hours of English language tuition to eligible new arrivals with low levels of English.

² <http://www.immi.gov.au/pub-res/Documents/research/state-territory-migration-summary-june-2014.pdf>

High quality government subsidised training

The concurrent Review of quality assurance in Victoria's VET system³ will recommend a framework to "provide assurance that VET credentials issued support high quality outcomes, meet the skills needs of students and employers and guarantee those skills have been attained".

The following points are therefore confined to other areas related to high quality training for consideration within the funding model.

High quality training includes provision of the right kind of support for higher needs students. These include, but are not limited to, people without sound English skills /Foundation skills and those who are relatively new arrivals to Victoria.

There is potential to improve the quality of training and subsequent outcomes for these groups with specific targeted support, including

- intensive vocational counselling especially for young people
- assistance sourcing work placements
- a delivery model which concurrently address vocational content with language / literacy teaching.

Intensive Vocational Counselling

To maximise retention and course completion students need to be well informed and supported in their enrolment decisions. Course completion relies on making well informed choices in which course selection is linked to employment pathways and labour market information. Understanding the language and study demands of particular courses is also an important factor in choosing a program which individuals have the skills to successfully manage.

VTG eligibility and access rules also need to be clearly understood. With VTG rules limiting the number of opportunities to access a subsidised training place, it is essential that any barriers are identified and addressed or support provided, so that an individual's enrolment decision has the best chance of success.

AMES experience is that migrants and refugees have ambition and motivation and are highly likely to engage in training. Refugees and migrants do not know about the Australian labour market or training system so we cannot assume early choices are well informed. All new arrivals to Victoria are novices within the training system and, as such, require information and /or experience to make well informed decisions about vocational training and workforce preparation.

It is worth noting the situation for young refugees and migrants⁴ in particular who have their working lives ahead of them and for whom engagement in training is therefore critical.

When the majority of Australian born young people finish school they have developed:

³ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/learners/vet/Pages/qareview.aspx>

⁴ AMES Youth Programs include refugees and migrants up to 25 year olds, acknowledging the skills and knowledge gaps to be addressed for this particular group.

- academic competency and subject knowledge sufficient for progressing to further study, including IT and independent study skills
- knowledge of mainstream education, health, welfare and employment systems in Australia and how to access these, especially for issues of significance to young people
- knowledge of post-school options and how to prepare for and access these, gained through extensive vocational and careers education
- employability skills gained through part time work and/or work experience
- confident communication skills, social skills and networks with a peer group.

Depending on their educational backgrounds, young people who have arrived as refugees or migrants will not have had these same experiences and opportunities. They are not likely to have many of the skills and experiences, and much of the knowledge and information specifically needed to effectively access and participate in Australian post-school contexts.

Provision of intensive individual vocational counselling, in first language if required, is therefore critical to individuals' capacity to successfully participate in VET. For young people who are still forming their ideas about future study and work, exposure to a range of vocational options⁵ as well as professional vocational counselling are critical.

Parents of newly arrived migrant and refugee young people place a high priority on education but also have information and knowledge gaps in relation to post-school options in Victoria. Provision of information in first language to migrant and refugee communities is important as families try to make realistic decisions about young people's participation in future education and training. First language information campaigns could target areas of high migrant and refugee settlement as a way of ensuring VET opportunities are known and accessible to new arrivals at the local level.

AMES recommends that consideration be given to allocation of specific resources within the funding model for pre-course pathway planning targeting high needs learners, including new and recent arrivals, particularly young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Assistance Sourcing Work placements

Many vocational training courses, including apprenticeships, incorporate a practical placement in a workplace. AMES experience is that work experience is one of the most effective elements of VET in terms of moving students into work. Frequently it is the work experience employer who provides job opportunities on course completion. Training providers generally ask students to find their own placements. Most new and recent arrivals don't have contacts or established networks to be able to do this.

VET providers working directly with employers to secure work placement opportunities; and with other agencies providing workforce familiarisation programs (such as LLENs), will maximise the quality and outcomes of VET for new and recently arrived migrants and refugees. This will directly

⁵ The VTG rules around up-skilling and 2 courses at the same level / same year can be limiting for young new arrivals who are unclear about what they want to do in the future, the available options and pathways, and if they can manage a course in a particular vocational area.

support this cohort to complete training and commence work. This is particularly important with entry level qualifications into industries with on-going job opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse employees. (eg Certificate III in Aged Care / Early Childhood Education), and apprenticeships.

AMES recommends provision within the funding model for VET providers to work directly with employers to secure work placement opportunities for students requiring this support, particularly refugees and migrants who do not have workplace knowledge and contacts.

Integrating English / Foundation skills and VET

AMES experience with ESL learners is that integrating language, foundation skills and vocational content is an effective methodology for intermediate level learners who wish to complete a VET qualification while still learning English. This integrated approach is very effective in terms of training outcomes, and of moving more quickly to an industry entry level qualification.

For example, students with intermediate levels of English enrolled in Certificate III in Aged Care or Early Childhood Development can continue to improve their language skills in the context of the language and communication skills they will need for the job. This methodology is more relevant and effective than the lengthy process of de- contextualised language learning followed by a VET course. Under current funding arrangements this means employing a suitably qualified and experienced industry trainer who is also a qualified ESL teacher. Staff with such dual qualifications and experience are very limited across the broad range of vocational areas.

AMES recommends consideration be given to an alternative funding model which allows for Foundation Skills and vocational content to be undertaken concurrently. The Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development's Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills or CAVSS (course number 52626WA)⁶ provides a well -established and effective model. (CAVSS was first accredited in 2011 and re accredited by the Western Australian Training Accreditation Council in 2013.)

CAVSS is a delivery strategy for integrating literacy and numeracy support with vocational training, with a vocational teacher / trainer and a literacy teacher teaching the same group of students in the same place in the same time. Rather than de-contextualised skills, literacy and numeracy teaching is totally relevant, and limited to, the competencies in the Training Package qualification. CAVSS is restricted to those enrolled in a vocational training course or Training Package qualification at Certificate II or above.

The course provides a means for the Department to fund additional support for students who are undertaking vocational training and who need support with literacy and numeracy skills to successfully undertake course requirements.

This model has application with many different learner groups including early school leavers with poor literacy skills, and migrants and refugees with language and literacy needs.

The Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development reports that "if the course is delivered according to the prescribed model, and by suitably skilled and qualified teachers,

⁶ www.vetinfonet.dtwd.wa.gov.au/VETpolicyandguidelines

CAVSS can significantly increase vocational course outcomes. CAVSS delivery is associated with improved module completion rates and a reduction in withdrawal rates.”

The new 2014 Business Rules for CAVSS⁷ provide detailed information for managers, lecturers, data administration personnel and auditors to monitor the compliance of training providers under delivery and performance audits or within frameworks for quality recognition. The funding model is also detailed in these Business Rules.

AMES recommends consideration be given to an alternative funding model which allows for Foundation Skills and vocational content to be undertaken concurrently and that the CAVSS model be considered in detail with a view to its potential application within the Victorian training system.

Rural and regional communities’ access training

Learn Local organisations across Victoria play an important role in VET, particularly in rural / regional communities. Learn Locals are well established in regional areas and recognised as “learning hubs” in areas where populations are dispersed. Learn Locals frequently provide the first step in a VET pathway by providing Foundation Skills training and short, skills-based courses related to specific jobs in the local area.

AMES recommends provision of specific funding to support capability building for an expanded role for Learn Locals within the VET sector, particularly in rural and regional areas, to strengthen the potential for transition from basic Foundation Skills to training resulting in higher level qualifications for students who may be unable (geographically) to access VET in larger Institutes.

Meeting community service obligations

Newly arrived refugees and migrants with whom AMES works are highly motivated to start work and to undertake training that will get them into the workforce as soon as possible. Finding work is critical to the successful settlement of migrant and refugee families within the Victorian community⁸. Vocational training is the pathway to work for a significant number of this group and therefore an important enabler of effective settlement for these Victorians. Although highly motivated, without targeted support they can be lost to the Victorian labour market.

AMES governing legislation, the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, details the organisation’s obligations as a public provider within the VET system. One of the primary obligations is providing efficient and effective adult, community and further education, vocational education and training, employment and other associated programs and services responsive to the community we serve.

In AMES case this community is culturally, linguistically and educationally diverse, presenting with a range of challenges and requiring a range of additional supports to participate and succeed in VET. The AMES Framework for Social and Economic Participation (Attachment 1) outlines the determinants of Settlement which our client group is experiencing whilst studying and provides an insight into the high level needs and challenging circumstances of the community AMES serves.

⁷ <http://www.vetinfonet.dtwd.wa.gov.au/VETpolicyandguidelines/Documents/CAVSSBusinessRulesOct2014.pdf>

⁸ AMES Framework for Social and Economic Participation

90% of AMES clients are of working age. All have low to intermediate levels of English. Many have seriously disrupted family situations and educational backgrounds linked to their pre-arrival experiences. Approximately 20% have less than seven years formal education and therefore need Foundation skills development and / or alternative delivery methodologies (such as CAVSS described above), and specific support (such as pathway counselling and assistance with sourcing work placements also outlined above) in order to successfully access vocational training and subsequent employment.

Addressing these challenges incurs additional costs. As well as training delivery costs including the employment of a highly qualified and regulated professional workforce; AMES must factor in all other costs associated with provision of additional services whilst operating in competitive funding environment.

Failure to meet the particular training needs of these learners can result in poor settlement outcomes for families in the Victorian community. As much as a legislative obligation to support these particular Victorians there are subsequent benefits from early investment in this group in terms of their future contribution to the Victorian community and economy.

AMES recommends the funding model take account of the additional costs associated with the expectation that public VET providers, including AMES, are required under legislation to provide for particularly challenging, high needs groups of learners, whilst operating in a competitive market for funding.

Responsive public Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector

For many people with lower level skills, particularly early school leavers and those without sound foundation skills, attainment of an entry level vocational certificate may be too challenging. People with this profile may not stay in the training system to progress to full qualifications at increasingly higher levels, but can, with skills set / module based training, start work.

In the current labour market and the predicted trend for the future, employment prospects for many lower skilled people lie in casual, often precarious work. These opportunities may be across a range of industries and people need to be able to act quickly to take up work as opportunities arise.

The VET sector needs flexibility to prepare all participants for jobs and to provide training that industry and employers want for specific roles. For people with low level foundation skills completing full certificates can be a limiting factor when what is required is short, sharp skills sets training for a specific job.

In order to take advantage of limited opportunities in the labour market people with lower level skills / no formal qualifications may need to undertake a number of short sharp courses to match available jobs in industry areas such as hospitality and construction.

AMES recommends increased flexibility in VTG guidelines in regard to the number of enrolments at the same AQF level to allow for skills set training linked to jobs for those with low skills base.

Fees, student costs and barriers to participation

One group of clients with whom AMES works is those with an overseas qualification (such as a degree or higher level qualification) which has been recognised in Australia. In some cases people have migrated on the basis of their skill being in demand.

AMES experience is that many such people, although very keen to start work, cannot immediately find work at the level of their previous qualification and choose to enter the labour market at a lower level to build up Australian work experience and workplace skills, either as a pathway back into a job at their previous level, or in order to simply get into the workforce and start work as soon as possible. AMES experience is also that people are willing to undertake certificate level vocational study to undertake this pathway into work in Australia. In many cases the lower level certificate qualification is required for entry to lower level jobs in the industry. For example, an overseas qualified teacher may not be able to immediately enter the school system due to their English skills and lack of local experience. To work in a related field such as in Childcare as a stepping stone back into their profession, they would need to complete a Certificate III in Early Childhood Learning to enter the industry.

Under current VTG rules these students are not eligible for subsidised training place because they already have a higher level qualification and must pay fee for service to take this pathway to an entry level job. Similarly, people in this situation may only need a module of (for example) cultural orientation to the workplace to get started, but are deemed ineligible under the up-skilling requirement.

New arrivals are generally not on high incomes especially if they have not yet worked in Australia, meaning that full fees for vocational study have a very high impact in low income / modest income families.

This particular group have proven capacity to undertake and complete further study and intention to work. This is a relatively small group for whom access to subsidised training would be well placed.

AMES recommends that consideration be given to extending VTG eligibility rules relating the up skilling requirement so as not to exclude migrants with recognised overseas qualifications from accessing subsidized training that will enable them to enter the work force and contribute to the Victorian labour market as soon as possible.

Fair and well-targeted eligibility

Each year AMES provides English language and training to over 11,000 refugees and migrants early in their settlement through the Adult Migrant English Program⁹. AMES research¹⁰ indicates that 95% of AMEP clients intended to work in Australia and 91% were considering some kind of training after the AMEP. Regardless of whether they had an overseas qualification, the perception was that doing vocational training in Australia would help them gain employment.

⁹ The AMEP is a federally funded program providing up to 510 hours of English language tuition to eligible new arrivals with low levels of English.

¹⁰ AMES 2011 Words to work: Settling in and Finding Work in Australia: Longitudinal Study of clients in the AMEP

Approximately 23% of this group – or approximately 2,500 people- are on temporary partner / spouse visas¹¹. These clients are young, want to work and will convert to permanent resident status, generally within two years. However, people on temporary spouse visas are currently ineligible for subsidized training places under VTG rules, meaning approximately 2,500 people who could be in the training system and preparing for work are not accessing vocational training, delaying their entry to employment. Investment in this group would be well placed given their age and potential future labour market contribution.

AMES recommends access to subsidized training places for migrants on temporary partner / spouse visas to expedite their transition to the workplace as soon as possible.

AMES also recommends consideration be given to opening access to subsidized training to asylum seekers currently living in the community in Victoria as was the case in the past with people on Temporary Protection Visas.

Contact

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AMES is a statutory body and the largest provider of settlement, education and employment services to newly arrived migrants and refugees in Australia. The overarching purpose of AMES work is to support migrants and refugees as they move from early settlement to independence and greater participation in mainstream Australian life.

¹¹ ARMS data for full year 2013

Attachment 1: AMES Framework for Social and Economic Participation

Framework for Social and Economic Participation

