



Australian Government
Department of Immigration
and Citizenship

Review of the Adult Migrant English Program

Discussion Paper July 2008



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Invitation to respond to the Review of the Adult Migrant English Program Discussion Paper

The Australian Government considers learning English one of the most important steps migrants and humanitarian entrants can take towards successfully settling in Australia.

Learning English equips new arrivals with the language skills needed for employment and helps build the social connections necessary for successful integration into the broader Australian community.

For the past 60 years the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) has been the main vehicle for newcomers to Australia from non-English speaking backgrounds to learn English. Over this period the labour market needs and the profiles of new arrivals has changed significantly. The AMEP of the future needs to be responsive to these challenges and cater to the employment aspirations of clients and the demands of the labour market.

This Discussion Paper, which has been informed by views expressed by a wide range of stakeholders around Australia in recent weeks, proposes a new direction for the AMEP. I invite your views on the new direction and how we can best deliver an effective and responsive AMEP.



LAURIE FERGUSON MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services

Introduction

The Australian Government has articulated a vision for a socially inclusive Australia. It is working on a whole of government approach to implement programs and policies that have as a core tenet, the concept of social inclusion. Social inclusion is the antidote to social exclusion whereby individuals, families and communities experience isolation, multiple disadvantage and/or other social and economic barriers that restrict their ability to experience real social choices in everyday situations.

Addressing exclusion by encouraging economic and social participation is a major goal of government. Migrants and refugees, particularly those who have arrived recently, are amongst the most vulnerable in our society. They are at risk of social exclusion due to a range of complex issues that can arise for them upon settlement, not least of which is their lack of English language skills.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) commissioned research by the Australian National University in 2001 to develop a set of indicators and benchmarks of potential and actual settlement success. The research indicates that the ability to speak English correlates highly with other positive settlement outcomes such as finding employment.

Successful social inclusion outcomes for the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) are those derived from the production of processes and methods within the program that reflect social and economic participation as outputs which can also form the basis for ongoing policy development.

The AMEP program is an important and critical first step in the settlement process and is an essential component of the learning pathway. It is a cornerstone that assists people to learn English to a level that helps them to achieve realistic goals such as employment, further study and social participation.

This is also akin to the broader education and employment agenda of government. It is seeking to incorporate into policy through learning pathways, the view that people need to communicate effectively in many different ways, for diverse purposes, in a variety of contexts.

Aim of the AMEP

The AMEP is an integral part of a suite of Australian Government settlement services that introduce recently arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants to life in Australia and support their integration into Australian society.

The AMEP aims to help recently arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants to develop the English language skills they need to access services in the general community, provide a pathway to employment, training or further study and participate in other government programs offered. The AMEP also assists clients, through experiential learning, to become independent in managing day-to-day situations.

Its vision is to provide basic English through:

- formal and informal tuition
- support services, including vocational guidance counselling
- social participation activities, and
- learning and linkages to employment, training and further study pathways.

The program objective is to support and promote the acquisition of English language skills to all eligible new arrivals through the provision of timely and quality English language services.

Background

The AMEP is the Australian Government's largest settlement program and is delivered at more than 250 locations around Australia. Participating in the AMEP is one of the most important steps that newly-arrived non-English speaking migrants and humanitarian entrants can take towards independence and participation in employment.

The AMEP was originally delivered to migrants prior to embarkation and on the ships that brought displaced Europeans to Australia in the 1940s. Since 1948 it has helped migrants from 189 countries around the world learn English. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the AMEP.

The learning of a language is a lifelong process. The AMEP provides migrants and humanitarian entrants with the first step towards acquiring the level of English proficiency needed in a variety of social and employment settings.

Rationale for the review

There are a number of factors which combined make this an opportune time to review the AMEP. There have been considerable changes in the profile of AMEP clients and the Australian labour market in the last ten years.

Between 1997 and 2002, most humanitarian entrants came from the former Yugoslavia and Iraq and had average to high levels of education. Since 2002, the regional focus of the Humanitarian Program has changed in response to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) resettlement priorities. There are significant numbers in the current cohort of humanitarian entrants with little or no education who require both English language and literacy skills. These clients are struggling to make gains in the current AMEP.

The Australian labour market has also changed significantly during the same period, with labour shortages being experienced across a number of sectors. New arrivals are keen to take advantage of this situation and move into employment quickly, and must be supported in their decision to do so.

An audit undertaken by Ernst & Young in 2007 noted that the current strategic goal and objectives of the program do not align. Several recommendations to improve program administration were made and these need to be considered. The AMEP contracts will expire in June 2010 and a new tender process will begin shortly. Reviewing the AMEP provides an opportunity for the necessary program changes to be considered. The outcomes of the review will inform the development of the Request for Tender for the 2010-2015 AMEP contracts.

Terms of Reference

The AMEP Review commenced in February 2008 and is expected to be completed by September 2008.

The AMEP Review will address:

- the strategic goal and objectives of the program
- the best way to meet the English language needs of clients who are seeking employment and those requiring English to integrate socially
- the provision of English language assistance to 15 to 18 year old migrant and humanitarian entrants who are not attending school and are currently unable to access the AMEP, and
- improvements to the administration of the AMEP in the areas of performance measurement, reporting, legislation and benchmarking.

AMEP Review Steering Committee

An external Steering Committee has been established to provide high level guidance and overall strategic direction to the review.

The Steering Committee membership is comprised of departmental officers and:

- two community representatives
- the AMEP Research Centre
- a State Government education representative

The Committee will meet three times over the course of the review.

The consultation process

Community consultations for the AMEP Review are being undertaken as a two step process. Focus group sessions were held in April and May 2008 with key stakeholders in capital cities and some regional centres around Australia. These stakeholders include AMEP service providers and teachers, AMEP clients, settlement service providers, and state and territory government representatives. Consultations have also been held with business representatives and employment service providers in New South Wales and Victoria.

This discussion paper is the second part of the consultation process. While all aspects of the program are being considered in the review, the discussion paper focuses on addressing key issues raised during the focus group sessions which affect outcomes for clients. Issues relating to program administration will be considered internally.

Making a submission

You are invited to make a written submission in response to this discussion paper by 15 August 2008.

The department prefers to receive submissions by email to:

AMEP.Review@immi.gov.au

Alternatively, you can post written comments to:

The AMEP Review Team

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

PO Box 25

BELCONNEN ACT 2616

In the interests of informed public debate, submissions which are not clearly marked as confidential will be regarded as being in the public domain and made available to any person or organisation upon request.

Confidential submissions may contain sensitive information (such as information relating to individuals) or simply involve a wish to maintain privacy. Any request for access to a confidential submission is determined in accordance with the *Commonwealth Freedom of Information Act 1982* which has provisions to protect sensitive information provided in confidence. Where these provisions apply, documents can be exempt from release.

Features of the current program

Eligibility

Permanent adult migrants and humanitarian entrants who lack proficiency in English are eligible under the *Immigration (Education) Act 1971* for up to 510 hours of English language tuition, unless they achieve basic English before this period, in which case their entitlement ceases. Eligible clients are generally from the humanitarian and family migration streams, or are dependants of skilled migrants.

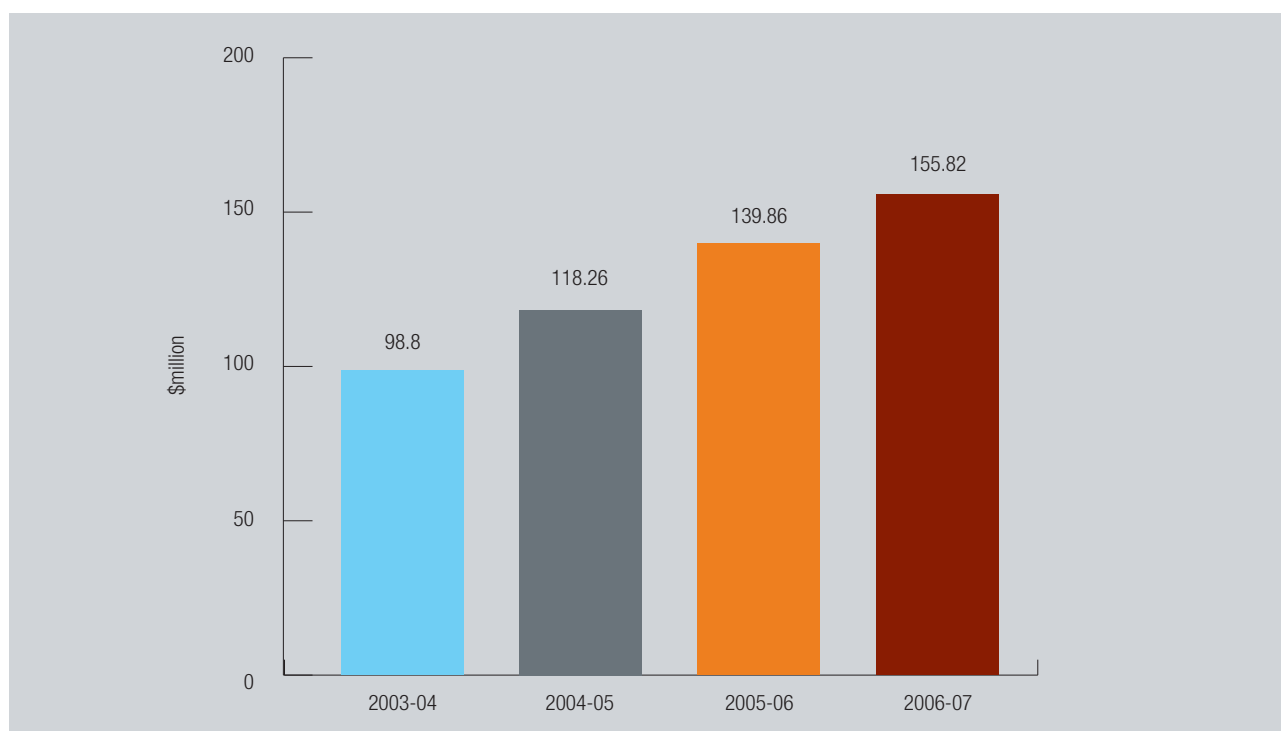
Eligibility for the program is extended on a case-by-case basis to recently arrived 16 to 18 year olds who are unable to participate in the school system.

Humanitarian entrants under 25 years old, with seven years or less of schooling, may be eligible for up to an additional 400 hours of tuition. Those aged 25 and older who have had difficult pre-migration experiences, such as torture and trauma, may be eligible for an additional 100 hours of tuition under the Special Preparatory Program.

Expected expenditure

Expenditure for 2007-08 is expected to be approximately \$167.5 million, including funds for the Special Preparatory Program. The table below shows AMEP expenditure over the last four years.

Figure 1: AMEP expenditure 2003-04 to 2006-07



Access

Migrants may be referred to the AMEP by their sponsor, settlement service providers, local Centrelink office, employment service provider or make contact directly. Clients are required to register within three months of arrival and begin classes within 12 months. Once registered, clients may defer their course and there is no time limit within which their tuition must be completed.

AMEP service providers are expected to assess each individual's English language skills to identify their learning needs.

Learning options

The AMEP provides a range of learning options, including full or part time tuition in formal or community based settings.

Clients with difficult pre-migration experiences which affect their learning may access the Special Preparatory Program before attending AMEP classes to prepare them for the more formal teaching environment in which the AMEP is delivered. Special Preparatory Program classes are intended to be delivered at less than full time intensity (no more than 15 contact hours per week) with around seven to 12 students.

Distance Learning and the Home Tutor Scheme are available to clients who cannot attend formal classes because of class location or timing, personal, cultural, work-related or other reasons. Distance Learning is also available to clients who wish to supplement classroom tuition.

Distance Learning enables clients to learn at home with curriculum materials specifically designed for out-of-classroom learning, supported by regular telephone contact with a qualified teacher.

Home tutors are trained volunteers who provide language assistance usually on a one-to-one basis in the client's home. Home tutors are available to AMEP clients enrolled up to six hours a week in classroom tuition through the Home Tutor Scheme. Special Preparatory Program and Distance Learning clients also have access to home tutors.

Curriculum

The Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) is used in the AMEP. The CSWE is a nationally recognised curriculum and is accredited within the Australian Quality Training Framework.

There are four levels in the CSWE:

- Pre-CSWE for pre-literate learners
- Certificate 1 for beginners
- Certificate 2 for post beginners
- Certificate 3 for intermediate learners.

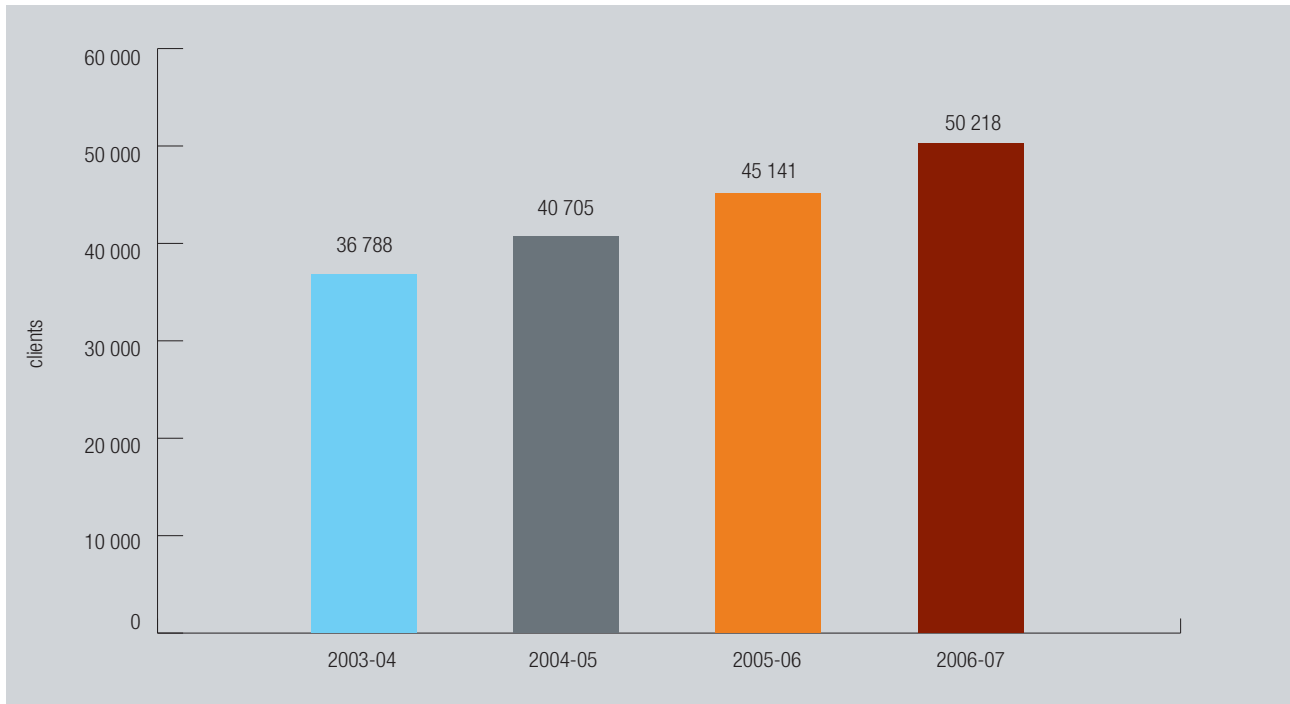
Childcare

The AMEP provides free childcare to clients with under school aged children during class times. Childcare must be arranged within three months of the client registering for the AMEP and, where possible, be within 30 minutes travel of either the client's home or the classroom.

Client profile

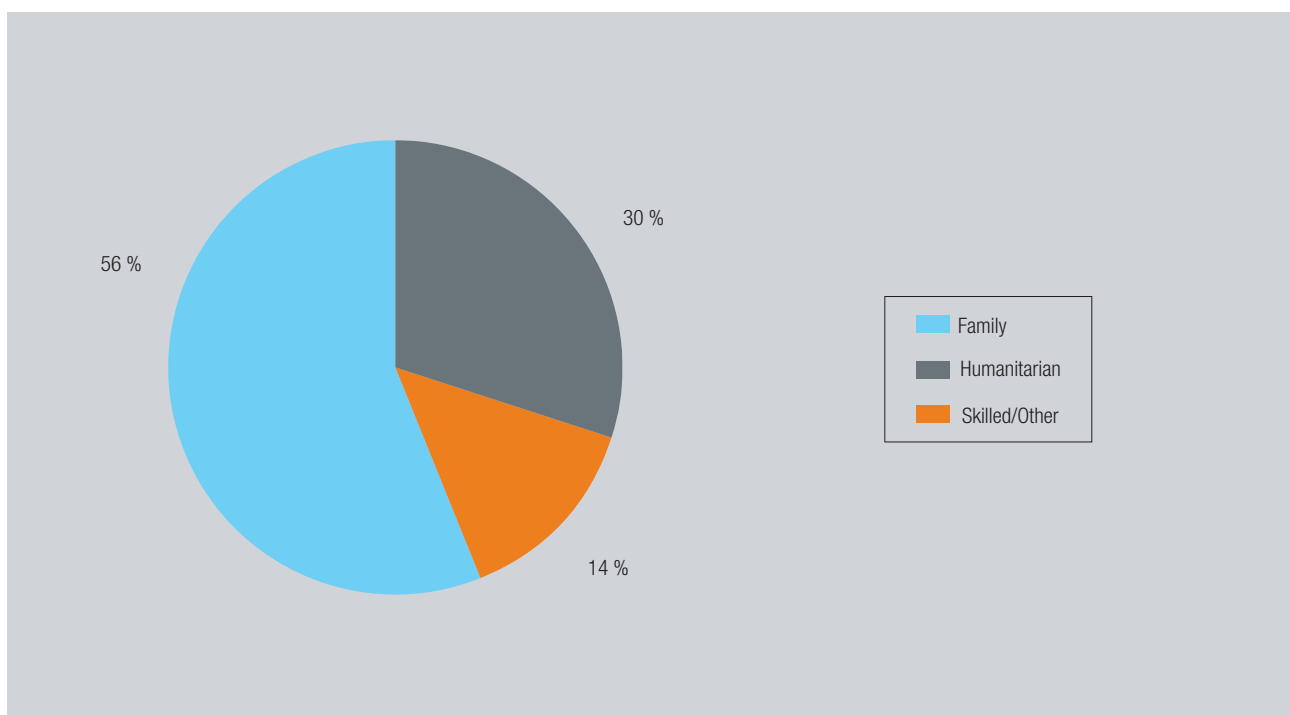
Since 2003-04 there has been a steady increase in the number of clients registering and enrolling in the AMEP. In 2006-07, 50 218 clients accessed the AMEP compared to 36 788 in 2003-04.

Figure 2: AMEP clients 2003-04 to 2006-07



The graph in Figure 3 below shows that the majority of AMEP clients over the last four and a half years have been from the family migration stream.

Figure 3: Migration streams of AMEP clients 2003-04 to December 2007



In the same period, 64 per cent of all registered and enrolled AMEP clients were female compared to 36 per cent male. The ratio of female to male clients is most prominent in the family migration stream where 72 per cent of all AMEP clients were female. By contrast, the humanitarian stream had roughly the same ratio of female to male participants.

Of all AMEP clients, 82 per cent were aged 19 to 44 years of age, and 15 per cent were aged 45 years or more.

On average, 76 per cent of all AMEP clients had 8 to 12 years of formal schooling. Humanitarian entrants generally had less formal schooling; 56 per cent had 8 to 12 years of schooling while 42 per cent had between 0 and 7 years.

The main form of AMEP study undertaken was classroom tuition (85 per cent). Only a very small percentage of clients undertook a combination of classroom tuition, Distance Learning, Intensive and/or the Home Tutor Program.

Focus group session findings

Clients who participated in focus group sessions were highly appreciative of their teachers and they commented positively on their friendliness and accessibility. Clients expressed the following views about some aspects of the program:

- Mixed classes where participants have different levels of English language and literacy skills were seen as ineffective, as they hampered progress being made by either the more advanced or the less literate clients.
- The material taught in class was perceived as irrelevant to their needs, particularly for those wanting to learn English to gain employment.
- There was a lack of understanding of teaching methodology or course objectives.
- There was a lack of awareness of options available within the program, such as the Home Tutor Scheme or Distance Learning, to further enhance their English language learning.
- There was a lack of awareness of their English language and vocational training options upon exiting the AMEP.
- Centrelink Activity Test requirements, for those eligible for Australian Government employment services, were seen as difficult to manage particularly when attending classes full time. Many clients elect to drop out of the program as the pressure from their employment services provider to get a job at any cost is too great. These clients have opted to start work without the English language skills they need to sustain them in employment.¹

Clients also noted the need for:

- more classes to be held in informal community settings
- more English language options for youth aged 15 to 18 years, who drop out of school or who finish school without adequate English skills to move into vocational training or employment
- more tuition hours to be available to achieve English proficiency levels commensurate with employment requirements and/or to transition into further study
- better learning options for mothers who are unable to be provided with childcare for their children
- bilingual support in class, particularly for new clients in the initial weeks and for lower level learners in the longer term
- better learning resources
- better promotion of the AMEP to family stream migrants and dependants of skilled migrants
- changing the perceived 'unfair' conditions under which client hours are deducted from their entitlement.

1. New employment services will commence 1 July 2009.

For more information, see *The Future of Employment Services in Australia: A Discussion Paper*

<http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Publications/PolicyReviews/Employment+Services+Review/>

Proposed future directions for the AMEP

Creation of client pathways

A major criticism of the AMEP is a lack of distinction between client groups and a 'one size fits all' approach in providing English tuition. To address this concern the AMEP Research Centre has been commissioned to profile AMEP clients. This will enable informed consideration of the relative English language needs of each cohort.

While the profiling of clients has not yet been finalised, preliminary analysis indicates that the motivation to learn English varies across the AMEP client spectrum. There are those for whom the learning of English for employment purposes or for further education and training is a priority. The majority of AMEP clients would fall into this category. There is a small cohort, mainly those of non-working age or mothers with very young children, whose major concern is learning English for daily living and managing settlement related situations.

Although both groups need to learn English for social purposes, those seeking to be in employment as soon as possible after arrival will require greater assistance in acquiring the necessary English language skills for employment purposes, and an understanding of the workplace environment, culture, expectations and communications in the Australian context.

Taking this into consideration, it is suggested that the AMEP offer two learning pathways to better meet clients' life goals. Flexibility will be built into the system to enable those clients of working age, who are unable to work for parental reasons, to develop English skills for daily living and then move into the Settlement for Employment Participation Pathway as their circumstances change.

The creation of learning pathways will help clients to have a better understanding of employment requirements and assist those needing to acquire life skills in the Australian context to focus on the language required to navigate settlement situations, by incorporating material more relevant to their needs.

Settlement for Employment Participation Pathway

Those of working age intending to go into employment, further study or training could enter the Settlement for Employment Participation Pathway. Clients in this pathway would be provided with 20 hours per week of tuition. Clients eligible for Australian Government employment services will also be connected to an employment service provider to support their training and employment goals. Strengthening connections between the AMEP and Australian Government employment service providers will help new arrivals find pathways to employment and is discussed further on.

This pathway may offer different strands, depending on clients' goals and employment aspirations, such as:

- Vocational employment – offering basic English language training, including for specific vocational sectors, with additional modules aimed at understanding Australian workplace culture, expectations and communication.
- Employment in professional occupations – offering basic English language tuition as well as providing facilitated links to mentors and assistance with recognising overseas qualifications.

Where a client is participating concurrently in Australian Government employment services and the AMEP, service providers will work together to help find the client employment.

Settlement for Social Participation Pathway

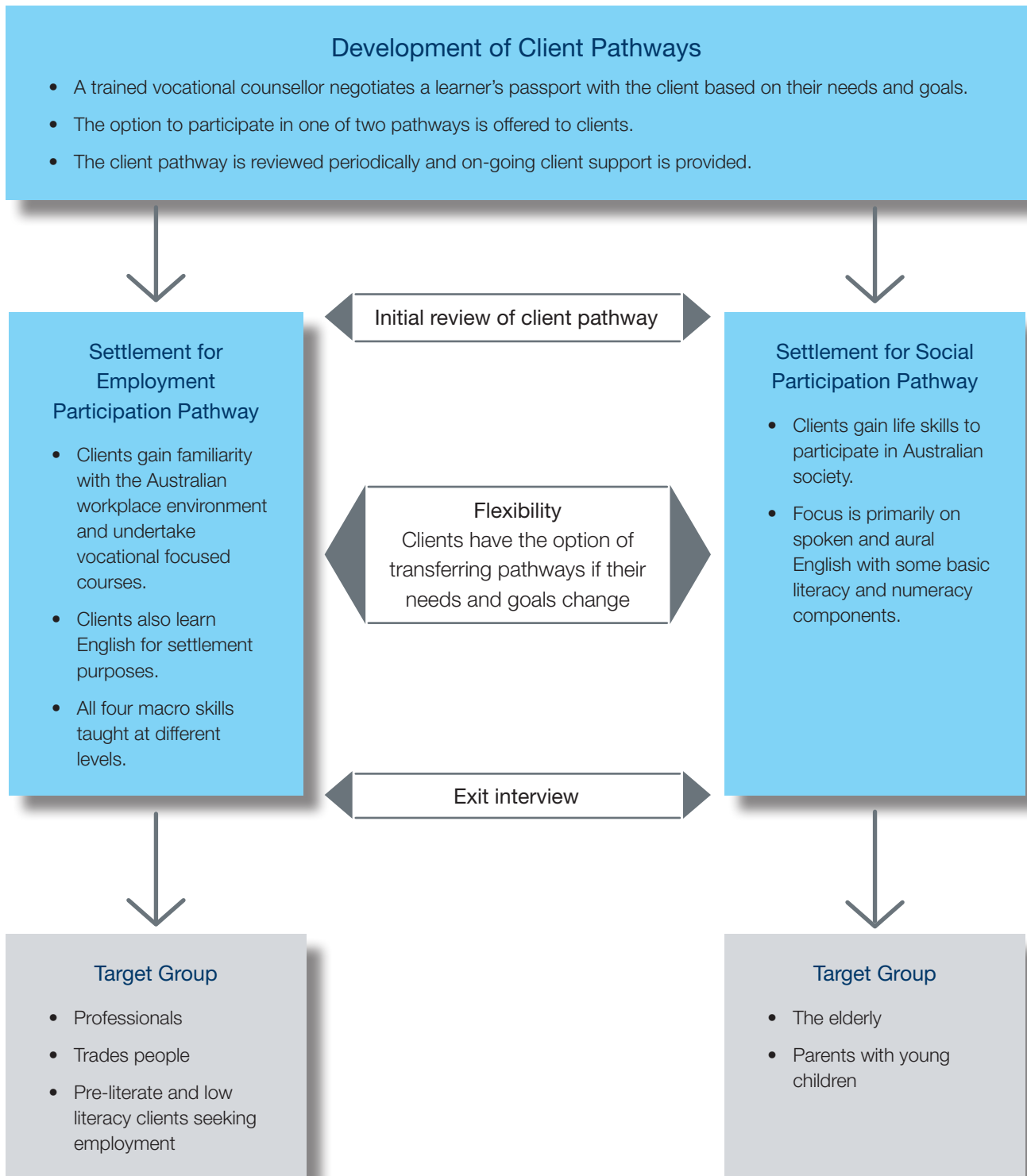
Clients who by virtue of age or parental responsibilities are unable or not ready to participate in the workforce could enter the Settlement for Social Participation Pathway. This pathway would focus on spoken English for social and settlement purposes, and would include some basic literacy and numeracy. Clients would learn, for example, how to recognise signs, read and pay bills, make appointments, call emergency numbers, participate in conversations and sign their own names. More informal learning settings would be desirable.

Given the focus on English language skills for initial settlement, it is proposed that AMEP service providers work with settlement service providers, especially those Settlement Grant Program recipients who focus on orientation to Australia to target the most relevant topics and issues.

The following diagram illustrates client pathways and demonstrates the flexibility between them.

AMEP clients in the Settlement for Employment Participation Pathway, who are eligible for employment

Figure 4: Client pathways



assistance, will also be connected with an employment service provider who will provide concurrent employment assistance. Australian Government employment services provide a range of vocational and pre-vocational assistance which may help individual participants achieve their employment aspirations.

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

QUESTION: How can we best implement this proposal?

Development of Individual AMEP Learners' Passports

Newly arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants may have little understanding of the options for further education, skill development and training available in Australia. They may also have negative perceptions of trades and vocational training as in their home countries these were low paid jobs. For some, only professional jobs are seen as worth pursuing because these were the only jobs that offered a decent living in their home countries. The professional and non-professional skills required in Australia may be very different to what was required in their home countries. New arrivals benefit from guidance in understanding what is required to be effective in securing sustainable employment.

Clients eligible for Australian Government employment services are required to report on a regular basis to Centrelink and have ongoing contact with their employment service provider. Navigating this assistance can be a challenge.

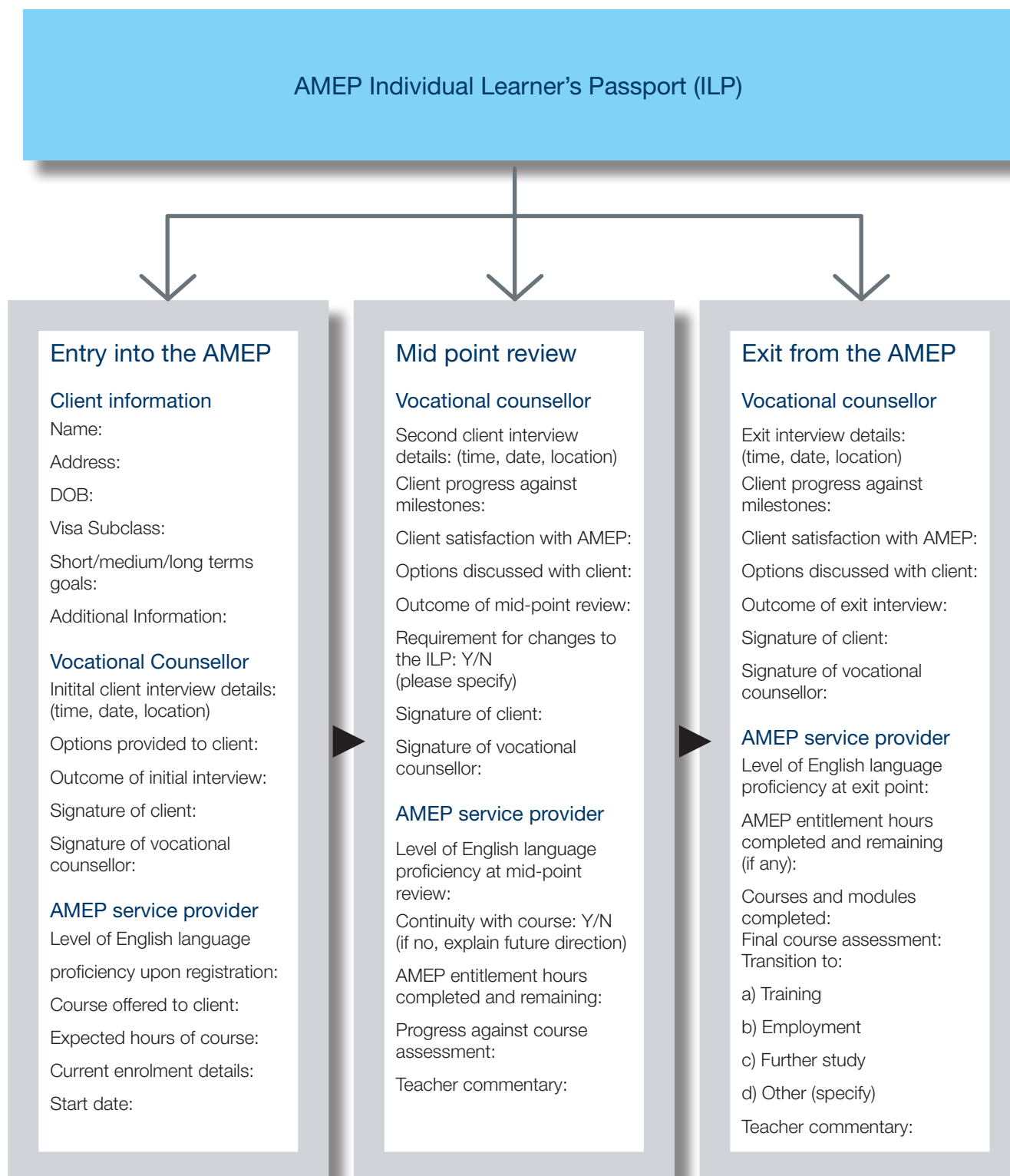
To overcome this, it is suggested that the AMEP introduce a document to be known as the Individual AMEP Learner's Passport. This document would be developed when starting in the AMEP by the teacher and AMEP counsellor in a formal interview with the client, facilitated by an interpreter where needed. The passport would be updated at key intervals as the client's goals are clarified and would include:

- client details (name, address, date of birth and Centrelink Reference Number or visa type, if not on Centrelink benefits)
- name of AMEP service provider and counsellor
- course duration and number of hours offered
- key milestones to be achieved (level of English at start and aimed for) including steps for further English training, vocational training, work experience and/or employment.

Once completed, the passport would be provided to the client as their personal AMEP training document to be used when meeting with Centrelink and employment service providers. The Individual AMEP Learner's Passport would provide useful information of the client's involvement in a learning activity, and their progress along their pathway to employment, to Centrelink and the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program, and employment service providers.

An example of an Individual AMEP Learner's Passport is provided in Figure 5. The information on the passport is provided as a guide only. The content of the passport will require further discussion with key stakeholders.

Figure 5: Example of an Individual AMEP Learner's Passport



QUESTION: Is the development of an Individual AMEP Learner's Passport a helpful way to assist clients understand the steps towards their goals, starting with the AMEP?

AMEP counsellors

The increased focus on making the AMEP more responsive to client needs suggests the need for a greater investment in AMEP Counsellors (particularly for those clients not eligible for Australian Government employment services) to assist clients to understand the options available in the employment and training sectors. This knowledge will be critical to facilitate the transition into further study, training and employment. New arrivals cannot navigate these complex transitions unassisted. To ensure clients link to the next step on their Individual Learner's Passport, AMEP counsellors could support and refer clients, particularly those not eligible for Australian Government employment services, to the next service provider or to employment.

A number of new arrivals come to Australia with professional or trade qualifications gained overseas. Many confront difficulties in understanding the processes involved in gaining recognition or relevant registration with professional or industry bodies. AMEP counsellors would also be able to help clients navigate the relevant processes necessary for the recognition of overseas gained qualifications in Australia.

QUESTION: 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?

QUESTION: How can we best do this?

Strengthening connections between AMEP and Australian Government employment services

In the case of AMEP clients who are eligible for Australian Government employment services, AMEP and employment service providers need to work together in the best interests of the client. There is a need to increase and strengthen connections between AMEP and employment services. Following an extensive consultation process, the government is developing a new model for employment services which will take effect from July 2009. Australian Government employment services' clients will be able to access an appropriate level of assistance in one of four employment services streams. The development of the Individual AMEP Learner's Passport will assist clients in their connections with employment service providers or introductions to employment.

QUESTION: 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?

Improve continuous enrolment

Current AMEP policy allows continuous enrolment of clients. New clients join classes which have already started. This creates difficulties for both clients and teachers alike as new students struggle and those already participating have to slow their pace to accommodate the new students.

On the other hand, recent arrivals need to be exposed to an English learning activity as soon as possible, given their need to acquire the language skills for daily living.

An option may be to establish interim classes for clients arriving mid-term. This would be a low intensity class and would use the Settlement for Social Participation pathway curriculum. Once the new term began, clients could be placed into a more intensive class, according to their Individual AMEP Learner's Passport. This option would not affect progress of those already in a class and it would at the same time give the newcomers an opportunity to be eased into a more formal learning environment.

QUESTION: Should interim classes for those arriving midterm be considered?

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

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

More bilingual support in mixed level classes

Mixed level classes within the AMEP have been adopted by service providers as a way of dealing with insufficient numbers to make separate classes economically viable. Given the level of dissatisfaction expressed by clients with this arrangement, it is suggested that bilingual aides be considered to assist teachers to manage mixed level classes and deliver better outcomes for students.

Clients entering the AMEP with no English skills have also reported frustration at not being able to understand anything in the first few weeks of class, as the classes are conducted in English. Some who had been provided with initial bilingual support (via bilingual tutors in class) reported positive outcomes, smoothing their transition into English language learning.

The value of bilingual support is recognised by a number of AMEP service providers as well as State Education Departments. The Victorian Government has developed a training course for people with bilingual skills to become an integral part of the school system. Training would also provide a pathway for some to qualify as teachers' aides.

It is suggested that AMEP service providers provide bilingual support where possible to assist clients make greater gains in learning over the long term. It is essential that appropriate levels of training be provided to such personnel and that the roles of teachers and bilingual aides are clearly defined.

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

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

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

QUESTION: Should bilingual aides work alongside teachers or independently?

Increased options for youth

Some newly arrived humanitarian youth aged 15 to 18 years old have experienced significant disruption to their education, or have had little or no schooling prior to arriving in Australia. As a result, these young people often face great challenges in education and struggle to acquire the language and literacy required to succeed either in school, further education or employment.

Some schools have introduced a number of bridging and transition programs to address the particular learning needs of this group of young people. Despite this, continuing low levels of English language and literacy are a significant barrier to completing school, undertaking further education and entering employment. As a result a number of newly arrived youth are at risk of being socially and economically marginalised. They need to be provided with access to opportunities for ongoing English language learning and skill development.

Youth in school

Newly arrived students are expected to enrol in schools in line with the compulsory school age legislative requirements in their respective state or territory (which vary between 15 to 17 years of age). Schools provide a safe and supportive environment for young people to develop their English language and literacy skills.

The Australian Government provides funding to states and territories under the English as a Second Language – New Arrivals (ESLNA) Program to assist with the cost of delivering intensive English language tuition (ELT) for newly arrived migrant primary and secondary students. Eligible students are expected to receive six months ELT in intensive language centres or in schools. In 2008, the Australian Government doubled the subsidy for humanitarian school students who form 38 per cent of total eligible students. The increased subsidy is in recognition of the significant pre-migration experiences of these students who need to spend much longer in the initial phase of intensive English language tuition. Humanitarian students are expected to receive 12 months ELT assistance. The amount of time and duration of assistance for individual students is a matter for state education authorities to determine.

Currently the AMEP is able to offer classes for those aged 16 to 17 on a case-by-case basis if they are not able to participate in mainstream schooling. Some schools are reluctant to release students even where the student has indicated a strong preference to attend the AMEP.

In recent times there have been calls from community stakeholders for the AMEP to provide additional after school language and literacy support to 15 to 18 year olds in the school system to enable them to cope with school work and make greater language gains. As the AMEP is a program for adults, it is not the best fit for this age group. More age appropriate options need to be considered.

Youth who drop out of school

There is a case to consider extending eligibility to the AMEP for 15 to 18 year olds who have dropped out of the school system and are not being assisted. This would apply particularly to those who may have become parents at a young age.

The AMEP could assist this group by offering language tuition and pathways to training, further study and employment. These individuals may also be eligible for pre-employment support that they could access through employment service providers concurrently with participation in the AMEP.

Post-school options for youth

It became apparent in the focus group discussions that post-school options for youth aged 15 to 18 are not clearly understood. Students and their parents lack knowledge about the Australian education, training and employment markets to make informed choices. For example, some students complete school without meeting the requirements for a senior secondary credential due to their lack of English language proficiency. Some students may not be aware that they can access the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program to continue their English language training.

In addition, some parents pressure their children to pursue professional careers regardless of their interest or ability to cope with the level of English proficiency required. Parents are often unaware of broader labour market opportunities and skills training available in the trade sector. These students and their parents would benefit from informed vocational counselling including services available through Australian Government employment service providers in which individual pathways to further education, training and employment are explained and developed.

Some approaches to catering to the needs of youth are being pursued by state governments, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria. These approaches are at a developmental stage and require evaluation before they can be applied more broadly. Consideration is needed for research into English language delivery models which help youth, aged 15 to 18, transition to further education, training and employment so that a nationally consistent approach is applied to students with low literacy levels in this age group.

QUESTION: 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?

Increased allocation of hours

The issue most frequently raised by all those consulted was the number of hours available under the AMEP. There is general consensus that the number of hours offered through the AMEP is insufficient for the majority of clients to acquire sufficient language skills to manage at an acceptable level within the workplace and in social situations. Data collected through the departmental AMEP Reporting Management System and reported in the Annual Report 2006-07 shows that only 20 per cent of the AMEP clients exit the program at Certificate III in Spoken and Written English, which equates to basic English.

Currently under the AMEP, eligible new arrivals have a legislated entitlement to 510 hours. Humanitarian entrants may have access to additional hours prior to entering the AMEP under the Special Preparatory Program. The 510 hours entitlement is not based on any estimate of the time needed to reach proficiency in English. It was derived by averaging the hours that AMEP clients spent in the program irrespective of educational background.

While the highly literate cohort within the AMEP may be able to achieve proficiency in English in 510 hours, those lacking literacy in their own language do not achieve the required English language proficiency within the available hours.

Research (Pillar I and McPherson P, 2007, How Long Does it Take to Learn English? unpublished) shows that the learning of another language requires on average 1800 hours. Canada and the United Kingdom do not cap the number of hours of English language training offered to eligible clients. New Zealand provides study grants to refugees and academic migrants of up to 12 months' duration.

There are several options that could be considered for increasing the number of hours, such as:

- bringing some parity of hours available through the AMEP to those available under the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (800 hours)
- considering all programs within the AMEP to create flexibility in the use of hours available
- considering the possibility of re-crediting unused hours to those most in need.

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

Increased delivery settings

Currently the AMEP is delivered in formal classroom and community based settings. The choice of delivery setting is particularly pertinent for clients who live far from major centres in areas with little or no public transport. This, combined with having to drop off their children at school or childcare, creates problems for parents attending formal classes held far from where they live. It is proposed that the AMEP continue to require service providers to hold classes in a variety of settings to assist their clients.

Some humanitarian entrants become employed as soon as possible after arrival to meet their responsibilities towards family members, some of whom may be refugees living in camps, or to repay their sponsors who paid for their travel to Australia (as in the case of the Special Humanitarian entrants). Some humanitarian entrants, once they have found employment, continue attending AMEP classes at night, on the weekend or in the small number of workplaces where the AMEP is currently delivered. Despite the current flexibility in the delivery of the AMEP, many stop attending. It is suggested that more classes be delivered in the workplace to ensure that the English language learning needs of clients in employment continue to be met.

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

Childcare arrangements

A very important feature of the AMEP is the provision of childcare places brokered by service providers. This requirement has been pivotal to ensuring that more parents are able to participate in the AMEP. Notwithstanding this requirement, service providers are faced with a lack of short term childcare places available to meet demand, and some parents are uncomfortable about leaving their children with people they do not know while they are attending class. This has resulted in some parents not attending the AMEP, or alternatively being offered options for learning at home through Home Tutors. The net outcome is that some parents are not achieving appropriate levels of English proficiency even for social purposes.

While it is acknowledged that there are no easy solutions to short term childcare places, one option may be to make greater use of onsite childcare facilities for the duration of classes held in community settings. This would help relieve the anxiety mothers may feel as their children would be nearby. Another option is to provide more effective support for these clients through the Home Tutor Scheme, with more frequent interaction with home tutors than the reported once a week session claimed by some clients.

More effective learning

A consistent message arising from the focus groups is a need for greater access to diverse learning options to help acquire English language skills. Clients were of the view that relying on a single option, such as classroom tuition, was insufficient particularly where the classroom was the only environment where they were exposed to English. Many clients also reported being puzzled at the lack of textbooks and the reliance on handouts. Others commented on the need for greater access to computers for self-learning and better quality audio materials.

Clients who enter the AMEP, having gone through a more traditional introduction to learning, may benefit from a clearer understanding of the teaching methods being used in class. Teachers could provide clients with an overview of the program including the nature of assessment tasks and support to be provided at the start of each term. This information should be documented and provided in a folder that clients can use on an ongoing basis for handouts provided by the teacher throughout the term. This will give clients a greater sense that they are learning and progressing in the AMEP.

Additional learning resources could also be provided to clients. The majority of clients were very supportive of having online learning resources to practice their English outside of formal classes. Some clients commented on the fact that they could not afford to buy their own computer and connect to the internet, particularly in rural and regional Australia where it is very expensive. This could be addressed by providing enhanced computer facilities at AMEP premises with after hours access.

Clients also responded positively to suggestions of audio and DVD material that they could listen to and use to practise at home.

The AMEP Research Centre has developed Distance Learning material such as *It's Over to You* and the *Get Wise* program for youth, but many service providers supplement these tools with material that they have developed.

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

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

Better promotion of the AMEP

Despite information being included in the visa grant letter, the message about learning English through the AMEP is not effectively reaching family migrants and dependants of skilled migrants. Consistent feedback from consultations indicates that these clients often hear about AMEP through informal channels, such as friends or relatives, rather than formal referrals.

Feedback from consultations also suggests that there is inconsistent knowledge of the AMEP, including learning options, among key stakeholders such as Centrelink, Australian Government employment services, the Job Network, settlement service providers and community organisations. Better promotion of the program to prospective clients, existing clients and community stakeholders will address this shortfall in knowledge about the program and what it offers.

Strategies for increasing awareness of the AMEP include:

- developing a separate leaflet to accompany the visa grant letter which clearly states that free English classes are available, together with an AMEP telephone enquiry number
- advertising the AMEP in ethnic media
- advertising the AMEP through the department's on-hold telephone messages (similar to the way the Translating and Interpreting Service is currently promoted)
- developing promotional material which better uses photographs, pictures, and diagrams, as opposed to material which is dominated by text, and providing this to key stakeholders (AMEP service providers, Centrelink, employment service providers, settlement service providers and community organisations), as well as the broader community (i.e. doctors and schools)
- building upon existing contract provisions around promoting the AMEP, to clearly articulate expectations for establishing networks with stakeholders, targeting potential AMEP clients and reporting on promotional activities
- inform clients of all the learning options available to them, including Distance Learning and the Home Tutor Scheme.

QUESTION: How can the AMEP better market the program to reach as many eligible clients as possible?

Changes to the curriculum

The use of a national curriculum has many benefits as it helps clients to move easily between service providers if they relocate, facilitates communication between providers, and promotes consistency in assessment and reporting. The Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) is a nationally recognised credential aligned to the Australian Quality Training Framework. Using a nationally recognised curriculum such as the CSWE helps clients to transition into further studies including vocational courses.

The CSWE has been recently updated and is reported to have more focus on employability skills at the higher levels. In the context of the AMEP review, particularly for the suggested Settlement for Workforce Participation stream, the new CSWE will need to provide the flexibility for inclusion of new work preparation skills training for lower level clients.

Increased flexibility is also required within the new CSWE to allow progression into one or two core skills (listening and speaking) without the same level of competency in writing and reading. This will allow clients to see progress through modules completed rather than having to achieve full certificate competency.

With the focus on being responsive to client needs, it is expected that client pathways will include elements associated with direct employment such as work experience, mentoring and training in the workplace. Achieving these outcomes will be dependent upon the ability of providers to develop and facilitate these linkages with local employers, employment service providers and training service providers.

Should a Settlement for Social Participation Pathway be introduced, it is suggested that service providers be given the flexibility to adopt a different (non-CSWE) curriculum.

QUESTION: How can work preparation modules be best incorporated into the CSWE?

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

Improved reporting arrangements

The AMEP program has been criticised for insufficiently demonstrating client progress and clients have complained that they can't see that they are making incremental gains. There are a range of factors that contribute to slower student progress in the program such as illiteracy, low levels of education, trauma and other health issues. The reporting arrangements for the program may also be inadequate. The current reporting arrangements do not adequately reflect client achievements in the program and there is no consistent data available on client outcomes on exiting the AMEP.

Increasing the range of reports available will better reflect client achievements in the program and provide data on client outcomes upon exiting the AMEP. These reports could include:

- learning outcomes in the CSWE
- other learning achievements attained during the program such as completion of work experience
- settlement outcomes such as English language proficiency linked to achieving life skills
- program outcomes such as links with training, further study and employment including Australian Government employment services.

Better targeted professional development of teachers

Discussion with teachers and service providers highlights the need for support in the training of teachers in areas of:

- more information on clients' cultural backgrounds and experiences, and cross-cultural training
- the use of CSWE particularly in relation to the development of programs (syllabuses) that cater to the interests and needs of the client group, and
- understanding where the AMEP fits in the vocational education and training system, and how to prepare clients for movement into other education and training programs as well as employment and employment services.

While the AMEP Research Centre has been funded to provide development activities for teachers, training for teaching English as a second language is best provided by the industry. Professional development activities, funded by the department, could be better targeted towards developing resources and training for teachers to equip them with skills and knowledge to best deliver classes to new groups of entrants whose needs differ significantly from those of previous client groups.

QUESTION: 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?

QUESTION: Taking into account that overall professional development of teachers is the responsibility of employing agencies, are there emerging training needs for teachers?

Your views

The objective of the AMEP is to deliver assistance that achieves real outcomes for its clients.

We welcome your feedback on the program's future directions and your ideas on how to improve any aspect not mentioned in this Discussion Paper. Your input will enable us to more accurately reflect those changes likely to lead to improved language and employment and other settlement outcomes for new arrivals.

Through your feedback and ideas, AMEP 2010 will become a program that enables new migrants to participate more fully in the social and economic life of Australia.

