

Skilling Australia for the Future

PREPARED FOR:

**Department of Education, Employment and Workplace
Relations (DEEWR)**

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This response relates to the following Issue for Discussion of the *Skilling Australia for the future* Discussion Paper.

What can be done to ensure that the training outcomes for individuals and enterprises translate into appropriate employment outcomes?

AMES contribution to the discussion is specifically in relation to NESB participants. AMES defines NESB participants as those who have arrived relatively recently and have one or a number of the following attributes.

- Limited or no Australian work experience and networks
- Limited or no knowledge and understanding of Australian workplace culture and systems
- Low English communication skills and some pre-literate in first language
- Experiences of torture or trauma prior to arrival
- Chronic health issues as a result of overseas experiences
- Overseas skills and experiences which are relevant but not necessarily easily translated and / or recognised in Australia

Recommendations

Structure of training	▪ Sufficient flexibility in curricula and resourcing be available to meet employer needs and the training needs of NESB job seekers with diverse education backgrounds and levels of English language and literacy ▪ Vocational and English language skills for job seekers be delivered concurrently ▪ Entry level training in technical skills be delivered in first language for some job seekers ▪ Work experience be integrated into training wherever appropriate
Expansion of Certificate Levels	▪ Training be available at Certificate 1 as an entry point for job seekers with minimal English and no previous vocational qualification ▪ Certificate I and II training be available for the existing workforce where job seekers who have entered with very low skills and require achievable entry points to training
Employer engagement	▪ Employers be actively engaged to employ newly arrived NESB job seekers in areas that recognise and utilise overseas skills and experience, and in entry level jobs ▪ Incentives be considered for employers to employ newly arrived NESB job seekers
Apprenticeships and traineeships	▪ Fast track apprenticeships with new wage structures be considered for NESB job seekers with existing skills but no recognised qualifications ▪ Apprenticeships and traineeships opportunities for young newly arrived refugees be reviewed to increase access and uptake ▪ Federal Government consider implementing a Traineeship program, reserving some positions for NESB staff who can provide service in first language in areas such as Centrelink

AMES Overview

AMES is a specialist organisation providing settlement, education, training and employment services to newly arrived refugees and migrants in their initial phase of settlement, and to longer term migrants who require support to gain employment.

AMES is the largest provider of specialist services for newly arrived refugees and migrants in Australia. AMES provides services in Victoria and in the western suburbs of Sydney. AMES works with over 50,000 people a year and has over 50 years experience.

Context

Newly arrived migrants and refugees generally arrive with high levels of resilience, resourcefulness and determination to work and succeed. This determination to settle and build a new life provides a strong incentive to complete training that facilitates early entry to the workforce, and subsequent progression within that workforce.

There is no doubt that many newly arrived refugees and migrants, as well as those who have been displaced by restructures in the economy and the labour market, require training to gain employment. A challenge is to structure training in such a way that it leads to appropriate employment rather than a series of training courses and no sustainable employment.

From AMES experience, there are a number of approaches that can assist in facilitating successful training and employment outcomes.

- Training must be structured to meet the needs of different groups
- Existing models do not always meet the needs of some newly arrived groups
- Training must take into account any additional barriers - for example limited English language

Services include:

- initial settlement services for refugees provided through Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Services (IHSS)
- English language training (with a focus on employment where learners are also job seekers) provided through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP)
- vocational training for job seekers and those already in the workforce
- NESB specialist employment services provided through Job Network

skills and knowledge of the Australian workplace

- Training must accommodate the existing overseas skills, experience and possible unrecognised qualification of participants
- Training must develop entry level skills to gain initial employment but also support progression to more skilled work once new arrivals have established their foothold in the Australian workplace.

Participation rates for recently arrived NESB refugees and migrants

National data from DIAC's Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA)¹ indicates that participation rates for newly arrived refugees and some migrants are significantly lower than for the general population.

Anecdotal and empirical evidence also highlights the issue of under employment among this group. This unemployment and under employment presents opportunities to address skill and labour shortages through an existing and motivated pool of labour. Training can be designed to assist in facilitating access for this group to employment.

¹ The DIAC Longitudinal Survey surveys Primary Applicants in all visa categories over an extended period. The survey found that 43% of Humanitarian Entrants and 13% of Family Stream Entrants were unemployed after 16-17 months. It also found high levels of under employment with one in eight jobs for Independent Migrants being in semi skilled or unskilled jobs compared to one in thirty jobs in the former home country.

Employment pathways for newly arrived settlers are often transitional – with initial employment in casual and part-time work that often underutilises the skills of newly arrived refugees and migrants. Training opportunities that develop entry level skills where these are required for initial employment must be provided.

However, the need to gain early employment should not preclude the possibility of securing more skilled employment through continued training opportunities once new arrivals have established their foothold in the Australian workplace.

Employer Engagement

One of the most significant barriers for NESB job seekers, particularly the new and recently arrived, is securing a first job in Australia in order to effectively engage with a new labour market, learn about Australian workplace culture and develop local work experience. The “catch 22” situation in which the job seeker needs experience to get the job, but can’t get the job to get that experience, is a reality for many NESB jobseekers.

A willingness on the part of employers to offer jobs to newly arrived job seekers is an essential ingredient for training that results in employment outcomes. This applies particularly to NESB job seekers who may require some particular initial

support due to lack of English or familiarity with Australian workplaces and job seekers who may need to demonstrate their skills rather than come with accredited credentials.

It is, however, not limited to this group. The significant under employment and unemployment amongst overseas qualified professionals demonstrates the barriers for other groups.

AMES experience in working with employers demonstrates that support must be provided to first encourage employers to give these workers an opportunity. This must then be followed up with support in the workplace to ensure that workers with lower English skills or a need to become familiar with work practices is acknowledged and supported.

The government also has a role in advocating and supporting industry and large employers to take a part in providing opportunities for NESB job seekers. This can apply to entry level positions as well as positions where overseas skills are utilised. Employers also need support in understanding what is required to successfully integrate workers who may be unfamiliar with Australian work culture. Equally importantly an increased awareness of real advantages these employees can bring in terms of motivation, networks into new arrival communities and foreign language skills to improve customer service is required.

Issue for Discussion

What can be done to ensure that the training outcomes for individuals and enterprises translate into appropriate employment outcomes?

A number of proposals are included for consideration. These are based on AMES experience delivering training with NESB job seekers. Some of these job seekers are registered with Job Network. Others are ineligible for Job Network services and are being assisted through other AMES programs.

Based on the premise that training must be structured to meet the needs of different groups, proposals are outlined to meet the needs of three broad groups.

1. Refugees and migrants with overseas experience and / or qualifications and functional to fluent English
2. Refugees and migrants with some English and skills that may be utilised with some training
3. Refugees and migrants with low formal skills and limited or no English

1. Refugees and migrants with overseas experience and / or qualifications

Bridging programs to fill skill gaps for workers with overseas experience and / or qualifications

Workplace Orientation

It is evident that lack of accredited vocational training is not always the barrier that prevents entry to the Australian workforce. The critical training intervention to enable vocational skills to be used for some job seekers is workplace orientation and job search.

AMES works with many migrants and refugees who have vocational skills and experience gained overseas but who cannot gain work in Australia. This is frequently because they do not have Australian work experience, lack an understanding of the job search skills needed to access Australian workplaces and lack the necessary industry and employer networks to access employment opportunities.

Investment in highly focussed training programs which provide practical placement and job search skills can address these barriers and is one way to match potential employees to vacancies and provide part of the remedy for skill shortages in the skilled labour market.

Data summary indicating under used skills

In 2007 AMES undertook a preliminary analysis of AMEP and Job Network client data that compares stated occupations against 2007 Victorian

Learning Employment and Skills Commission (VLESC) State-wide Training Priorities. The priorities assess high priority industry areas for publicly funded vocational education and training. These include Residential and Home Care, Children's Services, Electrical / Electro-technology, Cookery, Engineering, Automotive Repair, Service and Retail, Agriculture and Production Horticulture.

AMES data indicates that there are significant numbers of newly arrived NESB Victorians with existing experience and skills in these high priority occupation groups identified by VLESC as priority areas for training.

The analysis also indicates that there is capacity to meet skilled labour shortages within NESB Victorians registered with Job Network. Further analysis of Job Network placements in skill shortage areas may well identify that job seekers are frequently placed in entry level work in these areas and that, with some training intervention, there is a capacity to better use skills. Targeted training interventions, particularly for migrants with skills in high priority industry areas, would be a cost effective way to better use existing skills.

A 2006 Skills Survey² conducted by the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) found that many employers with a skill shortage have not considered the possibility of recruiting a skilled migrant. AMES experience is also that employers are frequently impressed with the calibre of migrants placed on work experience but would not have considered employing these candidates had this advocacy not been undertaken through work placement programs. This flags an opportunity for increased engagement and use of existing skills.

AMES Skilled Professional Migrants Program

An AMES training program designed for this group of already skilled and experienced job seekers takes a different approach to most vocational training in that it specifically focuses on job seeking skills and a work placement component, thus addresses two significant barriers for entry into the skilled workforce.

Many job seekers in this category are not eligible for assistance in the Job Network and there is no other clear source of funding for this type of training. Access to the Productivity Places Program to deliver this would assist in addressing skill shortages and getting these job seekers into appropriate employment that matched their skills.

To date the Skilled Professional Migrants Program has been primarily reactive – working with clients after they have attempted unsuccessfully to gain employment using their own resources. Participants have qualifications recognised in Australia and often many years of relevant experience overseas but find it extremely difficult to get employment in their field in Australia. Many have searched unsuccessfully for 4 months or more before enrolling in the program.

The program includes a 3-week intensive accredited workshop program in Strategies for Gaining Work, a 4–6 week work experience component and links to mentors in the professional fields of the participants. Strategies for Gaining Work includes an analysis of job interview questions and responses and resume writing.

Work experience involves assistance over 4 weeks to identify a work placement with participating employers and industry groups, 4–6 weeks of work placement in the job seekers professional area and vocational counselling and support during the work placement. Mentors assist in linking participants to industry and employer networks.

The program has achieved achieved high levels of placement into professional employment over the past 4 years.

Working with professional bodies

Working with employers and professional bodies to prepare job seekers for employment in Australia is integral to the program. For example, AMES delivered a targeted course for engineers in conjunction with the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia. APESMA found the work placements for course participants and had input into the job preparation components of the course to ensure they were specifically tailored to the engineering field. The scope to provide more industry specific programs is untapped and has significant potential.

Using Productivity Places Program funds to provide this type of front end support would:

- fast track NESB job seekers into employment, avoiding the slide into protracted unemployment and / or under employment
- set NESB job seekers up for successful employment experiences
- effectively utilise skills to meet skill gaps
- increase the awareness of employers of this untapped labour resource

It would also make sound economic sense – investing early to get the benefit of skills into the economy and making savings in social welfare expenditure. Benefits to individuals and the contribution to successful settlement are also significant.

² Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) Skills Survey 2006

2. Refugees and migrants with some English and skills that may be utilised with training

Providing training in practical learning contexts

Simulated training to meet employer needs

The demand driven approach that underpins the Productivity Places Program is being used in AMES to train job seekers in areas where there are employment opportunities (e.g. Aged Care, Retail, Children's Services). A practical learning context can replicate the workplace and therefore provide training that meets employer needs as well as providing a learning model that increases the chance of successful learning.

This "vacancy training" is negotiated directly with specific employers and / or industry groups so that the skills, goals and training of job seekers are matched to these specific vacancies. This therefore ensures outcomes for both job seekers and employers. It provides one sound training model to guard against NESB clients being on a training cycle that does not result in employment. An example of an AMES centre in Sydney illustrates this model.

AMES Retail Training Centre

AMES, in partnership with the National Retailers' Association, has established a Retail Training Centre in Campsie, Sydney. This Centre trains long-term unemployed, mature age unemployed and parents returning to work in the retail sector.

The training is done in a simulated retail centre which has supermarket storage shelves, department store sections and point-of-sale equipment to create an on-the-job learning environment.

Job seekers study Certificate I and II in Retail Operations and are offered a one week work placement with an employer at the end of the training. The National Retailers' Association provides the training and organises the work experience placements. Work placements then lead to employment outcomes.

As a result of the strong partnership developed between AMES and the National Retailers Association, AMES was invited to present at their round table discussion on the benefits of cultural diversity in the workplace and offering employment to CALD job seekers who have been suitably prepared for working within the sector.

Undertaking concurrent English and vocational training

AMES has found that concurrent training is more effective than a sequential pathway of English first, then vocational training, if job seekers are keen to find work as soon as possible after arrival in Australia. Job seekers in this type of program are highly motivated, both to improve their English and acquire the vocational skills if they understand that the training leads to employment.

The Productivity Places Program needs to accommodate vocational courses at Certificate I and Certificate II level for those whose English language skills still need developing but wish to start vocational training early.

AMES has also found that many NESB job seekers who find work at entry level wish to take up vocational training to either secure their jobs or access career pathways at higher levels of responsibility once they find work.

In 2007 AMES conducted a survey of NESB participants in the Adult Migrant English Program and found that 30% were already employed in some capacity. Certificate II level courses for this group would enable them to both improve their English and begin a career pathway.

3. Refugees and migrants with low formal skills and limited or no English

Providing first step training and employment for refugees with low levels of English

Among the industries that have labour shortages are many that require basic level skills. Such jobs traditionally were taken up by newly arrived migrants with little or no English language. Process work in the manufacturing sector that the 1950s post war migrants were employed in was one major source of work.

However, today's labour market requires that even basic skill level jobs such as harvesting require some knowledge of occupational health and safety regulations and workplace procedures.

Given these requirements, it is AMES experience that employers are often reluctant to take on employees from a cultural group with whom they have no previous experience and whose English level is such that communication is difficult. It is therefore important to broker the employment opportunities and training that is required to meet employer needs and to provide support in the workplace.

The linear path of English, then training followed by employment does not meet the needs of newly arrived refugees with low levels of English language and literacy who need work early, would be willing to do low level skilled or unskilled work to get a first opportunity of work, and do not have the immediate capacity to undertake full certificates.

For newly arrived refugees with low levels of literacy, completing a whole certificate is therefore not always the most effective first pathway to employment.

A training and employment model which provides an opportunity for newly arrived refugees with little English to gain some work, commence some basic accredited training that can be applied immediately and have an opportunity to practice some English in a real work environment is what is needed.

A model that AMES is piloting in Outer West Melbourne is filling labour shortages and providing low level training and workplace support in first language. Consultation with the newly arrived client community for whom the employment and training is brokered, and with employers who are providing the work, are essential components in the model.

Market Gardens in Werribee

AMES has worked closely with the Australian Karen Association (AKO) to establish employment opportunities that are supported with first language training in Occupational Health and Safety.

Employers were initially reluctant to employ members of the Burmese community, perceiving them to be inexperienced and lacking sufficient English. AMES organised employment liaison staff (including Karen staff) to work with the employers and support workers who have very limited English on the job. Required training was negotiated with the employers.

AMES is also establishing ways to ensure that these new arrivals can continue to learn English in the AMEP while taking up what is initially casual and seasonal work.

Members of the community are now employed in picking for large market gardeners and in packing for the two companies who pack for major supermarket chains.

Integrated language and first language vocational training

A number of models that use practice and demonstration to deliver training are applicable for job seekers who have low levels of English language and literacy. As with the previous group discussed, who have some English, models that combine vocational training and communication skills are more effective and motivating for refugees and migrants with low formal skills and limited or no English. The difference in training for this group is that the vocational component of training must be in the learner's first language.

It is therefore useful to consider combining funding for foundation skills – for example using Language Literacy and Numeracy program funds with Productivity Places Program Funds concurrently rather than sequentially.

AMES is using a number of models where foundation and vocational skills are developed concurrently and vocational skills have first language support or are delivered in first language.

Hospitality Training and English for Sudanese women

A group of Sudanese women are doing Certificate I in Hospitality concurrently with a low level LLNP English course. The motivation and capacity to achieve the foundation skills comes from concurrently completing vocational training in first language where there is a prospect of employment. The English language course is strongly focussed on the hospitality theme and language and concepts of the hospitality course.

The hospitality training is delivered by a Sudanese trainer and training is delivered in first language. One day per week hands-on workplace learning is delivered in a hotel workplace site. At the end of course participants complete a two week placement in a hotel.

Delivering vocational training in first language where participants have low levels of English can fast track job seekers into entry level employment, significantly increase their motivation and capacity to learn English and provide a real context for learning.

Work Training Enterprises

A work training enterprise model that delivers hands on practical training, has proved effective in meeting the needs of both industry and NESB job seekers who may not have recognised vocational skills and who need language support while undertaking accredited training.

AMES has piloted a number of social enterprises as training venues for NESB clients. Training in these enterprises includes Hospitality and Asset Services.

Saha Catering – Hospitality

A hospitality social catering enterprise, Saha Catering, operates in Regents Park, NSW, where accredited kitchen hand training is offered within a commercial kitchen environment to refugee job seekers. The Saha kitchen also provides a space for interaction between the job seekers, helping to improve language and cross cultural skills and reduce social isolation.

The supportive and culturally sensitive training environment has increased job seeker's self-esteem and motivation to find work. The enterprise offers work experience to the job seekers once they have completed their training in Introduction to Certificate II in Hospitality – Kitchen Operations.

Applications for apprenticeships and traineeships

A review of the current models used for apprenticeships and traineeships is required to ensure that these training and employment models are accessible to newly arrived refugees and migrants.

A review is also required to ensure that traineeships and apprenticeships can accommodate the existing skills and experience of newly arrived refugees and migrants and provide credentialed training where refugees and migrants qualifications are not recognised in Australia.

Three areas are considered in this section.

1. Alternative entry to apprenticeships for young newly arrived refugees and migrants
2. Alternative mature age apprenticeships
3. Practice credentials for tradespeople working under supervision

An Intermediate Labour Market pilot AMES is undertaking using the traineeship model is also briefly outlined.

1. *Alternative entry to apprenticeships for young newly arrived refugees and migrants*

It is AMES experience that a number of newly arrived refugee young people are not able to meet entry requirements for pre apprenticeship courses including the Australian Apprenticeships Access Program. Language support is required to successfully complete these programs. They are thus excluded at the entry point.

For some young newly arrived this would be an excellent pathway as it can incorporate hands on learning that provides an extremely relevant context to concurrently improve English skills whilst providing a clear vocational pathway to work in an area of skill shortage. As noted previously, continuing to improve English language combined with vocational training is frequently more effective than taking a linear approach of English followed by vocational training.

This model would require additional concurrent support but has a high chance of increasing uptake of successful vocational training for newly

arrived refugees and migrants who arrive with low levels of English at an age where a traditional pathway through school is not age appropriate. With additional support, young people would complete the vocational training and as part of this process, improve their communication skills. With these two pillars in place, they will be equipped to further upgrade skills through their work life.

AMES is not aware of this model having been applied to apprenticeships to date. Swinburne University (TAFE Division) – an AMES Consortium Partner in the delivery of the Adult Migrant Education Program – has used a similar model to concurrently deliver vocational training and English language in the AMEP. This provides a model that could be modified and applied to apprenticeships and traineeships. Students are concurrently enrolled in English and Child Care studies. The concurrent English allows them to complete vocational training with a lower level of English than would normally be required.

2. *Alternative mature age apprenticeships*

Where migrants and refugees have vocational skills and experience but are not able to have these formally recognised an alternative apprenticeship system may be worthy of consideration. A reduced duration and capacity to assess and recognise pre-existing competence could fast track a group of employees into trades.

An NCVER report³ recommends encouraging adults into apprenticeships / traineeships by offering

financial incentives to make up the balance of lower training wages and reduce the duration of the traineeships through competency based assessments and Recognition of Prior Learning. It also notes the need to provide appropriate support to migrants during the settlement period. Where newly arrived refugees or migrants have trade skills this may provide an appropriate way to gain a recognised qualification.

³ The development of employability skills in novice workers NCVER ANTA 2003

3. *Practice credentials for tradespeople working under supervision*

Another option may be to provide on the job training and practice in Australian conditions that allows newly arrived refugees or migrants to practise their trade without full formal trade recognition under the Trades Recognition Australia processes. This would allow existing skills to be utilised, new skills, where required, to be acquired but would avoid the lengthy apprenticeship pathway to employment in the trade.

An NCVER research paper⁴ notes that there is only a loose match between the qualifications that people have and the jobs they do. Many people work in jobs for which they have no formal qualification and one third of people working as tradespersons and related workers have no post school qualification. A formal system developed that allows for some alternative to current Trades Recognition Australia processes and capacity to work under the supervision of a registered tradesperson may be appropriate. This could be supported by on the job training where required to comply with Australian conditions.

AMES Intermediate Labour Market Program

AMES is piloting the use of traineeships with NESB job seekers.

A differentiating factor is that the AMES trainees have existing skills that can be used immediately in providing services for newly arrived refugees. This is in contrast to trainees who are often school leavers with very limited or no experience in their traineeship field.

AMES trainees use their language and cultural skills to work directly with newly arrived refugees in providing services to assist the settlement process. They therefore have skills that are immediately applicable to contribute to, and improve, AMES service delivery. What the trainees lack is experience in demonstrating these skills in an Australian workplace and knowledge of Australian workplace culture.

The training component of the traineeship is used to provide a credential that they can use to gain work elsewhere on completion of the traineeship. AMES will integrate English language skills into the training where this is required. The employment in AMES will replicate real work demands to prepare trainees for successful transition to mainstream employment.

In 2008 this program will offer 50 traineeships and other paid work in addition to 50 work experience opportunities to clients in AMES programs. The experience and data from this program will identify what support is required to equip these new employees for mainstream work. It will inform future practices and provide directions for other employers. It can also provide some insight into alternative applications of the Traineeship model for NESB clients.

⁴ NCVER Forecasting future demands: What we can and cannot know