

Input into 2009-10 Budget

PREPARED FOR:

**Budget Policy Division
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Executive Summary

Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) is a specialist organisation providing settlement, education, training and employment services to newly arrived refugees and migrants in their initial phase of settlement. Employment services are also provided to job seekers over a longer settlement period. AMES works with approximately 50,000 clients a year and has over 50 years experience.

AMES response to the Treasurer's request for input into the 2009-10 Budget therefore addresses the impacts of policy and programs for refugees and other newly arrived migrants.

The input focuses particularly on impacts for this group in a time of rising unemployment and a weakening economy. Data and qualitative evidence indicates that workforce participation rates are already lower for newly arrived refugees and migrants than for many other Australians¹. Rising unemployment will increase the impacts for these groups.

AMES welcomes the government's decisive action in the global economic context in implementing measures to strengthen the economy and to keep people in employment. AMES also commends the government's changes to assistance provided to job seekers through the new DEEWR Employment Services model and proposed changes to the DIAC Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP).

This input proposes further refinements in the context of the additional rigour required to support highly disadvantaged Australians in weakening economic conditions.

The paper provides a brief outline of the existing disadvantage faced by refugees and some migrant groups in the labour market. It outlines some of the impacts for these groups of a likely increase in casual work and implications for social security policy. Particular challenges for refugees who are supporting family members brought to Australia under Special Humanitarian Program visas are noted, and additional support proposed.

With respect to the new Employment Services model the paper reiterates AMES reservations that Stream 1 services in the new Employment Services model will be sufficiently resourced to address the needs of newly arrived refugees and migrants who are recently unemployed. AMES urges further consideration of this component of the model.

The paper provides some possible refinements for consideration to contribute to employment creation that build on the Government's Nation Building investment. Two ideas are proposed - firstly, a proposal to build social dividends into some projects - using a model already in place in Victoria. Secondly, a proposal to combine initiatives to build on the government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS). This proposal would generate employment that uses the skills of newly arrived communities through the creation of a substantial social enterprise, increase uptake and understanding within refugee communities and reduce the financial burden of CPRS on these groups.

The paper also raises issues with respect to specific groups of migrants who are unable to access government programs that AMES believes could make a strong contribution to their success in securing employment and successful settlement. These groups are Spouse (Provisional) and Skilled and Family Stream Migrant visa clients.

A series of recommendations are included for consideration.

¹ For example, a Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) study found that 16-17 months after arrival 43% of Humanitarian Entrants were still unemployed and only 32% were participating. The DIAC Longitudinal Survey surveys Primary Applicants in all visa categories over an extended period. LSIA 1 surveyed arrivals between September 1993 and August 1995, LSIA 2 surveyed arrivals between September 1999 and August 2000. LSIA 3 surveyed arrivals and those granted their visa onshore between December 2004 and March 2005. Humanitarian Entrants were not included in LSIA 3.

Recommendations

1A:	<i>AMES recommends that the amount of income that can be earned by a Newstart recipient before the benefit commences to be withdrawn be increased to a level that provides adequate security to undertake casual employment</i>
1B:	<i>AMES recommends that the threshold for Partner Payments also be reconsidered.</i>
1C:	<i>AMES recommends that Health Care Card eligibility be retained for all Humanitarian Entrants – possibly for the first two years after arrival.</i>
1D:	<i>AMES recommends that income reporting requirements be further streamlined and there be increased access to designated Centrelink staff – particularly including staff of the major current intake of refugee languages</i>
1E:	<i>AMES recommends that the level of support provided for SHP clients being sponsored by newly arrived refugees be reviewed.</i>
2A:	<i>AMES recommends that the level of resources allocated to Stream 1 job seekers in the new Employment Services model be reviewed.</i>
2B:	<i>AMES recommends that the level of resources allocated to work experience in the new Employment Services model be reviewed.</i>
2C:	<i>AMES recommends that all Refugee job seekers be automatically classified as highly disadvantaged under the JSCI classification</i>
3A:	<i>AMES recommends that a local employment clause be included in selected Nation Building projects in line with existing clauses in Victorian Government contracts</i>
3B:	<i>AMES recommends that a major program be implemented to assist low income households to reduce carbon emissions and limit cost impacts of the proposed CPRS</i>
3C:	<i>AMES recommends that a social enterprise model be considered to implement this scheme for refugee households</i>
4A:	<i>AMES recommends that Spouse (Provisional) Visa clients be eligible for government funded training and Traineeships and Apprenticeships</i>
5A:	<i>AMES recommends that Skilled and Family Stream Entrants have immediate access to Employment Services (while retaining the exclusion of access to income support)</i>
5B:	<i>AMES recommends that a national employment orientation program be available for Skilled Migrants who need assistance to find employment</i>

Data indicating a need for increased monitoring and support in a slowing economy

Newly arrived refugees and migrants face additional hurdles to gaining employment even in times of low unemployment. Balanced against this, these new settlers 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 for early entry to the workforce. However, national data indicates participation rates for newly arrived refugees and some migrants are significantly lower than for the general population.

DIAC Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia

The most comprehensive survey undertaken on participation rates for Humanitarian and Migrant Entrants to Australia is the DIAC Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA).

Unemployment:

While data from this study indicates that participation rates have improved from LSIA 1 to LSIA 2, Humanitarian Stream Entrants and some categories within the Migration Stream continue to be severely under-represented in the workforce.

The national unemployment rate is currently 4.4%, but projected to increase.

- For Humanitarian Entrants surveyed in LSIA 2, 75% were unemployed after 4-5 months and only 16% were participating in the labour force. After 16-17 months 43% were still unemployed and only 32% were participating. (In January 2000, the unemployment rate was 7.35%.)
- In the Preferential Family / Family Stream 21% were unemployed after 4-5 months and 54% were participating in the labour force. After 16-17 months 13% were still unemployed and 62% were participating.

Under-employment:

The survey also notes that the jobs held in Australia by Primary Applicants shortly after arrival tended, on average to be slightly less skilled than their jobs in their countries of origin. For example, when looking at the current main job of those in the Independent Group, one in eight jobs was either semi-skilled or unskilled. In comparison only one in thirty jobs held in the former home country was semi-skilled or unskilled.

AMES Longitudinal Study

In September 2008 AMES commenced a longitudinal study of clients who have undertaken the government funded Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP). AMES will be in a position to provide current data on more recent arrivals in 2009.

A smaller retrospective survey undertaken in July 2008 of 53 refugee and migrant participants as part of this project provided data on employment outcomes. This indicates similar low levels of participation and low rates of job retention even in a time of record low unemployment. Of the 53 participants surveyed:

- 31 (58%) were actively looking for work
- only 8 (15%) were currently working but 23 (43%) have had some work since arriving in Australia
- only 4 (24%) of those who have been here less than one year had ever had a job in Australia and only 2 (12%) were currently employed
- retention rates in employment did not improve for those who have been in Australia 1-2 years and more than 2 years, compared to those who have been here less than one year.

Issues for consideration

Considerations for policy input into the 2009-10 Budget are outlined under five issues. The overarching concern relates to impacts of a weakening economy on the probability of social inclusion for newly arrived refugees and migrants. AMES concurs with the government's analysis that employment participation is a foundation for social inclusion and therefore considers that any budget adjustments that will increase new arrivals chances of gaining employment are important to incorporate.

Other issues raised relate to specific groups within the broad refugee and migrant intake. In some cases projects being developed by AMES and other project partners are used to illustrate potential interventions that can contribute to addressing some of these issues. In other cases policy changes are recommended.

1. Impact of the weakening economy on vulnerable groups
2. Strengthening early intervention for jobless
3. Creating opportunities through nation building projects
4. Increasing access to training
5. Increased employment support for Skilled Migrants

1. Impact of a weakening economy on vulnerable groups

As the government has outlined, the global economy is going through the most difficult period in living memory. The government is investing to strengthen the economy, support jobs and protect Australia from the worst effects of this crisis. Proactive strategy to support those most vulnerable in economic downturn must be actively pursued as part of these measures.

Data provided above demonstrates the disadvantage newly arrived refugees and migrants face in gaining and retaining employment early in their settlement. Challenges for this group will be exacerbated as unemployment rises and competition for available jobs increases.

Two issues are discussed:

1. Increasing casual work
2. Impacts on Proposers

Increasing casual work

Newly arrived refugees and migrants frequently gain entry to employment through casual and unpredictable work. These transitional pathways are the reality for obtaining on-going employment for some job seekers – particularly those with no Australian work experience. This reliance on casual work is likely to increase where employers are seeking to manage risks of labour costs. AMES experience in working with newly arrived refugee communities highlights some of the issues inherent in managing this casual work. Work with the Australian Karen Association provides one illustration.

AMES has worked closely with the Australian Karen Association (AKO) to establish work opportunities in local market gardens in the Melbourne's outer west. This work commences as casual work with some, to date, converting to more secure employment. Input from the community through bilingual outreach staff has provided valuable insights into understanding the barriers to these newly arrived refugees taking up work opportunities.

There is considerable misinformation and lack of understanding throughout the community about the negative impact of any form of reported work against Centrelink benefits. There is anxiety in particular about loss of family and healthcare benefits when employment is unpredictable and insecure. Community members with low English language skills and literacy and numeracy skills are unable to manage fortnightly reporting forms and are not confident to use the bilingual call centre.

AMES has addressed this by working with people from the community to identify the work opportunities, providing first language support to explain systems and provide support in areas such as Centrelink reporting in ongoing forums and one to one assistance. Work with local Centrelink offices where a specific staff member has been designated to manage these cases has also been effective.

These issues are also common with other newly arrived communities who AMES staff work closely with.

Policy adjustments that better supported job seekers whose only option in a period of rising unemployment is casual work would increase the probability of job seekers taking every opportunity to gain paid work knowing that there is an income security safety net where paid work is not available.

Current policy does not fully exploit the uptake of sessional employment. Revisions that would provide increased security and therefore willingness to take the risk of some insecure paid work include:

- increasing the income threshold for a Newstart recipient before benefits and partner payments are reduced
- further streamlining income reporting requirements and increasing accessibility of designated Centrelink staff – particularly including staff of the major current intake of refugee languages
- retention of Health Care Card benefits for refugees regardless of whether the recipient has employment in the early stage of settlement (say first 2 years) to provide security in managing chronic health issues as a result of refugee experience

Feedback from refugee communities is that fear of losing the Health Care benefits is the single most important disincentive to taking on sessional work.

Impacts on Proposers

One group that will be particularly affected by inability to secure employment will be those refugees wanting the act as a Proposer to bring family members still in refugee camps to Australia.

As the IHSS provider in Victoria, AMES and its consortium partners work actively to encourage Proposers to secure employment. Achieving this objective will be more difficult if unemployment rises. Being newly arrived refugees themselves, they face multiple barriers to employment and are particularly vulnerable. Without employment, they will find it difficult to propose their family members who often live in difficult, unsafe and dangerous circumstances overseas.

Proposers are already facing increased pressures in settling SHP Entrants who they have sponsored. The very tight rental market has resulted in severe difficulty in securing any accommodation and, particularly, affordable accommodation. Proposers and SHP Entrants will be under increased financial pressure if Proposers are not able to find employment and Entrants are also less likely to find any work in the short to medium term to begin repaying debts incurred in travel.

IHSS contracted providers nationally are under pressure to provide additional assistance to SHP Entrants as Proposers are frequently newly arrived themselves and are not in a position to negotiate complex issues with respect to accommodation, physical and mental health and social security systems and fully support Entrants.

AMES notes that the government has invested additional resources in the settlement of Refugee and SHP Entrants with the commencement of the Complex Case Support Services in 2008. This is a very welcome service to support highly complex cases.

Further investment in SHP Entrants could use a similar needs based principle in allocating additional resources to Proposers who do not have personal social capital and financial resources to support Entrants. This would differentiate well established Proposers (for example established church or other mainstream groups) from Refugee Proposers who have few resources but a high need to reunite families.

This policy revision could reduce the stress on Special Humanitarian Program Entrants and their Proposers.

RECOMMENDATION:	
1A:	<i>AMES recommends that the amount of income that can be earned by a Newstart recipient before the benefit commences to be withdrawn be increased to a level that provides adequate security to undertake casual employment.</i>
1B:	<i>AMES recommends that the threshold for Partner Payments also be reconsidered.</i>
1C:	<i>AMES recommends that Health Care Card eligibility be retained for all Humanitarian Entrants – possibly for the first two years after arrival.</i>
1D:	<i>AMES recommends that income reporting requirements be further streamlined and there be increased access to designated Centrelink staff – particularly including staff of the major current intake of refugee languages.</i>
1E:	<i>AMES recommends that the level of support provided for SHP clients being sponsored by newly arrived refugees be reviewed.</i>

2. Strengthening early intervention for jobless

The need to provide immediate support for retrenched workers will become greater if predictions of rising unemployment eventuate. Government and economists are predicting unemployment could rise to between 5.75% and 7.5% in 2010.²

Three issues are discussed:

1. Resources for Stream 1 job seekers
2. Resources for Work Experience
3. Classification of refugee job seekers

Resources for Stream 1 job seekers

In the response to the Minister for Employment Participation's Discussion paper in February 2008 AMES noted that Humanitarian Entrants face many complex issues in settling – gaining employment being one important component of this settlement. AMES also noted that many Migrant Entrants also face similar barriers and that it is important that both Humanitarian and Migrant Entrants are provided with support as early as possible in their settlement process. This proposition that intervention must be immediate, intense and flexible holds increasingly true in a climate of economic downturn.

Employment Service providers are likely to see an increase in the number of job seekers who have recently lost their job and are therefore likely to be classified as Stream 1.

In the response to the Minister for Employment Participation's Discussion Paper in June 2008 AMES noted concern that job seekers placed in Stream 1 will have insufficient support.

Given that it is estimated that approximately 53% of all job seekers will be in Stream 1, a service with adequate resources to support these job seekers in a labour market where they will not easily regain employment is essential.

With predictions of rising unemployment, AMES reservations that this component of the new Employment Services model will be sufficiently resourced to address the needs of newly arrived refugees and migrants who are recently unemployed have increased.

Resources for Work Experience

Rising unemployment will create a growing pool of newly unemployed people who have recent work experience and up-to-date skills for employment. Job seekers from refugee and migrant backgrounds with no or little Australian work experience will face increased competition for available jobs from these experienced and recently employed job seekers.

AMES is concerned that:

- in a highly competitive labour market, increased numbers of refugees and migrants will not gain employment within

12 or 18 months in Employment Services and will transition to the Work Experience Phase

- funding for the Work Experience phase will not resource Employment Service providers to provide assistance to large numbers of job seekers from refugee backgrounds

AMES proposes that additional resources be allocated to the Work Experience phase given the high likelihood of large numbers of job seekers in this phase with high levels of disadvantage.

² In October 2008 the Federal government reported expecting unemployment to rise to 5.75% by mid 2010. The economics teams at Goldman Sachs JB Were and Merrill Lynch see unemployment rising to 7.5%.

Classification of refugee job seekers

In a response the Review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) in June 2008 AMES proposed that job seekers who are refugees are automatically classified as highly disadvantaged. The revised JSCI has not yet been released so AMES is not aware if this recommendation has been included. Changed economic conditions will add an additional layer of disadvantage to a group already marginalised in employment and the recommendation is consequently noted again in this response.

The JSCI is not guaranteed to identify all job seekers who are refugees as highly disadvantaged. In this regard the instrument is reasonably effective but fails to identify the high level of disadvantage of all refugee job seekers. Currently AMES Job Network has high numbers of RHV job seekers and therefore provides a reliable sample of the effectiveness

of identifying these job seekers for immediate assistance.

AMES experience in working with refugee job seekers who have not been identified by the JSCI as highly disadvantaged is that they, too, have all or many of the characteristics of disadvantage common to newly arrived refugees. While some have qualifications and skills, their refugee experience and lack of knowledge of Australian work place culture and Australian work history indicates a need for intensive support in transitioning to work.

Table 1 provides data from the active caseload across all AMES Job Network sites on 2 May 2008. AMES has sites in all of the highest concentration areas of refugee settlement in Sydney and Melbourne.

Table 1 - % RHV job seekers on AMES Active Case Load

AMES Active Case Load	21,491	
Refugee Humanitarian Visa (RHV) job seekers	2,665	12.40%
- RHV (Highly Disadvantaged)	2,080	78.05%
- RHV (not Highly Disadvantaged)	585	21.95%

Data from AMES Active Caseload as at 2 May 2008

RECOMMENDATION:	
2A:	<i>AMES recommends that the level of resources allocated to Stream 1 job seekers in the new Employment Services model be reviewed.</i>
2B:	<i>AMES recommends that the level of resources allocated to work experience in the new Employment Services model be reviewed.</i>
2C:	<i>AMES recommends that all Refugee job seekers be automatically classified as highly disadvantaged under the JSCI classification.</i>

3. Creating opportunities through nation building projects

AMES commends the proactive approach taken by the government in investing in Nation Building projects. AMES considers that there are areas that could provide additional leverage to create employment for those who are most disadvantaged including newly arrived refugees and other migrants marginalised in the labour market.

Two issues are discussed:

1. Social dividends in infrastructure projects
2. Incorporation of social enterprises to generate employment

Social dividends in infrastructure projects

AMES considers that there are opportunities to provide employment for disadvantaged groups with the investment in Nation Building projects. The Victorian State Government has local employment clauses as a requirement of some large projects that are tendered out to the private market. These clauses ensure that a percentage of the employment created will be available to job seekers living in the local area.

Large infrastructure projects tendered out as part of the government's significant investment have the capacity to provide some opportunities to either take on refugees or migrants or other job seekers with particular barriers to gaining employment in the wide range of skills that will be required. These may be job seekers who have existing overseas skills and experience or those requiring entry level work and training.

Incorporation of social enterprises to generate employment

Social enterprises are increasingly recognised as a successful entry point to employment and on the job training. While small projects are not uncommon – AMES, for example, has created 12 enterprises in collaboration with newly arrived refugees and migrant groups and supported by Victorian Government funding – large enterprises that have the capacity to train and employ significant numbers of people are less common.

The coalescence of the urgent challenges presented by climate change and the injection of funds through the Nation Building package provide some opportunities in this regard. The need for the introduction of the proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is undeniable. The government notes in the Green Paper that low income households will be adversely impacted in a disproportionate way and that energy efficiency is the most effective way to address this. Newly arrived refugees will be one important group within this low income cohort.

Newly arrived refugees have a number of added disadvantages. As a result of long periods in refugee camps, they are frequently unfamiliar with a reliable electricity and water supply and western appliances. They are also unused to cold climates. Conserving energy and managing utility costs is problematic even without the increase in energy cost that will result from a CPRS.

AMES supports the proposal by KPMG, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Ecos Corporation³ to retrofit 3.5 million low income households across Australia over the next 7 years. The proposal includes visiting households to determine the most appropriate package of energy efficiency measures and the provision of energy efficiency improvements. Budgetary implications for government and total cost benefits of the program are included in this paper.

³ KPMG, Brotherhood of St Laurence and Eco Corporation, 2008 *A national energy efficiency program to assist low-income households*, KPMG Melbourne

Clearly this is a preliminary proposal and requires substantially more work but demonstrates a concept with much potential to collectively address carbon emissions, employment generation and reduction of financial impacts on low income households.

AMES can see great potential in the implementation of this project in providing an added benefit of employment for newly arrived refugees and migrants. Two major areas offer opportunities.

Firstly, there will be a significant education and information and behavioural change role to ensure that the concepts are understood and therefore incorporated into daily life. AMES has developed a model of Community Guides to provide settlement information and orientation as part of the implementation of the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Services (IHSS) contract that it delivers across Victoria.

AMES employs over 100 Community Guides to provide assistance in refugee's first language during their initial resettlement process, and particularly to provide information and assistance to access available services. Community Guides are from refugee backgrounds. These Guides are invaluable in mediating information and concepts in a way that is culturally comprehensible.

Secondly there will be significant amounts on unskilled or semi skilled labour required working in combination with qualified trades people. The KMPG report estimates that a total of 40,000 new jobs will be created (through direct employment and indirect job growth through the multiplier effect). The report also provides an analysis of required skill levels.

A number of recently arrived refugees from Burma, for example, have worked on building sites in Malaysia and have skills (but no formal qualifications) that could be built on to work in retrofitting. This is one small example of groups who have aptitudes, high motivation and skills.

The KPMG report recommends that one option as part of a tender process to implement this National Energy Efficiency Program would be to have separate tenders to encourage specialist providers who have a deep understanding of how to reach particular household groups to productively engage in

the program. This would be appropriate for newly arrived communities.

It would be possible for the government to join up some of these new and urgently required programs needed to address carbon reduction with existing government services and to use existing infrastructure and skills. There are a number of existing initiatives that could be used to build new programs and link state and federal initiatives.

AMES programs and partnerships provide one example that demonstrates this potential.

AMES generates employment for refugees through the Community Guides program and significantly improves service delivery through this model using the IHSS contract. Some orientation to energy use is also included. The government contract is therefore achieving service delivery and has the added advantage of employment creation for refugees in satisfying and useful work. This existing model lends itself to expansion to build in additional services.

AMES and our consortium partners in the delivery of the AMEP are planning to integrate additional environmental content in AMEP programs and could integrate programs to support the important behavioural changes required and the promotion of the program.

AMES and its IHSS consortium partners also have relationships with real estate agents that may provide opportunities for partnerships in retrofitting properties that could guarantee long term leases to refugee tenants. IHSS providers in other states would have similar relationships. The KPMG proposal also addresses issues to implement this program in the private rental market where most IHSS Entrants are accommodated.

AMES has had preliminary discussions with the Moreland Energy Foundation (MEFL) to explore possibilities for using a Community Guide model to increase energy awareness amongst new arrived refugee and migrant communities. AMES also works in partnership with the Centre for Education and Research into Environmental Strategies (CERES) and is planning additional green enterprises to create employment as part of the new Employment Services model.

AMES works with the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development to generate social enterprises for refugees and migrants.

RECOMMENDATION:	
3A:	<i>AMES recommends that a local employment clause be included in selected Nation Building projects in line with existing clauses in Victorian Government contracts.</i>
3B:	<i>AMES recommends that a major program be implemented to assist low income households to reduce carbon emissions and limit cost impacts of the proposed CPRS.</i>
3C:	<i>AMES recommends that a social enterprise model be considered to implement this scheme for refugee households.</i>

4. Increasing access to training

There are issues for some migrants in accessing vocational training that can provide pathways to early employment in Australia.

Spouse (Provisional) Visa Entrants

Migrants who enter Australia on Spouse (Provisional) 309 Visas are eligible for the AMEP. They are, however, not eligible for any further government funded training. The waiting time for issue of a permanent visa is approximately 2 years.

A strong focus of AMEP programs is providing pathways to vocational training and employment. For Spouse (Provisional) Visa AMEP clients no pathway to TAFE funded

vocational training programs or to Traineeship or Apprenticeship programs is possible. Vocational training as a preparation for employment in Australia is a necessary pathway for many of these clients.

Overall numbers of clients affected are relatively small (and therefore would have limited resource impacts) but impacts for individuals anxious to settle and work as soon as possible are significant.

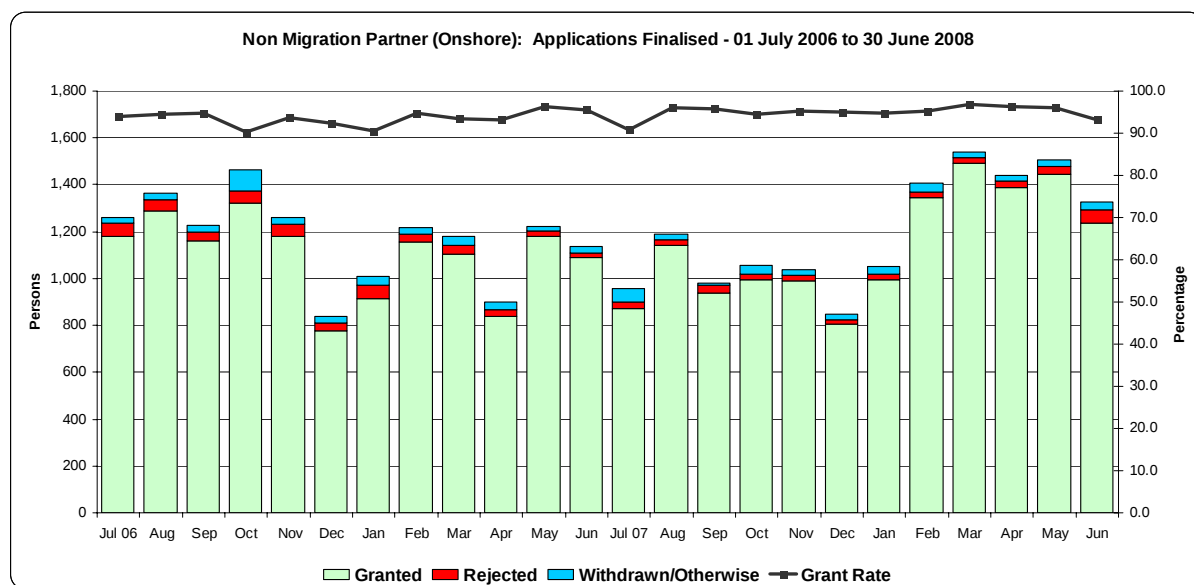
Table 2: Spouse (Provisional) Visas

Total AMEP Clients 2008	11,097	
309 Spouse (Provisional)	1,961	18%
All other visa categories	9,136	82%

Source: ARMS Visa Sub Class Grouping Report (1.1.08 – 31.12.08 AMES Contract Regions: Central East / Western / Southern)

The risk in providing access for these clients is low as data indicates that most are issued with permanent visas in due course.

**Table 3: Non Migration Partner (Onshore): Applications Finalised
01 July 2006 to 30 June 2008**



This issue has been further highlighted with the commencement of the DIAC Employment Pathways and Traineeships in English and Work Readiness Pilots. Pilot programs commenced in October 2008 and will continue until 30 June 2010. The government has invested \$49.2m to this program with \$18.5m being allocated to the pilot phase.

One outcome for the Traineeships in English and Work Readiness is entry into a formal Traineeship. This is not accessible to Spouse (Provisional) Visa clients, denying pathways to this employment entry mode.

AMES strongly supports the new direction proposed by the government for the AMEP with the increased focus on English language training combined with work readiness, vocational training and work experience. AMES has advocated these changes in a submission to the Review of the Adult Migrant English Program, August 2008, and in a submission to the previous government Interdepartmental Committee (Improvements

to Australian Government Funded English Language Training Stakeholder Forum), June 2007.

It is important that policy facilitates most effective implementation of these programs. AMES is also highlighting this issue with DIAC as part of our on going reporting and evaluation of the pilot program.

AMES is pleased to note the government's responsiveness in bringing forward additional Productivity Places Program (PPP) at Certificate II and Certificate III level to provide increased access for job seekers and existing workers who require training at low certificate levels. This was an area of concern to AMES in the broader context of accessibility of training for newly arrived refugees and migrants and adds to the range of programs available. Providing access to Spouse (Provisional) Visa clients to PPP places would be an additional enhancement.

RECOMMENDATION:

4A: *AMES recommends that Spouse (Provisional) Visa clients be eligible for government funded training and Traineeships and Apprenticeships.*

5. Increased employment support for Skilled and Family Stream Migrants

Providing support and orientation programs to bridge newly arrived migrants into employment is an effective model to circumvent welfare dependence.

Two issues are discussed:

1. Access to Employment Services
2. Access to Employment Orientation Programs

Access to Employment Services

Migrants in the Family and Skilled Streams are not eligible for DEEWR Employment Services for 104 weeks after arrival. It is AMES experience that the longer these job seekers remain unemployed or in a job that does not use their overseas skills the less likely it is that they will find employment in their original occupations.

AMES regularly holds formal consultations with new communities and also gains insights into community perceptions through the large number of AMES staff from these communities. Employment was a constant theme in all eighteen consultations held in 2008.

For example in one consultation in August 2008 to seek input to a discussion paper issued by the Victorian Multicultural Commission on a new multicultural policy, the central theme of community members was the desire of newly arrived communities to be productive.

Employment is seen as fundamental for many new arrivals to gain the sense of well being and confidence that are the precursors to broader social and civic participation. Communities see this as a cornerstone in their contribution to successful multicultural policy and successful settlement. In the communities' terms the importance of access to employment cannot be overstated.

Access to Employment Services for Migrant Entrants (without providing income support) within the 2 year waiting period would assist new arrivals to achieve this goal. It would provide orientation to employment in Australia and increase chances of gaining work and using overseas skills and experience to assist the Australian economy. It would decrease the probability of welfare dependence after the 2 year waiting period - and be of even higher importance if unemployment rates rise significantly in the short to medium term.

Access to Employment Orientation Programs

The DIAC Employment Pathways and Traineeships in English and Work Readiness Pilots noted above are an excellent government initiative to improve employment readiness for newly arrived migrants and refugees. These programs are only available to clients with AMEP eligibility and therefore exclude a number of Skilled Migrants who would benefit from a similar approach.

The government is wisely investing in a Nation Building package to prepare Australia for the challenges of the future. The government is also encouraging employers to take a long term view in decisions with respect to retention of staff. A similar approach is

required in attraction and retention of Skilled Migrants. Global competition for skilled workers may abate in the short term as major economies slip into recession. However the competition to attract migrants with skills will re-emerge.

Providing highly focussed employment orientation programs for migrants with professional or para professional skills but no Australian experience can fast track these migrants into work that uses their skills and contributes to a positive settlement experience. It can also contribute to building Australia's reputation as a destination for skilled migrants in the future.

Several approaches have been used successfully but there is not a consistent funding source that provides a regular and systematic program such as the nationally available and internationally recognised AMEP. AMES programs provide one successful model.

AMES has delivered programs for the past 4 years that 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.

In 2008 AMES also implemented an Intermediate Labour Market Program, using our capacity as a large employer to provide 3 months professional experience for newly arrived migrants with skills but no relevant Australian work experience.

AMES experience is that these programs have a high degree of success in matching job seekers with skills with employers, frequently placing job seekers who have independently applied work with no success. 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. A 2006 Skills Survey⁴ confirms this view.

RECOMMENDATION:

5A:	<i>AMES recommends that Skilled and Family Stream Entrants have immediate access to Employment Services (while retaining the exclusion of access to income support).</i>
5B:	<i>AMES recommends that a national employment orientation program be available for Skilled Migrants who need assistance to find employment.</i>

⁴ Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) Skills Survey 2006 found that many employers with a skill shortage have not considered the possibility of recruiting a skilled migrant.